



Overview of Florida's Designated Paddling Trails

From spring-fed rivers to county blueway systems to the 1515-mile Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail, Florida is endowed with exceptional paddling trails, rich in wildlife and scenic beauty.

If you want to explore one or more of the designated trails, please read through the following descriptions, click on a specific trail on our [main paddling trail page](#) for detailed information, and begin your adventure! There are waterways for all skill levels. Just remember to stay safe. Peruse our [Trip Tips and Safety information](#) to assist in planning your day trip. For those doing overnight excursions, these [Long Distance Paddling Recommendations](#) might be helpful.

Local outfitters, paddling clubs and the non-profit [Florida Paddling Trails Association](#) are good sources for learning about the numerous non-designated paddling trails. Also, taking guided trips with groups such as [Paddle Florida](#) are great ways to break into multi-day adventures on the water.

Before you embark on some of the river trails, take a look at the [Minimum Flows chart](#) to determine if water levels are adequate for an enjoyable trip.

The first Florida paddling trails were designated in the early 1970s, and trails have been added to the list ever since. Total mileage for the state-designated trails is now more than 4,000 miles. The Florida Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) coordinates the designated trails and works with or seeks to identify local and regional managers. For a waterway to be included as a state-designated paddling trail, a government body or non-profit entity must agree to manage the

trail and [apply for designation](#) through an established process through the Office of Greenways and Trails.

We want to keep our trail maps and guides current, so if you have noticed changes in access or other features while on a trail, please contact the Office of Greenways and Trails paddling trails coordinator, Doug Alderson: doug.alderson@dep.state.fl.us.

Paddling Skill Levels

The trail guides and this overview offer recommended skill levels for the various trails. Here are general definitions for these levels.

Beginner: New to paddling and may need tips and/or instruction. Prefers short trips of 1-5 miles on protected waters

Intermediate: Paddlers with knowledge of basic strokes and rescue techniques and some paddling experience on both river trails and open water in various weather conditions. Prefers trip distances of 5-10 miles and sometimes longer under favorable conditions.

Advanced: Seasoned paddlers who possess the skills and experience to paddle a variety of water types and conditions. Comfortable with paddling more than 10 miles in a day.

For more details about paddling skill levels, log onto this website: <http://www.kayaktraining.com/ACA%20Training%20Assessments.htm>

Trail Descriptions Alphabetically

Alafia River

Trail length: 10 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The Alafia provides the paddler with occasional shoals to get the heart pounding. Ibis, wood stork, osprey, red-shouldered hawk, pileated woodpecker, kingfisher, blue heron, songbirds, alligators and turtles can all be spotted. When the water is high and the current becomes swift, the river is not recommended for beginners. Most of the trail's shorelines are undeveloped and in public ownership. Occasional snags or strainers may require portaging.

Apalachee Bay Maritime Heritage Paddling Trails

Trail length: 50 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Skill level: Intermediate

Be transported back in time as you discover the history and witness the ecological diversity on one or all nine of the trails that make up the Apalachee Bay Maritime Heritage Paddling Trail System along the Wakulla County coast in North Florida. Apalachee Bay is named for the Apalachee Indian nation is one of the healthiest and most productive bays in the nation. Most of the protected coastline is located within the St. Marks National Wildlife offering paddlers a look at one of the most undisturbed bays in the United States. Each of the trails varies in difficulty and most can be completed in two to three hours. Paddlers can choose their own adventure based on skill level and interest. The majority of the trails are located between Panacea and St. Marks. The trails include Chaires Creek, Tide Creek, Mashas Sands, Levy Bay Loop, Spring Creek Inside Passage, Goose Creek Bay, Indian Point, Port Leon and the St. Marks River to Lighthouse.

Apalachicola River Blueway

Trail length: 114 miles (also includes part of Owl Creek, Devon Creek, and Dead Lakes)

Difficulty: Moderate

Skill level: Intermediate

From its formation at the Jim Woodruff Dam near the Georgia border, the Apalachicola River is undammed and largely wild, flowing past large tracts of public and protected lands. High bluffs, abundant wildlife, and rare animals and plants make this river among the most unique in Florida, and at the right water conditions, large sandbars make for ideal primitive campsites. The river has the highest volume of flow of any waterway in Florida, so there is always a good current until it widens near the bay.

Apalachicola River Paddling Trail System

Trail Length: 100 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Excellent opportunities for paddling and kayaking entice paddlers of all abilities to enjoy a hundred miles of marked waterways interlacing the lower Apalachicola River estuary. Short easy Trails meander through mysterious tupelo swamps while a variety of overnight Trails flow along rivers and open bays where fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities abound.

Aucilla River

Trail length: 27 miles

Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult
Skill Level: Intermediate to Advanced

With high limestone banks and an arching canopy of live oaks, cypress and other trees, the Aucilla is as picturesque as it is wild. The river runs 75 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, but only about a third is navigable. This river has rapids and shoals that paddlers can find challenging, especially at low water. The river is not recommended for beginners.

Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail

Trail length: 105 miles
Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult
Skill level: Intermediate to Advanced

This unspoiled coastline between the Aucilla and Suwannee Rivers boasts one of the longest and wildest publicly-owned coastal wetlands in the United States, and a striking array of bird and marine life. Seven designated primitive campsites have been set up exclusively for paddlers and a handful of small coastal communities provide opportunities for resupply. Since much of the region is remote and cell phone coverage is limited, experience in open water coastal paddling is recommended.

Blackwater River

Trail length: 31 miles
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

This winding stream flows through the unspoiled Blackwater River State Forest, with trees often forming a dense canopy over the river. High bluffs occur in some sections where pine and cedar trees tower above paddlers. The water is coffee colored, the reason why Creek Indians called the river "Oka Lusa" ("black water"). White sandbars provide a perfect place for camping or picnicking.

Blackwater River/Royal Palm Hammock

Trail length: 13.5 miles
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Intermediate

This scenic paddling trail winds through mangrove estuaries and salt marsh preserves of Collier-Seminole State Park, part of the Ten Thousand Islands region. The park covers what is historically known as Royal Palm Hammock. Here is found one of three original native stands of royal palms in the state of Florida, resembling the coastal forests of the West Indies and Yucatan.

Bulow Creek

Trail length: 6.5 miles from state park to Intracoastal Waterway (can also paddle about 3.5 miles upstream from state park)

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Bulow Creek begins at the historic Bulow Plantation Ruins State Park and leads upstream and back and then downstream to the entrance of the Intracoastal Waterway. As you approach the Intracoastal Waterway, the water begins to turn brackish. Much of the trail flows through grassy coastal marsh typical of the Atlantic Coast.

In 1836, Seminole Indians destroyed the prosperous Bulow Plantation where the Bulow family grew sugar cane, cotton, rice, and indigo. Ruins of the former plantation—a sugar mill, a unique spring house, several wells, and the crumbling foundations of the plantation house and slave cabins—show how volatile the Florida frontier was in the early 19th century.

Buster Island

Trail length: 11

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Skill level: Beginner to intermediate

Paddlers encircle Buster Island, nestled between vast lakes that bracket Lake Kissimmee State Park. The paddling loop meanders through the Zipperer Canal, Lake Rosalie, Rosalie Creek, Tiger Lake, Tiger Creek and Lake Kissimmee before returning to the boat marina. An outfitter at the marina offers boat rentals, fishing advice and Segway tours. Pine flatwoods, oak hammocks and freshwater marsh burst forth in the fall and spring with an abundance of wildflowers that splash vibrant colors along the waterways. The diverse habitat, part of the headwaters of the Everglades, offers excellent wildlife viewing opportunities for the quiet and observant visitor. The park is a site on the Great Florida Birding Trail.

Charlotte County Blueway

Trail length: 219 miles of trails

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The Charlotte County Blueway trails are filled with unique opportunities to observe Southwest Florida's native flora and fauna. Along the western county boundary the Gulf of Mexico connects to an extensive estuarine system. The shoreline is divided into four distinct sections: Charlotte Harbor, Coastal, Myakka River and Peace River.

Chipola River

Trail length: 51 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Fed by numerous springs, this scenic 51-mile trail flows through river swamps and hardwood forests. Limestone bluffs and caves, visible from the water, add a unique touch. Several shoals are present, especially during low water, and should be attempted by intermediate paddlers. Paddlers should take note of the shoal known as "Look and Tremble Falls" below the State Road 274 bridge and portage if necessary.

Chipola River (Upper)

Trail length: 4.5 miles
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The Upper Chipola River Paddling Trail is a shady, unspoiled waterway that meanders about 4.5 miles before ending in Florida Caverns State Park near Marianna. Numerous clear springs dot the river and colorful wildflowers adorn the banks in spring and fall. This remote stretch of the Chipola River is a site on the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail with excellent wildlife viewing opportunities.

Choctawhatchee River

Trail length: 64 miles
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The Choctawhatchee River is a journey into the heart of wild Florida where wildlife far outnumbers humans. This river is 170 miles long, beginning in Alabama with about 88 miles in Florida. Expect to encounter few people or boats except near a few popular springs. Paddlers must be comfortable with primitive camping and filter or treat water as there are few potable sources. There is little to no development along the river and amenities are very limited—a bonus for those looking for immersion in wilderness.

Coldwater Creek

Trail length: 19 miles
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Flowing through the Blackwater River State Forest, Coldwater Creek has some of the swiftest water in Florida. Because it is spring-fed, the shallow water is always pleasantly cool and makes for a perfect paddle for all ages. Flowing for nearly 20 miles through undeveloped land, it is very narrow in spots with a steep gradient. The sandy bottom and broad sandbars will remind you of nearby Gulf Coast beaches. A brisk downstream current helps carry you past pine and

hardwood forests. Obstructions could include cypress knees, logs, and wide gravel bars that extend into the stream from shorelines.

Econfina Creek

Trail length: 24 miles

Difficulty: Easy (lower section) to Difficult (upper section)

Skill level: Beginner (lower section) to Advanced (upper section)

This trail is an unusually beautiful, swift-flowing creek in northwest Florida that empties into the Gulf of Mexico near Panama City. The upper 11 miles of the trail (between Scott Bridge and Walsingham Park) is one of the most difficult stretches of river in the state. It is narrow with tight curves, fast water chutes, log jams and shallow water, so expect to portage. The lower section is spring-fed and slower, and the springs are possibly the purest in the state. The creek is ever-changing and the type of paddling experience and degree of difficulty is dependent on widely fluctuating water levels.

Econlockhatchee River

Trail length: 19 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate (depending on water levels)

Flowing past unmarred forests, including the Little Big Econ State Forest, paddlers can see a diverse array of wildlife including sandhill cranes, bald eagles, ospreys, hawks, wading birds, wood storks, roseate spoonbills, waterfowl, shorebirds, deer, turkey and sometimes black bear. The Muskogee name for the river means "River of Many Mounds," named for the multitude of Indian mounds found along this waterway. The second largest tributary of the storied St. Johns River, this black water stream is narrow in places and canopied by cypress and sabal palm.

Estero Bay and River

Trail length: 9 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (in bay)

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate (in bay)

Starting as a curving blackwater stream through hardwood hammocks, the lush shoreline eventually gives way to mangrove swamps, coastal bays and islands. Yellow-crowned night herons, cormorants and anhingas are easily spotted; more rare are black-whiskered vireos and mangrove cuckoos. Two prominent historic sites are featured along the trail: the Koreshan community and Mound Key. The trail also circumnavigates the island of Lover's Key State Park.

Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail

Trail length: 1,515 miles

Difficulty: Intermediate to Difficult

Skill level: Moderate to Advanced

Beginning at Big Lagoon State Park near Pensacola, extending around the Florida peninsula and Keys, and ending at Fort Clinch State Park near the Georgia border, the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail (commonly referred to as The CT) is a 1,515-mile sea kayaking paradise. The trail includes every Florida coastal habitat type, from barrier island dune systems to salt marsh to mangroves. Several historical sites and points of interest are accessible by kayak along with colorful fishing communities and urban centers.

The CT is divided into 26 segments. Each segment is unique, ranging from the remote Big Bend Coast and Everglades/Florida Bay wilderness, to the more urbanized coastlines of Pinellas County and Fort Lauderdale. The trail is utilized by thousands of Florida residents and visitors alike who paddle the trail for a few hours, days, weeks or months. Some hardy souls have paddled the entire trail, and others seek to complete the trail in segments over several years, similar to how hikers often tackle the Florida or Appalachian Trail.

The CT has incorporated and partnered with several existing local and regional trails such as the Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail, the Nature Coast Trail and the Gulf and Wilderness waterways in Everglades National Park. Also, the trail connects, incorporates and complements several county blueway trails.

Great Calusa Blueway

Trail length: 190 miles of trails

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail meanders through the coastal waters and inland tributaries of Lee County, covering the Pine Island/Estero Bay area, Calooshattee River and Sanibel/Captiva islands. Easy-to-identify brown signs guide paddlers through shallow areas away from powerboat traffic. The trail is perfect for both beginners seeking short trips and avid and experienced back-country paddlers. Anglers, bird watchers, day-trippers, families, adventure enthusiasts and geocachers also enjoy the blueway.

Hickey Creek

Trail length: 8 miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

This paddling trail was likely used for travel and subsistence by the Calusa people, who lived along the coast of southwest Florida until they were nearly

eradicated in the late 1700s. Living and surviving on the coast caused the tribesmen to become great sailors. They defended their land against other smaller tribes and European explorers who were traveling by water. The adjoining Caloosahatchee River, which means "River of the Calusa," was their main waterway.

Hickey's Creek is a short round-trip paddling excursion that can be accessed from several different points on the Caloosahatchee River. Keep in mind that wind, currents, and motor boat traffic are present on the Caloosahatchee. Allow time to enjoy a short nature loop trail and picnic at the Hickey Creek Mitigation Park.

Hillsborough River

Trail length: 30 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Difficult (depending on section)

Skill level: Beginner to Advanced

From a narrow, winding stream to a tidal estuary with extensive salt marshes, the Hillsborough River Paddling Trail runs from Hillsborough River State Park to the City of Tampa's Rowlett Park. Because of the length and huge variations along the route, the paddling trips have been separated into four sections: North, Seventeen Runs, Middle and South. The scenic North section is short and well-suited for beginner paddlers. The Seventeen Runs section is a very rugged and narrow section of river that is not maintained and should only be attempted by experienced paddlers. The Middle section is suited for beginner to intermediate paddlers, with some portages possible. The South section is rated for intermediate paddlers because of its length and the possibility of winds and motorboat traffic.

Holmes Creek

Trail length: 19.5 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Be sure to bring a mask and snorkel if paddling Holmes Creek. This remote Panhandle stream is fed by crystalline springs, so the water's clarity is often semi-transparent. Low-hanging branches and twisting bends add some challenge as the waterway makes its way past high sandy banks and lush swamplands. Several old-growth cypress and gum trees can be seen along the shore.

Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie River Paddling Trails

Trail Length: 37.7

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The Indian River Lagoon portion of the trail is part of the Indian River Lagoon Aquatic Preserve, known for its manatees, dolphins, sea turtles and rich bird life. Care should be taken when crossing the boat channel of the Intracoastal Waterway. There is also a quiet 2.6-mile trail spur that runs through St. Lucie Inlet State Park. The St. Lucie River (South Fork) portion of the trail, known for its arching old-growth live oaks and numerous air plants, is 21.5 miles and extends from the Atlantic Ridge State Park/ Halpatiokee area to sites near the Indian River Lagoon and the St. Lucie Inlet. There is also a 3.6-mile trail spur that runs between Atlantic Ridge and the Halpatiokee County Preserve.

Itchetucknee River

Trail length: 3 miles
Difficulty: Easy
Skill Level: Beginner

This beautiful spring-fed river is very popular in the summer months between Memorial Day and Labor Day as hundreds of visitors float in tubes and rafts down the shady waterway. It is best to visit during weekdays and less busy months when wildlife is abundant and few paddlers are present.

Juniper Creek

Trail length: 6 miles
Difficulty: Easy
Skill Level: Beginner

Paddle this historic stream beginning at Red Rock Bridge, believed to be the location where Andrew Jackson and his forces crossed the river during the First Seminole War. Juniper Creek has gentle curves, some small bluffs, and gold-tinted waters. Look for the white blossoms of mountain laurel lining the shore during spring.

Jupiter Waterway Trail

Trail length: 39 miles
Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult
Skill Level: Intermediate to Advanced

The Jupiter Waterway Trail is a series of trails that connect the Loxahatchee River, Intracoastal Waterway and Jupiter Inlet. These legs and off-shoots create a natural playground of eco-tourism activities, from kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding to snorkeling, boating, fishing, and diving. It also has several adjacent natural areas that encourage “near-water” activities like hiking, biking, beaching and enjoying wildlife, such as bird-watching.

Lake County Blueways

Trail length: 130 miles
Difficulty: Easy
Skill level: Beginner

The Lake County Community Blueways feature eight trails within the areas of the St. Johns River, Golden Triangle, Palatka Basin and Oklawaha Basin. Several of the St. Johns River trails are categorized as “wilderness” Blueways as these runs are located in remote, undeveloped areas and offer paddlers hiking and camping opportunities.

Lake Jackson Blueway

Trail length: varies
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Located just north of Tallahassee, Lake Jackson provides a tranquil oasis within a bustling urban area. It is an enticing destination for viewing sunsets, paddling, boating, fishing, and birding. Paddling on Lake Jackson is relatively easy, given its openness, lack of current, and few powerboats. The lake has impressive views, and the water quality is good. Access to the lake is convenient with multiple public boat landings, allowing visitors to create a trip of any length.

Little Manatee River

Trail length: 10 miles
Difficulty: Easy
Skill level: Beginner

Only 25 miles from Tampa, this tannin-tinted river has a sandy bottom and steep, sandy banks. Paddlers will journey through a variety of habitats including sand pine scrub, willow marsh, and hardwood forest. Several inviting rest stops can be found along the way.

Loxahatchee River

Trail length: 8.5 miles
Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult
Skill level: Intermediate to Advanced

This swift and twisting river is worthy of its status as Florida’s first National Wild and Scenic River. The coffee-colored stream meanders through an unspoiled subtropical river swamp where bald cypress, pond apple, orchids, and ferns line the shores. Trapper Nelson’s cabin is a point of interest near the trail’s terminus in Jonathan Dickinson State Park. Nelson was an intriguing and colorful fur trapper who came to the area in the 1930s and lived along the banks of the Loxahatchee. He made a living trapping and selling animals and built a rustic Florida homestead. He quickly became famous as the “Wildman of the Loxahatchee” and eventually ran a small wild animal exhibit for tourists. After his

death in 1968, the state acquired his land, preserving his home and grounds for future generations to enjoy.

Merritt's Millpond

Trail length: 4 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Merritt's Mill Pond is a unique 202-acre spring-fed lake about 4 miles in length with crystal clear waters in Marianna. Merritts is perfect for beginning paddlers and an excellent place to take children as the clear waters reveal lots of fish, turtles, and interesting underwater sights. The Pond is encircled with tall cypress wreathed in waving Spanish moss, offering shade to paddlers who like to wind between the trees. There are crystal blue springs available to swim and snorkel in and submerged caverns offer adventure for certified cave divers.

Ochlockonee River (Upper)

Trail length: 27 miles

Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult depending on water levels

Skill level: Intermediate to Advanced

Beginning near the Georgia line, the narrow upper portion of the Ochlockonee twists around cypress knees and blowdowns toward Lake Talquin. Most of this river corridor is completely undeveloped, surprising when considering that the City of Tallahassee is only a few miles away. Low water will require some portaging and pullovers.

Ochlockonee River (Lower)

Trail length: 62 miles

Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult depending on water levels

Skill level: Intermediate to Advanced

Most of this trail is wild and scenic since the river winds through the Apalachicola National Forest and other public lands more than fifty miles, past high pine bluffs and dense hardwoods. Near Ochlockonee River State Park, the end of the trail, the river widens and motorboats are more common. Adjoining tidal creeks near the Gulf offer miles of exploration. Releases from the Jackson Bluff Dam vary water levels. Campsites, campgrounds and fish camps are numerous.

Paddle Manatee

Trail length: 75 miles of trails

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Manatee County's rivers, tidal creeks and bays are all included in this comprehensive paddling trail network, the first of its kind established in Florida.

Paddlers can spot a variety of marine and freshwater species, including dolphins, manatees and an array of birds and fish. Detailed maps can be downloaded and a free 45-page guide can be ordered by phone.

Manatee County Natural Resources Department, (941) 748-4501 x4605

Peace River

Trail length: 70 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (depending on water levels)

Skill level: Beginner; Intermediate above Zolfo Springs

The Peace River, true to its name, is a serene, slow-moving river with few signs of civilization. From Bartow to Arcadia, the pale, tea-colored river shows many different faces. Sometimes the river is narrow, passing swiftly between high banks. Around a curve, the river may widen and the current becomes slow-moving. Past another curve, the river becomes a quiet, shallow pond before narrowing again. The Peace River is split by tiny islands and joined by numerous creeks. Sandy beaches and sloping banks provide excellent camping spots. The most outstanding feature of the river is its geology. Large limestone formations frequently emerge from the banks and river bottom, creating shoals and gentle rapids (depending on water levels). Below Wachula, the river is popular with fossil hunters, who (after obtaining a state permit) pan for the shark's teeth and bones from ages past.

Pellicer Creek

Trail length: 6.7 miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

The unspoiled pine forests of Faver-Dykes State Park and the 1,500-acre Princess Place Preserve make for scenic access points for this calm stream. More than 100 bird species, including colorful warblers, can be spotted during the spring and fall migrations. Eagles and falcons return to nest each year, and resident herons, egrets and wood storks can be seen year round. Both freshwater and saltwater fish can be caught in the stream.

Pellicer Creek, formerly called Woodcutters Creek, was once home to a large timber mill. The waterway was used to haul timber and turpentine out to the Mantanzas River and onward to St. Augustine. The creek is named for Francisco Pellicer, an early Spanish resident of the area and owner of a large and prosperous plantation.

Perdido River

Trail length: 15.4 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

Forming the border between Florida and Alabama, the Perdido curves past extensive woodlands of pine, cypress and juniper cedar. Several small sloughs provide additional paddling opportunities and numerous sandbars offer ideal rest spots. The sparkling waters are often tinted with yellow or red-black tannins from swamp vegetation, depending on rainfall levels.

Pithlachascotee River

Trail length: 3-6 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The wildest and most scenic section of the river is in the vicinity of the Grey Preserve, where arching trees often form a jungle-like canopy. Fragrant spider lilies greet paddlers in the warmer months. Below the preserve, the river flows through the town of New Port Richey and it is more of an urban paddling trail. Weekends and holidays in this lower section can be busy with boat traffic. Submerged logs are the biggest hazard for swimmers and paddlers since the water is dark.

Potano Paddling Trail

Trail length: 11.6 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

Circling the shoreline of Newnan's Lake near Gainesville and dipping into the ancient passageway of Prairie Creek on the southwest side of the lake, the trail is named after the Potano, a Native American tribe that lived in the area through the 1600s. When the lake dried up during the 2000 drought, 138 early Native American dugout canoes were found in the lake bottom, the largest discovery of aboriginal vessels in North America. Many more were believed hidden beneath silt and muck. Numerous eagles and wading birds nest along the lake. In fact, so many eagles nest along the lake that eggs have been used to help repopulate eagles throughout the eastern United States.

Alachua Conservation Trust, Inc., (352) 373-1078

Putnam County Blueway

Length: 183 miles of trails

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Once complete, a total of 18 trails, from a mile long to sixty miles, can take paddlers on a journey through Old Florida. Many of the trails have been used by Native Americans for thousands of years, and all of the trails connect to or include the St. Johns River, Florida's only nationally designated American Heritage River. Well known historic figures who once traveled the St. Johns and

Ocklawaha rivers include John and William Bartram, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Some lakes and wide stretches of river are included, so paddlers should be cognizant of weather and wind forecasts.

Santa Fe River

Trail length: 26 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

This scenic trail begins in O'Leno State Park, where the Santa Fe reappears after flowing underground for more than three miles. This tributary of the Suwannee River curves past hardwood hammocks and through river swamps. Many clear springs feed the Santa Fe and provide cool relief on hot days. There are some small shoals during low water, which can be attempted by intermediate paddlers.

Shingle Creek

Trail length: 10 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

Flowing out of the City of Orlando, Shingle Creek is considered the headwaters of the world's most famous freshwater wetlands—the Everglades. The trail begins at Osceola County's 1,000-acre Shingle Creek Regional Park and ends at the ramp along Lake Tohopekaliga in Kissimmee. Many people enjoy paddling up and down the stream through the park. Remnants of early pioneer buildings can be found along the creek and the waterway flows through a thick cypress swamp that was the site of a running battle during the Second Seminole War.

Osceola County Parks & Recreation, (407) 742-7800

Shoal River

Trail length: 9.5 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

A nature lover's dream, the gold-tinted Shoal River threads through a northwest Florida wilderness of high sandy hills and broad sandbars. The surrounding forest is a mixture of maple, birch, oak, gum and cypress. The sometimes slow current during normal water levels makes for an easy paddle upstream.

Sopchoppy River

Trail length: 15 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (depending on water levels)

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate (depending on water levels)

This reddish-brown river—fed by wild swamps—twists around cypress knees and impressive exposed roots through the Apalachicola National Forest and beyond. Numerous sandbars make for scenic rest stops. Deer can often be seen along the shore or swimming across the river. In spring, wild azalea and other flowering plants add color to the shorelines. During low water levels, some pullovers and wading may be required.

Spruce Creek

Trail length: 16 miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

Paddlers begin their journey from a wide brackish bay, but as they head north, the creek narrows and marshy expanses give way to shoreline trees. Historically, a large indigenous Native American habitation was nestled around the Spruce Creek basin. A prehistoric earthen works, the Spruce Creek Mound, is located on the creek. The site functioned as a major ceremonial and political center for the Timucua Indians. Lesser mounds are scattered throughout surrounding areas.

St. Johns River

Trail length: 310

Difficulty: Varies depending on location

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate depending on location

At just over 300 miles from its headwaters in the Upper Basin marsh to its mouth northeast of Jacksonville, the St. Johns is Florida's longest river entirely within the state's borders.

St. Mary's River

Trail length: 60 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

Originating in the famed Okefenokee Swamp, the St. Mary's River is known for its gentle curves framed by picturesque hardwood forests. White sandbars are found at almost every bend, contrasting with the tea-colored water. Paddlers can choose from several access points along the 60-mile trail, and the slow current makes for easy paddling.

Steinhatchee River

Trail length: 6-7 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

The Steinhatchee River is a serene blackwater river forming the boundary between Dixie and Taylor Counties, entering the Gulf of Mexico along the Big Bend coastline between the small towns of Jena and Steinhatchee. It begins as a shady meandering waterway just below a limestone ledge that creates the picturesque and historic Steinhatchee Falls. The upper stretches of the river are pristine and remote with no houses visible the first mile or so. The river continues to widen as it nears the Gulf, a distance of 6-7 miles depending on where paddlers choose to take out.

Suwannee River Wilderness Trail

Trail length: 170 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (depending on water levels)

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate (depending on water levels)

The upper Suwannee River features high banks lined with arching live oaks, pines, and cypress. White sand beaches make for good campsites or you can use screened pavilions or rent cabins at one of several “river camps” established for the Suwannee Wilderness Trail. The river also boasts more than 70 springs, many of which are found in the middle section.

South of Branford, the lower Suwannee runs deep and wide along pine flatwoods and wetlands as it flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Sandy banks become lower and slope gently toward the river. Most of the lower Suwannee River is wide, tranquil and gentle, and the scenery is spectacular. This section has more motorboats than the upper section, but wildlife is still more common than people. “River camps” provide camping opportunities.

The Suwannee Wilderness Trail provides a managed wilderness experience while educating visitors about protecting the natural, cultural and heritage resources in the Suwannee River Basin. Visitor opportunities extend outwards from the river to include recreational “hubs,” recreational trails, parks, museums, cultural sites and other nature and heritage attractions in adjacent cities, towns and rural landscapes throughout the area.

State of Florida’s Nature and Heritage Tourism Center in White Springs, (386) 397-1919 or (800) 868-9914.

Tomoka River

Trail length: 13 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

This short river features a wide variety of natural communities, from the narrow canopied waterway upstream of the Riverbend Nature Park to the wide, coastal marsh-lined river around Tomoka State Park. The high ground now occupied by the Tomoka State Park was once the site of the Timucuan Indian village of

Nocoroco. The sites of archeological significance surrounding this peninsula are considered some of the most important in Volusia County.

Upper Manatee River

Trail length: 6.5 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

Subtropical vegetation lines the banks of this gently winding trail. It is an easy half-day trip, or you can paddle both ways, making only one vehicle necessary. Water levels and flows vary with releases from Lake Manatee Dam. Across from the take-out point is the historic site of Fort Hamer. The fort was built during the Indian scare of 1849-1850 to defend Tampa settlers.

Wacissa River

Trail length: 15 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner for upper part; Intermediate to Advanced for lower river and Slave Canal

Spring-fed and rich in wildlife, the Wacissa has lured paddlers for thousands of years, beginning with Florida's earliest Native Americans and their dugout canoes. The river begins as a wide marshy waterway, ideal for beginners, but the current quickens as the river narrows in the middle stretch. Wading birds, alligators, otters, and various raptors can often be spotted. The lower Wacissa spreads out into several braids through a swamp called Hell's Half Acre. Paddlers must take care to find the entrance to the Slave Canal in order to paddle to the take-out at Nutall Rise on the Aucilla River.

Wakulla River

Trail length: 4 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Skill level: Beginner

Wildlife is abundant along this clear, spring-fed river. Manatees, once seen only in summer, are now spotted year-round. Paddlers can choose between a four- or six-mile trip below Wakulla Springs State Park. The current is usually gentle enough to paddle up and back for any distance desired.

Wekiva River/Rock Springs Run

Trail length: 27 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Beginning just north of Kelly Park in Apopka, Rock Springs Run winds its way swiftly downstream to join the spring run flowing out of Wekiwa Springs State

Park. The trail continues north approximately 15 miles to the St. Johns River. A mixture of swift and placid water offers a frequent change of pace. Traveling through sand pine scrub, pine flatwoods, hammocks and swamps, paddlers can see a variety of wildlife, including river otters. Numerous islands, tributaries and lagoons provide opportunities for side trips and camping. Primitive camping by permit is available at some sites along the trail.

Whiskey Creek

Trail length: 3.8-mile loop

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Dr. Von D. Mizell-Eula Johnson State Park in southeast Florida is bordered by the Intracoastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean, with Whiskey Creek running through its center. The creek is a marine estuary lined with sea grapes and mangroves, an important habitat for marine species and bird rookeries. This park is a site on the Great Florida Birding Trail, so bring a camera and binoculars to watch for wildlife at a safe distance.

Withlacoochee Gulf Preserve

Trail length: 4.5 miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (depending on winds)

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate (depending on winds)

Located near the town of Yankeetown near the end of the Big Bend Gulf Coast, with Withlacoochee Gulf Preserve Paddling Trail winds through a marshy, undeveloped coastal wilderness. Several other paddling trails, many of them loops, are shown on the preserve website, although low tide may prove prohibitive in some of the smaller tidal creeks. Use caution in high winds around Beach Bird Creek Park since this area is open water.

Withlacoochee River (North)

Trail length: 28 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate (depending on water levels)

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate (depending on water levels)

This river gently curves through Twin Rivers State Forest past hardwood forests, crystal-clear springs, and sandbars along the bends. Primitive camping is allowed along the way. There are some small shoals, but portaging is generally not necessary. The Withlacoochee contributes a significant amount of water to the Suwannee River and joins it at Suwannee River State Park. The trail ends at the boat ramp in the state park, about a quarter-mile upstream on the Suwannee River.

Withlacoochee River (South)

Trail length: 76 miles
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate
Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Once a refuge for Seminole Indians during the Second Seminole War, the river emerges from the Green Swamp in west central Florida and twists and bends through scenic sandhills before entering a swampy terrain of cypress, gum and maple. Overhanging limbs form a lacy canopy. Camping is available at Silver Lake Recreation Area. During dry seasons, paddlers may encounter logs and hyacinth jams. Although this is a long trail, numerous access points enable paddlers to choose shorter trips.

Yellow River

Trail length: 54 miles
Difficulty: Easy to Difficult (depending on water levels)
Skill level: Beginner to Advanced (depending on water levels)

Located in the western Panhandle, the upper Yellow River is unique in that it drains the state's highest elevation. As a result, the current is faster and there are numerous high banks. Hardwood forests and high sandy banks frame the waterway. Farther downstream, the river deepens and slows as it passes through cypress and gum swamps. Water levels can fluctuate dramatically in a short period of time.