



## **Segment 7**

### **Nature Coast**

**Emergency contact information:**

**911**

Levy County Sheriff's Office: 352-486-5111

Citrus County Sheriff's Office: 352-726-4488

Pasco County Sheriff's Office: 727-847-5878

Hernando County Sheriff's office 352-754-6830

US Coast Guard Station Yankeetown 352-447-6900 (North of Hernando Beach)

US Coast Guard Station Sand Key 727-596-8666 (South of Hernando Beach)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 24-hour wildlife emergency/boating under the influence hotline: 1-888-404-3922

**FPTA Region: C**

**Begin:** Cross Florida Greenway Spoil Island near Yankeetown

**End:** Hudson Beach Park

**Distance:** 58 miles

**Duration:** 4 days

**Special Considerations:** Much of this segment is remote, where cell phone coverage can be spotty. Being properly equipped and prepared and leaving a float plan is very important. The coast here is shallow in places and low tides can present a problem for navigation and when seeking to land or launch. Keep a tide chart to help plan your trip. A

GPS is necessary, especially when paddling the winding route between Crystal River and Chassahowitzka. Four straight days require paddling more than 15 miles a day, so long distance-paddlers attempting this segment should be experienced and fit.

Open water stretches around the Crystal River power plants and Anclote Key will prove challenging in high winds. Be sure to check the weather forecast before attempting to paddle these sections.

## **Introduction**

Whether it is paddling through miles of winding tidal creeks or along unmarred beaches, or stopping at small coastal towns, this segment has much to offer the nature lover. Plus, wildlife abounds. Constant temperatures in the spring-fed Crystal and Homosassa rivers provide winter refuge for numerous manatees. White pelicans, wading birds, and a glimpse of endangered whooping cranes also add excitement to any excursion.

For cultural breaks, friendly trail towns spaced a day or two apart offer museums, restaurants, grocery stores, motels, and campgrounds. Information on many of the local communities along the trail can be obtained by logging onto [Visit Nature Coast](#), [Visit Citrus Coast](#), and [Adventure Coast](#).

Extensive public lands are the key to keeping the Nature Coast natural. Three coastal state parks are featured: [Crystal River Preserve](#), [Werner-Boyce Salt Springs](#), and [Anclote Key](#). In addition, the [Crystal River](#) and [Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuges](#) protect thousands of acres.

The [Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area](#) is another large tract of public land just above Weeki Wachee, totaling nearly 34,000 acres.

This segment includes the 23,000-acre [St Martins Aquatic Preserve](#), which helps to protect the marshy wilderness between Crystal River and Homosassa.

Near Inglis, paddlers will pass the outlet of one of Florida's largest public works projects—the Cross Florida Barge Canal. Before completion, this massive shipping channel was halted by President Nixon in 1971 and deauthorized by Congress in 1990. Now, the former canal lands constitute a world-class 110-mile recreational greenway, named after one of the major barge canal opponents, Marjorie Harris Carr.

[Leave No Trace](#) principles should be followed in camping at designated primitive sites in order to protect the environment and keep them open for paddlers.

**1. Cross Florida Greenway spoil island campsite to Uncle Tom's Island campsite, 17 miles**

After the campsite, you'll need to follow a GPS point on the map to a point where you can either cross (at high tide) or make a short portage over the jetty bordering a cooling canal for the Crystal River coal plants. This is about two miles from the campsite and more than three miles from the mainland. The jetty is wide and vegetated before this point and posted with no trespassing signs. If you want to see pods of manatees in the winter, you can paddle on the north side of the jetty towards the mainland where warm water is released from the power plants.

After crossing the jetty, you can aim for the mouth of Crystal River and pick up the channel markers. A straight shot is about five miles. Many boaters camp on the privately-owned Shell Island at the river mouth. Proceed up the Crystal River until you reach the end of Pine Island and the mouth of the Salt River to the south, where you'll begin paddling the established 17-mile St. Martins Marsh Saltwater Paddling Trail. This is a scenic and winding route along the Salt River and other waterways that requires a GPS and close attention to the maps. Signs along the route may aid navigation.

If you continue up the Crystal River into King's Bay, you'll have a good chance of encountering manatees. While some manatees live in the bay year-round, hundreds frequent the waters in winter as they are dependent upon the constant 72-degree temperatures of the springs. These manatees represent approximately 20 percent of the manatee population in the Gulf of Mexico. Please keep in mind that it is unlawful to chase or harass these gentle giants or to enter established manatee sanctuary areas. Some manatees may be curious enough to seek your company but keep your distance as they are capable of flipping a boat when their powerful tails thrust them in a downward dive to escape from harm. Numerous motels and restaurants are accessible from the water in the town of Crystal River. The Crystal River Archeological State Park, which features a museum and various Native American mound structures, is not accessible from the water. The closest access point is the Crystal River State Park Preserve ramp, where you will have to hike about two miles.

Along the Salt River, closely follow GPS points as you paddle through Dixie Bay and "The Narrows." About a half-mile past "The Narrows" you'll see the north entrance to Salt Creek. Uncle Tom's Island is a remote tree island surrounded by marsh about a mile up Salt Creek on the left. You'll need to follow your GPS to find it. This campsite is ideally suited for a maximum of 8 people or 4 small tents and is available free of charge on a first-come, first-serve basis. Timing your arrival and departure at high tide will facilitate easier access, avoiding the marsh muck.

## **2. Uncle Tom's Island campsite to Florida Cracker Riverside Resort, 7.5 miles**

From the campsite, you can exit Salt Creek at the south entrance (see map). Continue along the scenic Salt River where you can stop for a rest break at John Brown Park, just past the Highway 494 Bridge. You'll then proceed through Greenleaf Bay and Shivers Bay where you'll see numerous opportunities for rest stops.

Once you leave Salt River and enter the Homosassa River, be wary of boat traffic and fast-moving airboats in this area, especially near the entrance of Battle Creek. Travel up the Homosassa River a little over a mile to Florida Cracker Riverside Resort (352-628-2474), .10 miles past the public boat ramp. It is not recommended to use the public ramp, as it is extremely busy and popular with powerboaters. The Resort has its own boat ramps. The ramps are located on the same side as the public boat ramp, just up the creek immediately after the resort. There is one just as you turn into the creek, and another a few hundred feet past the first, behind the marina. Make sure to make reservations beforehand.

### **3. Florida Cracker Riverside Resort to Ten Palms Campsite, 16 miles**

After you leave the resort, head downriver to the Battle Creek entrance (across from where you exited Salt Creek) and head south. As you proceed into the 31,000-acre Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge through Porpoise Bay—where porpoises are frequently seen—follow your GPS to the entrance of Mason Creek then to Seven Cabbage Creek. This creek entrance is narrow and vegetated and can easily be missed. More than one paddler has either mistakenly paddled up Rose Creek—very scenic, but there is no outlet, or paddled past the narrow entrance to the Cutoff. If you stay in the main channel of Seven Cabbage Cutoff, you should be fine, although a winter low tide can be problematic.

Leaving Seven Cabbage Cutoff, a spot for a break is the Dog Island Rest Area about 2.5 miles up the Chassahowitzka River along the northern bank. Managed by the refuge, this spot has a low dock, composting toilet, picnic tables, and a pavilion. No camping is allowed in the refuge. The public ramp along the river is another 3.5 miles upriver and can serve as an emergency takeout. Also, camping is available at the Chassahowitzka River Campground (352-382-2200).

Continue south across Chassahowitzka Bay. Ten Palms is just past the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge's southern boundary and the landing is on the northwest side of the island. Currently, there are less than Ten Palms due to rising sea levels.

### **4. Ten Palms to Hudson Beach Park 16.8 miles**

Pine Island Park is a county park located about 2 miles south of Ten Palms and amenities include water, outdoor showers, bathroom facilities, and pavilions. Open 8:00 am to

sunset it also has a concession stand offering a variety of foods and beverages, guaranteed to satisfy any hungry kayaker.

A couple of miles farther south, you can take a rest break at the designated kayak ramp just before the Bayport fishing dock at Bayport Park, where bathrooms and water are available. If you proceed up the Weeki Wachee River and turn into the Mud River, you'll find an alternate site at Mary's Fish Camp, which rents cabins and tent space, along the headwaters of the Mud River (352-597-3474).

If you continue up the Weeki Wachee River to the Rogers Park Launch, there is a restaurant across the bridge. If you continue up the Weeki Wachee, you will be treated to a clear spring run where manatees can be seen, especially during the winter months. The Weeki Wachee and Rogers Park can get very crowded on weekends and during spring break.

Other overnight opportunities in the area include the Hernando Beach Motel, about three-quarters of a mile in from the coast in Hernando Beach, 352-596-2527. Advanced reservations are recommended. Restaurants are within easy walking distance of all the overnight stops.

A good rest break is Norfleet Fish Camp in the Old Florida town of Aripeka, after about 9 miles (352-666-2900). Water, restrooms, and snacks are available. Camping is not allowed. Hudson is a larger town where you can land at the Hudson Beach Park on the far east end of the swim area and access motel, restaurants, water, restrooms, and showers. Across the street from the park is the Inn on the Gulf, where you can rent a motel room. Call 727-868-8648 for rates and reservations. Hudson Beach Boat Ramp is an alternative location for the beach park.