

Florida Designated Paddling Trails

Aucilla River

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Lamont

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

Aucilla River Paddling Trail Map

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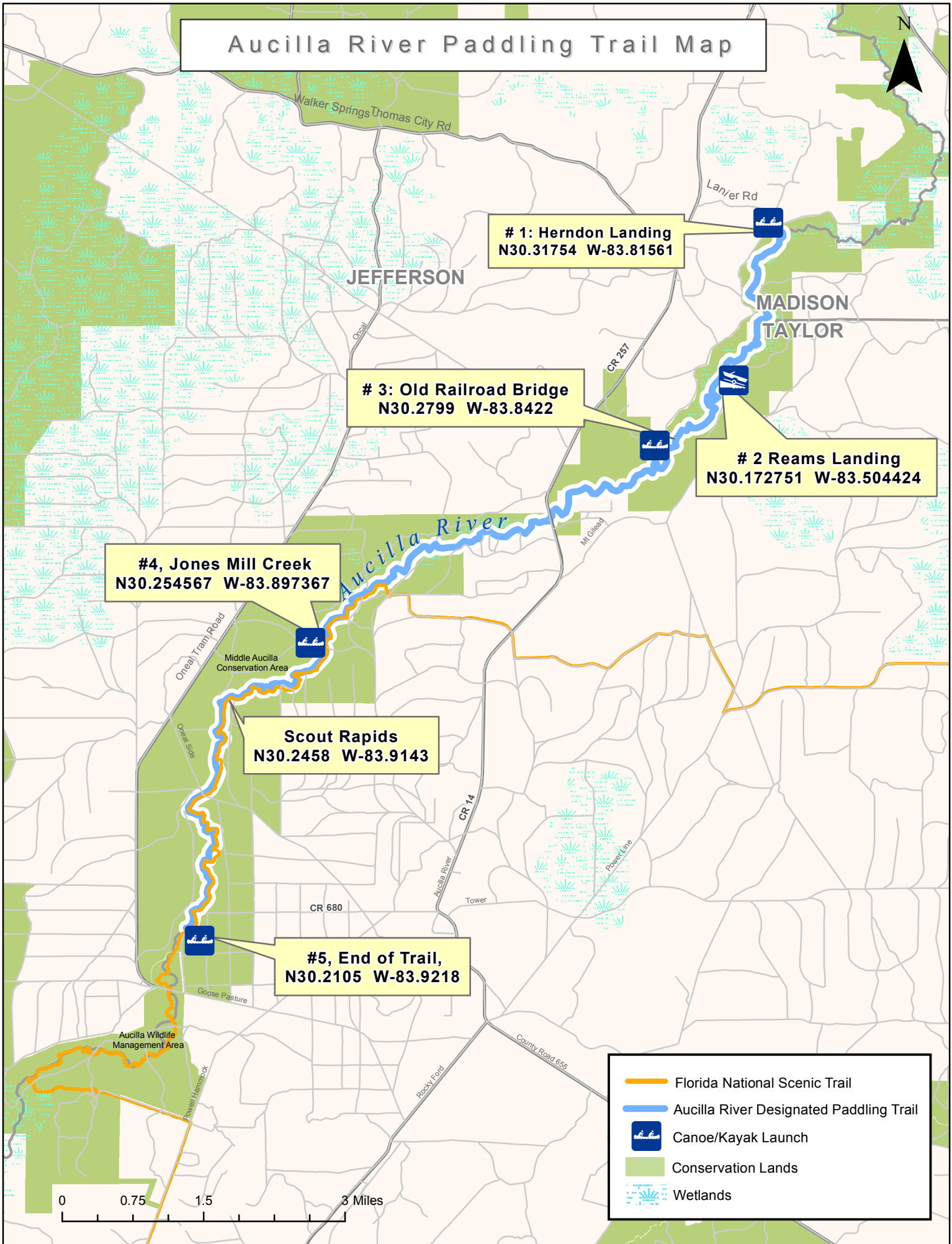
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Aucilla River Paddling Trail Map





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The Waterway

Note: The river around mile 3 has a very large blockage from downed trees (June 2024).

With high limestone banks and an arching canopy of live oaks, cypress and other trees, the [Aucilla River](#) is as picturesque as it is wild. The river is designated a [National Recreation Trail](#) and runs 75 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, much of it within the [Aucilla Wildlife Management Area](#) and lands managed by the [Suwannee River Water Management District](#). Only about a third is navigable as the river plunges [underground near Goose Pasture Road](#) and reappears nearby as a chain of sink holes strewn through a lush, primal landscape. The Aucilla emerges about eight miles later at Nutall Rise and totally changes character, becoming flatter, wider and brackish as it ends with majestic vistas of the Gulf of Mexico. Hike on stellar trails, paddle the historic Slave Canal in addition to the nearby [Wacissa River Paddling Trail](#) and [Econfina River](#), and enjoy abundant wildlife in this photographer's dreamscape.

The Paddling Experience

This river is not recommended for beginners as tight turns, rocky shoals, and a short stretch of rapids can be challenging, especially at low water. Expert paddlers can add an additional 10 miles of difficult paddling by launching from Federal Road (north of US 19/27) to Herndon's Landing, but it is typically clogged with numerous log jams. A better option is to begin a 15-mile trip at Herndon's Landing and take out before the river dives underground just north of Goose Pasture Rd. Do not launch from the US 19/27 or CR 14 bridges as was recommended in former editions of the map guide. At certain times of the year, access points might require a 4-wheel drive vehicle. Call the Suwannee River Water Management District for updates on road conditions and permission to camp overnight along the Aucilla or at Goose Pasture Group Campground: 386-362-1001, 800-226-1066 (Florida toll free) or email recreation@srwmd.org. You are allowed to camp overnight along the Aucilla on District land with permission using the same contact info as above, but overnight parking is not allowed so you must arrange to be dropped off.

The water [gauge](#) at Lamont should be between 48 and 50 feet for ideal paddling. You can also call the Suwannee River Water Management District 24-hour water level hotline at 386-362-6626. If the river is below 48 feet at Lamont, downed trees and rocky areas will make for a tough trip. You can order a detailed [guide](#) to the *Rivers of AWE: Aucilla, Wacissa and Econfina Rivers* through the Wildlife Foundation of Florida.

Access Points

There are a numerous access sites on both sides of the Aucilla River, a select few are included below. There are more available on FWC Public Boat Ramp Finder [website](#) with photos and Google maps.

#1 Start of the trail, Herndon Landing, CR 257A entrance, west side of the river.

This is an unimproved access suitable for hand launching boats only, with very remote parking. *From US 27, turn south onto CR 257A. After 4 miles, turn left onto Lanier Grade (CR 257A intersects this road twice—it is best to take the second one, indicated by a small brown sign reading "Middle Aucilla"). Follow Lanier Road 0.7 miles, turn right at*





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the fork and proceed 0.2 miles to kiosk, bear left a short distance, then turn right almost immediately on first dirt road to the river. Look for Herndon Landing Ramp sign

#2, Mile 2.0, Reams Landing, Mt. Gilead Rd., east side of the river

There is the only paved boat ramp on the east side of the Aucilla and there is also an unpaved, sandy launch a half mile further up the road. Directions to the paved launch: *From US 19/27 turn south on CR 257A. In 7 miles cross the Aucilla River, and the road becomes CR 14. A short distance south of the Aucilla River Bridge, turn left (east) on Mt. Gilead Rd (aka Rocky Ford Cemetery Rd). Drive 2.0 miles, stay left at the fork in the road, go 0.8 miles and look for "River Access 24.4" sign, follow to the river.*



#3, Mile 4.7, Old Railroad Bridge, west side of the river

This is an unimproved access on the west side of the river, suitable for hand launching boats only, with very remote parking. *From US 19/27, turn south onto CR 257A and drive 6.1 miles. Look for "Lamont Tract, CR 257 Entrance sign", turn left and proceed 0.2 miles to fork in the road. Look for "Old Railroad Bridge Launch" sign, go 0.7 miles to river.*

#4, Mile 10, Jones Mill Creek (River Access 17.6), west side of the river

This is an unimproved access on the west side of the river suitable for hand launching boats only, with very remote parking. About a mile downstream from this access point are a short stretch of rocky shoals, the Aucilla Rapids. Stop and scout before running as conditions may be challenging depending on water levels; portage if uncertain. *From US 19/27, turn south onto CR 257A. After 4.6 miles, turn right onto Walker Springs/Thomas City Road and then 3.6 drive miles to O'Neil Tram. Turn left and go 5.7 miles to graded road on the left. Turn and proceed 1 mile to river launch. There is no road sign.*

#5, Mile 15, end of the trail, east side of the river.

Be sure to leave the river at this point as a short distance downstream the river dives underground. *From US 19/27, turn south onto CR 257A. In 7 miles cross the Aucilla River, and the road becomes CR 14. Continue to the Cabbage Grove Fire Tower and turn right onto Powell Hammock Rd. Follow 2 miles to Goose Pasture Road and turn right. Follow 0.8 miles to a gravel road heading off to the right (north) (GPS: N30.2005 W83.9219). Turn and go 0.6 miles to a river access on the left.*

Outfitters and Shuttle Service

[Wacissa River Canoe Rentals](#), 850-997-5023



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Base Camp

Plan on camping several days at the [Goose Pasture Group Campground](#) on the nearby Wacissa River to explore this exceptionally scenic area. There is a group camp adjacent to the public campground with portable toilets and covered pavilion. Neither campground charges any fees and both are closed during general gun season. Contact the Suwannee River Water Management District for permission to camp overnight or to make reservations and get the gate code for the group camp at (386) 362-1001, 800-226-1066 (Florida toll free) or email recreation@srwmd.org.

Florida National Scenic Trail

Mix up your adventure and take a hike along a popular segment of the [Florida National Scenic Trail](#). There is a kiosk and limited parking as the trail crosses Goose Pasture Road. Heading north from the kiosk, the Aucilla River Trail is draped along a picturesque portion of the river's east bank. The Aucilla Sinks Trail traces the river's mysterious disappearing act south of Goose Pasture Road. Sinkholes reveal the underground course of the ink-black Aucilla River, framed by graceful palms in a rugged wilderness landscape. Orange blazes mark the tree-lined trail, making it easy for hikers to explore this geologic wonderland. Wear orange during [hunting season](#). Ticks can be prevalent during warm weather.



History

From MyFWC.com: For more than twelve thousand years, people have inhabited the land around the Aucilla and Wacissa rivers. Indians hunted and fished the abundant resources in and around the rivers, where archeologists documented many seafood middens and prehistoric artifacts. To protect these and other cultural resources, artifact removal is illegal.

Before the first Europeans arrived, the climate was drier and the sea level lower than today. Dry land



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extended miles into what is now the Gulf of Mexico and water levels were lower in rivers and lakes. The Aucilla was a series of separate sinkholes that were a major source of fresh water, attracting mastodons and other large animals. North Florida's first inhabitants used chert spear points attached to shafts to hunt for big game around these watering holes. In 1993, archeologists from the University of Florida recovered a 7.5-foot mastodon tusk from a prehistoric site along the Aucilla River. Eight long cut-marks at the base of the tusk indicated it had been removed from the skull by humans. Radiocarbon dated the tusk at 12,200 years ago, one of the earliest records of human activity in Florida.

As Florida's climate became wetter and forests replaced grasslands, the Indians hunted deer and other animals in the forests, fished and gathered freshwater snails and other mollusks. By A.D. 400, villages were built up, and people had constructed ceremonial mounds. Archeologists refer to this as the Weedon Island culture, named for an archeological site found in the Tampa Bay area. In the spring of 1902 and 1918, archeologist Clarence Moore excavated two mounds along the Aucilla River that he associated with a nearby village. Moore uncovered numerous burials containing skeletal remains as well as decorative ceramic burial goods.

The rich resources and the accessibility of two rivers attracted those determined to profit from the bounty. Slaves deepened a natural channel between the Wacissa and the Aucilla rivers, but the Slave Canal was abandoned. Later, Seminole Indians used the dense swamps to successfully attack Army soldiers who had little success against guerrilla tactics.

Lumbermen removed most of the old-growth cypress from the swamps early in the 20th century. They constructed raised roadbeds (trams) for locomotives to haul huge timbers out of the swamps. Stands of native longleaf pine were replanted with fast-growing slash and loblolly pines for pulpwood. Today, some of these trams still provide roadways for vehicles, while others are smaller pathways for hikers, cyclists and wildlife.



Aucilla Rapids, photos Liz Sparks



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