

For the Long-Distance Paddler...

Thinking of a long-distance journey on the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail? Want to paddle the entire trail? You can choose to tackle the trail in segments over several years or attempt a thru paddle all at once. Either way, several factors and considerations should be part of your preparation and planning.

Pre-Planning. Besides this information sheet, items to download from the Office of Greenways and Trails website include all pertinent segment [trail guides and maps](#), [trail data book](#) and [summary sheet](#), “[Trip Tips and Safety Information](#),” and “[Recommended Gear and Safety Equipment](#).”

In addition, the [Florida Paddling Trails Association](#) offers valuable information about the trail, including links to blogs from past and sometimes current thru paddlers. Some of the information is only available to members. The purchase of navigational charts, available at most marine supply stores, is also recommended.

Reservations and Permits. Maintaining the circumnavigational trail is a low-budget operation that largely depends upon volunteers, so there is no central permitting/reservation body for the trail. Where required, permits and reservations must be obtained from the many parks and private businesses along the trail. These may be found by perusing the segment trail guides. Many motels and state park and private campgrounds, especially in central and south Florida and in the Keys during peak seasons (holidays and early spring), require advance reservations in order to be assured a spot. Bring a cell phone and call ahead as soon as you have a good idea of your schedule. Regarding the Big Bend portion of the trail managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (Aucilla River to the town of Suwannee, part of segment 6), free permits are required and can be [reserved online](#).

Be sure to leave a **detailed float plan** with a reliable friend or relative before you begin your journey.

Experience. Long distance paddlers should be competent in all types of environments and conditions, capable of dealing with strong winds and currents, and skilled at crossing open water stretches and boat channels. You should be able to navigate at night and in poor visibility, capable of

using navigational maps and charts and a GPS system, and trained in advanced rescue techniques, wilderness first aid and primitive camping skills. The trail is marked by GPS points on a map, not by signs. Cell phone coverage can be spotty in some sections. A SPOT tracking device is recommended.

Testing Equipment. It is especially important to field test your equipment beforehand under various conditions, especially all electronic equipment and items such as dry bags, tents and rain gear. Some paddlers have learned the hard way that the "waterproof" label is not always accurate. Online and magazine reviews of equipment can also be helpful, along with consultation with outfitters and other paddlers.

Distances. In several stretches, one must paddle more than 20 miles to reach a legal campsite or motel. For this reason, proper conditioning and equipment, and awareness of weather forecasts and wind conditions, are all imperative. Stiff fines and possible arrest can result from illegally camping on private or public lands, especially military lands and national wildlife refuges. Only emergency conditions such as injury or dangerous weather should dictate a decision to stop short of an authorized overnight stop.

Weather. As with any long-distance paddling journey, weather may not always be ideal. Storms and high winds can prohibit travel for a day or more. Lightning can be especially dangerous. Occasional storm days should be factored into your planning. A weather radio is an important addition to your equipment list along with the ability to read changing weather conditions while in the field.

Timing. Generally, it is best to avoid the summer hurricane season for a long-distance journey. Recommended paddling months are late October through April. Bugs and hot steamy weather, along with lightning storms, will be less prevalent as well. The entire trail is about 1,515 miles, but side trips and extreme low tides can add more miles. Allowing for some days off, plan to take about four months if planning to traverse the entire trail. Or, paddle the trail in segments over a longer period-of-time. Make your trip a journey of discovery, not a race.

Budget. Be realistic about costs. While every effort has been made to provide low cost or free campsites for paddlers, motel stays will occasionally be necessary. Waterfront motels, and some established campgrounds, can be expensive, depending on the season and locale.

Supplies. Plan on having 4 to 7 days of supplies at any given time, depending on the segment. The longest stretch without an opportunity to re-supply will be from Everglades City to the Keys in segments 14 and 15. While we list or describe a few supermarkets within easy walking distance of the trail, there are several more that may require a longer walking distance. Inquire locally for directions. Some small towns or fish camps may only have a convenience store for re-supply. In some places, care packages can be sent ahead to post offices in care of general delivery, but your arrival time needs to coincide with post office hours. Also, for those with special dietary restrictions and/or the need for certain prescription medications, post office drops may be essential in some areas. See data book summary for list of recommended post offices.

Water. You'll be able to replenish water supplies almost daily in developed sections of the trail due to the many parks along the route. However, in the Big Bend and Ten Thousand Islands/Everglades in particular, fresh water re-supply opportunities can be spaced several days apart. See segment guides for specifics. The general rule is to figure on one gallon of water per person per day. Be mindful that animals such as raccoons on remote coastal islands may seek your fresh water as much as your food. Hang food and water or store in secure hatches.

Trail Direction and Camping. Note that the trail is designed to go north to south along the Gulf Coast, and south to north along the East Coast. This will help to prevent trail groups from overlapping at campsites. For many fragile coastal camping sites, the size limit is 8 persons and 4 small tents. Campsites are often on a first-come, first-serve basis and are not always limited to paddlers. Camping rules may differ according to the managing entity. Follow [Leave No Trace guidelines](#) when primitive camping.

Trail changes. Hurricanes, business closings and other factors can alter trail conditions and overnight stays. Check the Circumnavigational Trail website for trail updates. Maps and segment guides on the website will occasionally be revised, so download or peruse the latest versions before beginning serious planning. Contact the trail manager if you encounter situations that differ from what is currently on the website.