



Hiking the dunes on Santa Rosa Island | Bridge over Gum Creek, Eglin Air Force Base | Camping along the Florida Trail | Backpacking in the Ocala National Forest | Nice Wander Trail in the Osceola National Forest | Suwannee River near Little Shoals | Sunrise over Lake Okeechobee | Hikers in Big Cypress National Preserve

Florida: a land of natural wonders. From the world's only Everglades to the sparkling white quartz dunes of the Florida Panhandle, the Sunshine State hosts an incredible diversity of habitats. Haunting forests of dwarf cypress, tangled thickets of saw palmetto, open prairies bursting with wildflowers, and deep ravines lined with mountain laurel and rhododendron—the Florida Trail enables hikers to explore landscapes unlike any other trail in the nation.

Stretching more than 1,300 miles across the state of Florida, from the sawgrass prairies of Big Cypress National Preserve to historic Fort Pickens at Gulf Islands National Seashore at Pensacola Beach, the Florida Trail provides opportunities for both short hikes and extended backpacking outings. Walking is one of the best ways to maintain your health, so head outdoors and explore Florida's natural attractions along the Florida Trail.

The Florida Trail: Florida's Footpath Forever

History. The Florida National Scenic Trail leads hikers through Florida's natural wonders as it meanders 1,300 miles across the state. In 1983, the U.S. Congress designated the Florida Trail as part of the National Trails System, making it one of only eight National Scenic Trails. It is the only National Scenic Trail where hikers can enjoy both subtropical and temperate ecosystems year round, and is fully blazed from end to end. The Florida Trail is recognized as Florida's official statewide trail and the state's Millennium Legacy Trail for connecting its culture, heritage, and communities.

James Kern, a wildlife photographer and real estate broker, envisioned the Florida Trail while hiking the Appalachian Trail in the early 1960s. To generate support for the project, Kern created the Florida Trail Association (FTA). Since the group's first trail blazing in the Ocala National Forest in 1966, the volunteers of this nonprofit organization have dedicated themselves to building and maintaining the Florida Trail and other hiking trails and to educating trail users on careful use and enjoyment of the outdoors. With more than 5,000 members, this association built and maintains more than 1,600 miles of hiking trails, including both the Florida Trail and loop trails near urban

areas. Seventeen geographically distributed chapters serve the state. The association's headquarters are in Gainesville; trail staff of the FTA share an office with the USDA Forest Service in Tallahassee.

Trail Administration. The USDA Forest Service has overall administrative responsibility for the Florida National Scenic Trail. The USDA Forest Service certifies that trail segments meet standards established in both federal law and in the trail's comprehensive plan; manages trail lands; and coordinates trail planning, development, and protection with Florida Trail partners. To close

gaps in the trail, the USDA Forest Service seeks to purchase land or permanent easement agreements from willing landowners. Through cooperation, sections of the trail are opened for the public to enjoy.

The Florida Trail Association manages the trail's day-to-day operations. Through a cost share agreement with the USDA Forest Service, the nonprofit Florida Trail Association oversees trail maintenance, promotes its use, and works to acquire and protect trail corridor to complete the trail. The volunteers of the FTA donate tens of thousands of hours annually building and

maintaining the trail and its bridges and boardwalks, mowing and cutting ever-growing vegetation, and painting orange trail blazes to make it easy to follow. Trail maintainers are a common sight on the trail during all but the hottest months of the year.



Volunteers building a new bridge across Mitchell Creek

Your Help is Needed to complete the Florida National Scenic Trail. Join the Florida Trail Association and its local chapters by volunteering to assist in building and maintaining a wilderness hiking trail the length of Florida. Your financial assistance or gifts of land or easements for the trail are also welcome. For more information:

Florida Trail Association
5415 SW 13th Street
Gainesville, FL 32608-5037
toll-free phone: 877-HIKE-FLA
email: fta@florida-trail.org
web: www.floridatrail.org

Enjoying the Trail

Many public agencies and private interests participate in the development and management of the Florida National Scenic Trail. Because of this diversity, rules and regulations governing use of the trail vary. Contact the land managers listed in this brochure or the Florida Trail Association for information particular to the section of trail you intend to travel.

People using the Florida National Scenic Trail are urged to show appreciation to the volunteers and land managers who make this trail possible. The best way to do this is through good stewardship, practicing "leave no trace" and "pack it out" ethics while hiking. Travel in groups of ten or fewer if backpacking; 25 or fewer on day hikes. Dispose of human waste at least 50 feet from the trail and 200 feet from water. Use a camping stove instead of building fires.

Users should be especially careful to respect the rights of private property owners, particularly those who have generously allowed the trail to cross their land. Please stay on the trail, respecting the privacy of trail neighbors by not trespassing onto private property.

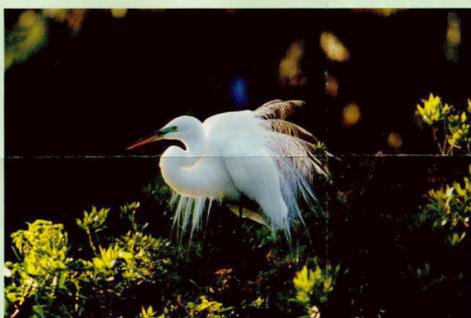


A group of hikers stand by FNST sign

Trail Markings. Trail segments open to the public are signed with the FNST logo shown above. The trail is marked with 2-inch by 6-inch vertical orange paint blazes. A double blaze, one above the other, is placed before turns, junctions, or other areas that require hikers be alert. Blue and other color blazes mark FNST side trails leading to campsites, water supplies, or special features.

Permitted Uses. The Florida National Scenic Trail is primarily a footpath, and all segments are open to travel by foot for walking, hiking, and backpacking. Based on considerations of resource sensitivity and the intended recreational experience the trail is to provide, other non-motorized uses include bicycling and horseback riding which may be permitted on a given segment by the land manager. Please respect any trail closures. Ride bicycles and horses only on those segments designated for such use. If you take a dog, keep it on a leash. Dogs may not cross Eglin Air Force Base. Some segments of the Florida Trail are not safe for dogs due to native wildlife or swampy conditions. If in doubt, contact the land manager when planning your trip.

Fees and Permits. Fee payments or permits are required for use on many Florida National Scenic Trail segments and overnight facilities. Fees are charged for camping in many developed federal, state, and county campgrounds. The trail is still a work in progress; some segments of trail are not yet open to the general public and may only be accessed by members of the Florida Trail Association. Check with the Florida Trail Association or the area's land manager in advance to determine if FTA membership, fees, or permits are required. FTA offers special informational packets for long distance hikers that include up-to-date maps, permitting requirements, and an FTA membership.



Snowy egret

Camping. Facilities for backpacking along the Florida National Scenic Trail vary. Some managing authorities permit primitive camping anywhere along the trail. Others permit camping only at designated sites. Utilize maps and guidebooks to plan your trip accordingly.



Iron Bridge Shelter in Etoniah Creek State Forest



Camping along the Kissimmee River



Trail volunteer clipping brush



Mowing the Trail

Interpretive Facilities. Hikers will find interpretive centers that explain Florida's natural history and geology. These centers are located along the trail at Big Cypress National Preserve, Cross Florida Greenway/Buckman Lock, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Gulf Islands National Seashore, and off the trail in several national forests and Florida state parks.

Fishing. A Florida fishing license is required for fishing in lakes and streams along the trail.

Hunting. The trail passes through public and private lands that are legally open to hunting during specified seasons. The trail remains open during hunting seasons; however, land managers may impose some restrictions on camping during hunting seasons. From September through January, check in advance about hunting seasons with the managing authority responsible for the segments you plan to hike. During hunting seasons, trail users are encouraged (and in some areas required) to wear hunter orange clothing, vests, or caps.

Safety. Walk with a companion when possible. Leave your trip itinerary with family or friends, but not with strangers. Camp away from roads and avoid provocation. Report harassment or incidents to local law enforcement authorities and to the USDA Forest Service. Purify all drinking water from any natural source along the Florida Trail.



Hiking the Big O at sunrise, Moore Haven



Howell Branch Creek, Cross Seminole Trail



Fawn in Seminole State Forest



Trail Partners

Publications and Information. The Florida Trail Association acts as a clearinghouse for the Florida Trail by publishing maps and guidebooks and providing up-to-date information on the Florida Trail web site, www.floridatrail.org. FTA members receive a bi-monthly magazine, *The Footprint*, with articles, photos, trail routing notices, and a roster of chapter activities throughout the state. The FTA manages a catalog of trail-related items, including hiking guidebooks and FT logo items. For FTA membership, information, maps, and volunteer opportunities, contact: **Florida Trail Association**, 5415 SW 13th Street, Gainesville, FL 32608-5037, toll-free phone: (877) HIKE-FLA, e-mail: fta@florida-trail.org, web: www.floridatrail.org



Partnerships for the Trail. The Florida Trail represents the ultimate partnership among local, state, and federal agencies; private landowners; and trail volunteers to conserve and showcase Florida's natural beauty and heritage. As of July 2003, nearly 700 miles of the Florida Trail were open for the public to enjoy; the remainder is accessible to members of the FTA by agreement with private landowners. The progress made to date and in the future depends upon these partnerships. Credit should be given to the volunteers, agencies, and partners listed in this brochure. Without their commitment, the dream would never have become a reality.

Since 1988, the USDA Forest Service and the FTA have entered into cooperative trail management agreements with nearly two dozen public and private land managers covering nearly 70 sections of trail. These agreements certify that

trail segments meet minimum standards, are open to the public, are protected, and provide the public with quality recreation opportunities. Only through the generosity of public-spirited landowners who join this cooperative venture will more trail sections become available to the hiking public.

Trail Partners. The following lists the contact information for the partner agencies that generously allow the Florida National Scenic Trail to cross their lands.

USDA FOREST SERVICE National Forests in Florida
Supervisor's Office, 325 John Knox Rd., Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303-4160, (850) 523-8500, www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/florida/
Ocala National Forest, Ocklawaha Visitor Center, 3199 NE CR 315, Silver Springs, FL 34488, (352) 236-0288, and Salt Springs Visitor Center, 14100 N. Highway 19, Suite A, Salt Springs, FL 32134, (352) 685-3070, Pittman Visitor Center, 45621 State Hwy 19, Altoona, FL, 32702, (352) 669-7495
Osceola National Forest, US Highway 90, P.O. Box 70, Olustee, FL 32072, (386) 752-2577
Apalachicola National Forest, Apalachicola Ranger District, SR 20, Revell Building, P.O. Box 579, Bristol, FL 32321, (850) 643-2282, and Wakulla Ranger District, 57 Taff Drive, Crawfordville, FL 32327, (850) 926-3561

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES DIVISION OF FORESTRY Division of Forestry Headquarters, 3125 Conner Boulevard, MS C25, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1650, (850) 414-0871, www.fl-dof.com
Blackwater River State Forest 11650 Munson Highway, Milton, FL 32570, (850) 957-6140
Etoniah Creek State Forest, 390 Holloway Road, Florahome, FL 32140 (386) 329-2552
Little Big Econ State Forest, 1350 Snowhill Road, Geneva, FL 32732, (407) 971-3500
Pine Log State Forest, 715 West 15th Street, Panama City, FL 32437, (850) 747-5639
Seminole State Forest, 9610 County Road 44, Leesburg, FL 34788, (352) 360-6677

Twin Rivers State Forest, 7620 133rd Road, Live Oak, FL 32060, (386) 208-1460
Withlacoochee State Forest, Citrus, Croom, Richloam Tracts Recreation/Visitors Center 15003 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601, (352) 754-6896

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION Office of Greenways & Trails Headquarters, Room 853, Douglas Bldg., 3900 Commonwealth Blvd., MS 795, Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000, (850) 245-2052, www.FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com
Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway, Field Office, 8282 Southeast Highway 314, Ocala, FL 34470, (352) 236-7143, and Buckman Lock Visitor Center, 201 Buckman Lock Road, Palatka, FL 32177, (386) 312-2273
Florida Park Service, Division of Recreation and Parks, 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 500, Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000, (850) 245-2157, www.funandsun.com/parks
Blackwater River State Park, 7720 Deaton Bridge Road, Holt, Florida 32564, (850) 983-5363
General James A. Van Fleet Trail State Park, 12549 State Park Drive, Clermont, FL 34711, (352) 994-2280
Gold Head Branch State Park, 6239 SR 21, Keystone Heights, FL 32656, (352) 473-4701
Suwannee River State Park, 20185 County Road 132, Live Oak, FL 32060, (386) 362-2746
Stephen Foster Folk Cultural Center State Park, P.O. Drawer G, White Springs, FL 32096-0435, (386) 397-2733 or (386) 397-4331
Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad Trail State Park, 1022 DeSoto Park Drive, Tallahassee, FL, 32301, (850) 922-6007
Tosohatchee State Park Reserve, 3365 Taylor Creek Road, Christmas, FL 32709, (407) 568-5893
Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park, Wekiwa Springs State Park 1800 Wekiwa Circle, Apopka FL 32712, (407) 884-2008
Withlacoochee Trail State Park, 12549 State Park Dr., Clermont, FL 34711, (352) 394-2280



Mountain laurel in bloom, Econfina Creek

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SR 20 Choctawhatchee River Bridge, SR 20 Apalachicola River Bridge, US 98 St. Marks Trail to Wakulla River, FDOT District 3 Bicycle and Pedestrian Program, P.O. Box 607, Chipley, FL 32428, (850) 638-0250 ext. 1547, www11.myflorida.com/safety/ped_bike/ped_bike.htm

NORTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT Choctawhatchee River, Econfina Creek, Headquarters Office, 81 Water Management Drive, Havana, FL 32333, (850) 539-5999, www.state.fl.us/nwfwmd

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION (FWCC) Nature-based Recreation Program, 620 S. Meridian St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600, (850) 488-5520, www.wildflorida.org/nbr
Aucilla Wildlife Management Area, 620 S. Meridian St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600, (850) 421-1883 or (850) 488-5520
Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area, 1231 Prairie Lakes Road, Kenansville, FL 34739, (407) 436-1818
J.W. Corbett WMA, 8535 N. Lake Blvd., West Palm Beach, FL 33412, (561) 624-6989

ST. JOHNS RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT AND FWCC Rice Creek Management Area, Division of Land Management, 4049 Reid Street, Palatka, FL 32178-1429, (904) 529-2380, www.sjrwmd.com
Bull Creek Wildlife Management Area, 1239 SW 10th St., Ocala, FL 34474, (407) 846-5275 or (352) 732-1225, www.sjrwmd.com and floridaconservation.org/fltrails/
Seminole Ranch Conservation Area, P.O. Box 871, Christmas, FL 32709, (407) 349-4972, www.sjrwmd.com and floridaconservation.org/fltrails/

SANTA ROSA ISLAND AUTHORITY Pensacola Beach Trail, P.O. Drawer 1208, Pensacola Beach, FL 32562, (850) 932-2257, www.sria-fla.com

SEMINOLE COUNTY Cross Seminole Trail, 520 W. Lake Mary Blvd, Suite 200, Sanford, FL 32773-1468, (407) 665-2093, www.co.seminole.fl.us/trails

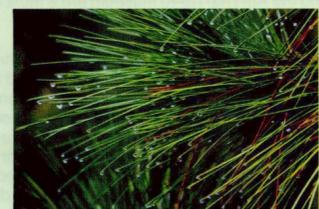
SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT Kicco WMA, Bluff Hammock, DuPuis Reserves, Hickory Hammock, Yates Marsh, Miami Canal, Levees 1, 2 and 3, 3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33406, (800) 432-2045 ext. 6640, www.stfwmd.gov/news/2_recreation.html

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT Green Swamp, 2379 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34609-6899, (352) 796-7211 ext. 4482, www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/reguide/reguide.htm

SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT Holton Creek, Disappearing Creek, Econfina River, Aucilla River, 9225 CR49, Live Oak, FL 32060, (386) 362-1001, www.mysuwanneeriver.com

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR Big Cypress National Preserve, National Park Service, Headquarters, 33100 Tamiami Trail East, HCR 61, Box 110, Ochopee, FL 34141, (239) 695-2000, and Oasis Visitor Center, 52105 Tamiami Trail East, HCR 61 Box 11, Ochopee, FL 34141, (239) 695-1201, www.nps.gov/bicy/
Gulf Islands National Seashore, National Park Service, Headquarters, 1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway Center, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561, (850) 934-2600, and Fort Pickens Visitor Center, (850) 934-2635, www.nps.gov/guis/
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 68, St. Marks, FL 32355 (850) 925-6121, <http://saintmarks.fws.gov/>, email: saintmarks@fws.gov

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE Avon Park Air Force Range, U.S. Air Force, 347 RQW, DET 1, OL A/CEVN, 29 South Boulevard, Avon Park AFR, FL 33825. Call (863) 452-4119 (ext. 5) for 24/7 recording to learn if trail is or will be temporarily closed.



Pine needles with morning dew

Eglin Air Force Base, U.S. Air Force, Jackson Guard, 107 Hwy 85 North, Niceville, FL 32578, (850) 882-4164
Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 525 Ridgelawn Road, Clewiston, FL 33440-5399, (863) 983-8101, www.saj.usace.army.mil/recreation/index.html#h

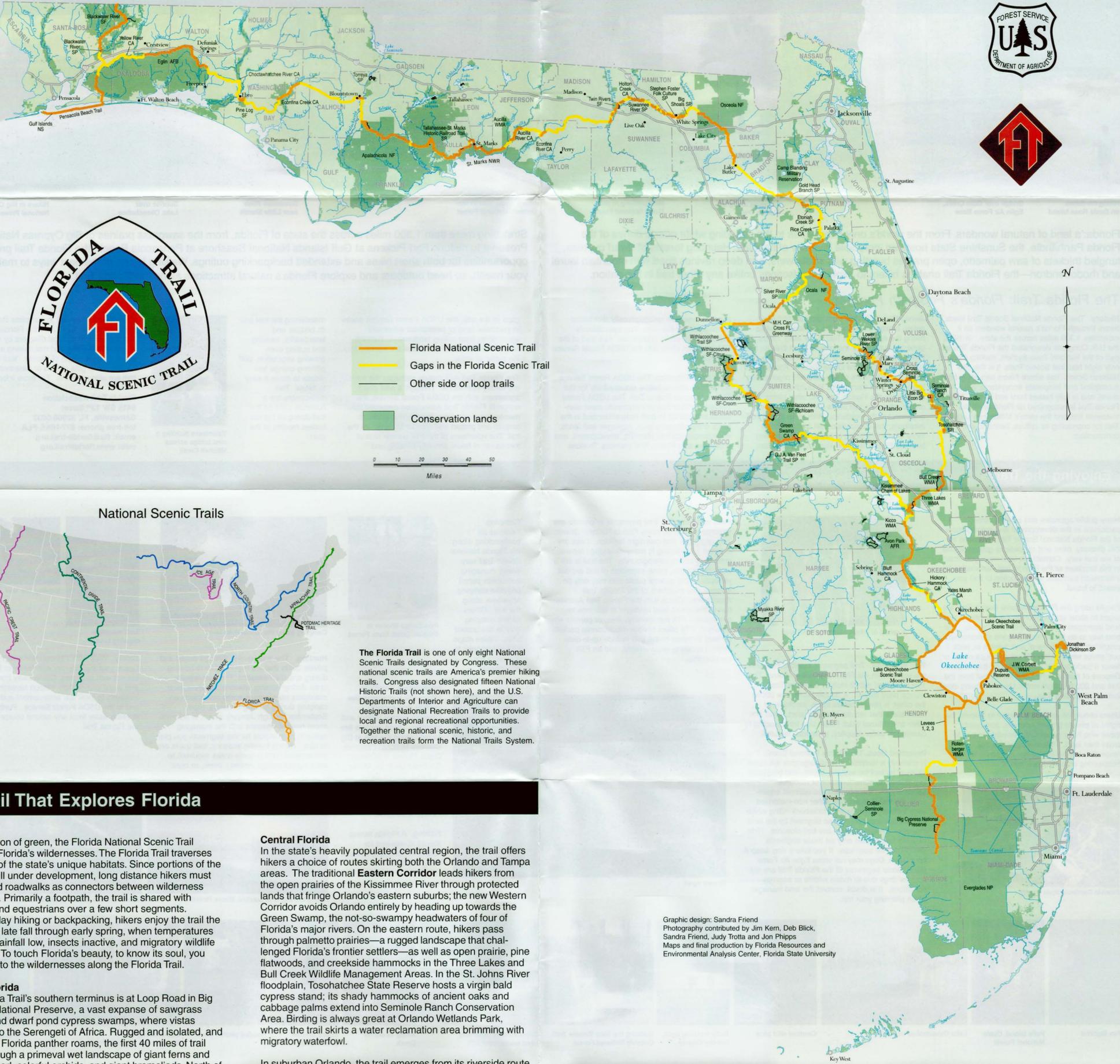


Ocean Pond, Osceola National Forest

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To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity provider and employer.

Florida National Scenic Trail



— Florida National Scenic Trail
— Gaps in the Florida Scenic Trail
— Other side or loop trails
 Conservation lands

0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles

National Scenic Trails



The Florida Trail is one of only eight National Scenic Trails designated by Congress. These national scenic trails are America's premier hiking trails. Congress also designated fifteen National Historic Trails (not shown here), and the U.S. Departments of Interior and Agriculture can designate National Recreation Trails to provide local and regional recreational opportunities. Together the national scenic, historic, and recreation trails form the National Trails System.

A Trail That Explores Florida

Like a ribbon of green, the Florida National Scenic Trail connects Florida's wildernesses. The Florida Trail traverses nearly all of the state's unique habitats. Since portions of the trail are still under development, long distance hikers must use blazed roadwalks as connectors between wilderness segments. Primarily a footpath, the trail is shared with bicycles and equestrians over a few short segments. Whether day hiking or backpacking, hikers enjoy the trail the most from late fall through early spring, when temperatures are cool, rainfall low, insects inactive, and migratory wildlife abundant. To touch Florida's beauty, to know its soul, you must take to the wildernesses along the Florida Trail.

South Florida
The Florida Trail's southern terminus is at Loop Road in Big Cypress National Preserve, a vast expanse of sawgrass prairies and dwarf pond cypress swamps, where vistas compare to the Serengeti of Africa. Rugged and isolated, and where the Florida panther roams, the first 40 miles of trail winds through a primeval wet landscape of giant ferns and slippery marl, colorful orchids, and giant bromeliads. North of the Big Cypress, the Seminole Tribe of Florida permits Florida Trail Association (FTA) members to follow roads through its reservation, where stops at Billie Swamp Safari and the Ah-Tha-Thi-Ki Museum are a must in learning about Seminole culture.

North of the reservation, the trail passes through the relict Everglades, now almost entirely converted to ranch lands and sugarcane fields. The trail continues on the levees of the South Florida Water Management District on its way to Lake Okeechobee, where hikers have the choice of walking atop the Herbert Hoover Dike around the east or west sides of the second largest freshwater lake in the United States. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed the dike in the 1940s after a storm surge cost the lives of thousands along the lake. On the west side of Lake Okeechobee, hikers are treated to views of the lake's expansive wetlands, while on the east side, they enjoy colorful sunsets along the blue water vistas of this inland sea. Every Thanksgiving week for more than a decade, the Florida Trail Association's popular Big O Hike draws participants from across North America on a series of nine supported day hikes that circle the lake, following a 109-mile segment of the Florida Trail.

North of Lake Okeechobee, the Florida Trail continues along the Kissimmee River floodplain, historically Florida's cattle country. Winding through beautiful hammocks such as those at Hickory Hammock, Bluff Hammock, and Rattlesnake Hammock, the trail parallels the river for more than 50 miles, passing through ghost towns and abandoned homesteads of Florida's early settlers before crossing the broad prairies of the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area, where sandhill cranes abound.

Central Florida
In the state's heavily populated central region, the trail offers hikers a choice of routes skirting both the Orlando and Tampa areas. The traditional **Eastern Corridor** leads hikers from the open prairies of the Kissimmee River through protected lands that fringe Orlando's eastern suburbs; the new **Western Corridor** avoids Orlando entirely by heading up towards the Green Swamp, the not-so-swampy headwaters of four of Florida's major rivers. On the eastern route, hikers pass through palmetto prairies—a rugged landscape that challenged Florida's frontier settlers—as well as open prairie, pine flatwoods, and creekside hammocks in the Three Lakes and Bull Creek Wildlife Management Areas. In the St. Johns River floodplain, Tosohatchee State Reserve hosts a virgin bald cypress stand; its shady hammocks of ancient oaks and cabbage palms extend into Seminole Ranch Conservation Area. Birding is always great at Orlando Wetlands Park, where the trail skirts a water reclamation area brimming with migratory waterfowl.

In suburban Orlando, the trail emerges from its riverside route in the beautiful Little-Big Econ State Forest to follow bike paths across Seminole County. Turn off the beaten path to explore shady Spring Hammock along Lake Jesup and Big Tree Park where "The Senator," one of the largest (17.5 feet diameter, 138 feet high) and oldest (3,500 years) cypress trees in the world still towers. Crossing Interstate 4 on a suspension bridge, the trail continues on bike paths to the wild and scenic Wekiva River, where Florida black bears roam the corridor through Seminole State Forest. When hikers reach the Ocala National Forest, it's a step back in time—the first segment of the Florida Trail was built here in 1966, and the unbroken 70-mile route is the most popular segment of the trail for backpacking. Hikers can expect to meet up with pleasant company as they walk through the world's largest sand pine forest, the Big Scrub, and roam through prairies and pine flatwoods past beautiful springs that invite a stop for a swim.

On the **Western Corridor**, hikers experience different terrain and more immersion into Old Florida. Roadwalks connect completed segments, taking hikers through St. Cloud and Kissimmee—where they are sure to see sandhill cranes along the road, as well as wood storks on Lake Tohopekaliga—and up along the Old Tampa Highway, a section of which still retains its 1930s cypress planks and red bricks.

A short walk on the Van Fleet Rail Trail, north of Polk City, brings hikers closer to the Green Swamp, where the first significant wilderness segment begins, offering several days of peace and quiet through pine flatwoods, rolling sandhills, and the floodplain forests of the Withlacoochee River. Emerging from the Richloam Tract of Withlacoochee State Forest, the trail then connects to the Croom Tract, offering a nice day's walk through hardwood forests along the Withlacoochee River, and on to the Withlacoochee State Trail, a rail-trail passing through the historic towns of Istachatta, Floral City, Inverness, Hernando, and Dunnellon, paralleling part of the route of explorer Hernando de Soto. After crossing the Withlacoochee River, hikers enjoy the challenging slopes and scenic vistas of the Cross Florida Greenway, a green ribbon of reshaped landscapes created during the 1930s diggings of the failed Cross-Florida barge canal. Crossing Interstate 75 on the nation's first land bridge, the trail continues up the Greenway and through the jungle-like forests of the Silver River and Ocklawaha River floodplains before meeting up with the eastern route in the Ocala National Forest.

North Florida
Long on scenery, the Florida Trail through North Florida entices with beauty spots connected by roadwalks on rural dirt roads. The first stop is Rice Creek, where a 1700s indigo and rice plantation thrived in the shade of giant cypresses. Dogwoods and azaleas lend their color to the scenic Etoniah Creek ravine; the trail parallels its lip before heading through dense oak forests to Gold Head Branch State Park, with its beautiful streams and eerie Devil's Washbasin. By old railbed, hikers reach Lake Butler and then wind through timberlands to Olustee, site of Florida's largest Civil War battle. In Osceola National Forest, watch the white-banded trees for signs of the red-cockaded woodpecker. Persons with disabilities can view a large colony of these endangered birds from the trail near Olustee Battlefield. Nearly 60 miles of trail parallels one of Florida's most beautiful rivers, the Suwannee, requiring some stamina and acrobatics for stream crossings and rapid elevation changes along the high bluffs. Camp on white sand beaches; explore the waterfalls. Heading west into the Big Bend, walk through more timberlands to reach the Aucilla River and its sinks, an unusual place where the river appears and disappears through "windows" in the limestone aquifer. Birding is fabulous in the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, where the trail passes through cathedrals of saw palmetto and along salt marshes en route to the heart of Florida's Panhandle.

The Florida Panhandle
Wild and wooded, the Florida Panhandle is especially diverse in flora and fauna. Although the trail breaks into more segments connected by roadwalks, the future is bright. Most of the Panhandle remains undeveloped; protection of the trail corridor is a matter of acquiring the land. Leaving the Big Bend area, the trail continues west through Apalachicola National Forest where it enters the 23,000-acre Bradwell Bay Wilderness, described by *Backpacker* magazine as one of the ten toughest hikes in the United States. Here, the trail requires several miles of wading in waist-deep water through dark titi and gum swamp forests. Beyond, hikers encounter pitcher plant bogs amid vast pine flatwoods, where terrestrial orchids sparkle under the wiregrass. Along Econfina Creek, the trail feels downright Appalachian, with mountain laurel and flame azalea in bloom above the rushing water. The segment through Florida's oldest state forest, Pine Log, treats the hiker to cypress-lined ponds in the midst of the pines. Dozens of tannic streams gurgle through the rolling sandhills of Eglin Air Force Base, creating steep ravines crossed by log bridges; rare varieties of pitcher plants thrive on moist slopes. There are two termini for the northern end of the trail. Long-distance hikers headed north along the Eastern Continental Trail will take on the bluffs and ravines, rolling sandhills, and titi swamps along the Blackwater River and its tributaries; those completing the traditional Florida Trail route head for the seashore, walking on Santa Rosa Island's famed white quartz beaches and its bayside dunes to historic Fort Pickens in Gulf Islands National Seashore.



Backpacking in Big Cypress National Preserve



Crossing Sugar Creek

Florida Trail System
Built and maintained by local FTA volunteers, the Florida Trail System in Florida state parks and state forests presents a vast array of back-to-nature getaways in urban areas. With loop trails ranging from 2 to 40 miles, the Florida Trail System offers outdoor fun for all abilities, from nature walks to extended backpacking trips. Stroll along the bubbling rapids at Hillsborough River State Park near Tampa, challenge the roller coaster of ancient sand dunes at Jonathan Dickinson State Park north of Jupiter, or slosh through cypress swamps along the rugged and wild Collier-Seminole Hiking Trail outside Naples—just a few of the many options available statewide.

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