



# Office of Greenways & Trails

## Segment 17

### Hollywood/Ft. Lauderdale

#### **Emergency contact information:**

911

Miami-Dade Police Department: 305-576-9900

Broward County Sheriff's Department: 954-764-4321

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

**Begin:** Oleta River State Park

**End:** Hugh Taylor Birch State Park

**Distance:** 16 miles

**Special Considerations:** Given the narrow Intracoastal Waterway (ICW), lengthy stretches of seawalls, and sometimes heavy boat traffic, this is a challenging segment and recommended for paddlers who have sufficient expertise in paddling over large and high energy wakes that often rebound off sea walls. Boat traffic is higher on weekends and holidays and should be avoided if possible. Paddlers should take special precautions in passing large ships moving and docking at Port Everglades.

During favorable weather, paddlers may opt to paddle along the Atlantic, with rest stops at area beaches. Both routes are included in this guide and on the maps. After the primitive campsite at Oleta River State Park, there is no camping in this segment, so advance motel reservations are recommended in Fort Lauderdale or Lauderdale-By-The-Sea.

#### **Introduction**

From a quiet area where Tequesta Indians lived for thousands of years, the Miami-Dade/Broward County region began its boom in 1896 when Henry Flagler's East Coast Railroad reached Miami. New towns and cities sprung up, quickly encompassing the small settler towns of Coconut Grove and Lemon City. From an 1890 population of about

2,000 people in Miami-Dade County, which then included most of Broward County, today's combined population for the two counties is around four million.

Even though this is a short and urbanized segment, paddlers will enjoy several scenic state and local parks. State parks include [Oleta River](#), [Mizell/Johnson](#) and <https://www.floridastateparks.org/HughTaylorBirch>. In addition, Oleta River and Mizell/Johnson have restaurants and canoe/kayak rentals. Hugh Taylor Birch State Park rents canoes on an interior lagoon.

A highlight of the segment is the West Lake Park/Anne Kolb Nature Center, among other [Broward County](#) parks.

### **1. Oleta River State Park to Holland Park, 7 miles**

If choosing the ICW route, proceed north from Oleta River. Seawalls may prevent opportunities for rest breaks until you reach Hollywood, where there are places to land near the Hollywood Marina and at Holland Park. Holland Park would make for the better lunch break since it has picnic shelters and a viewing tower that offers impressive views of the area.

One luxurious overnight stop in Hollywood is [The Diplomat Beach Resort](#) on the ICW. The high-rise motel has a floating dock and storage space for paddlers.

An option to taking the ICW is to paddle along the Atlantic shore, but only in good weather with mild winds. To reach the Atlantic from Oleta River State Park, you'll need to backtrack to the Baker's Haulover Canal, then proceed north. Your next opportunity to reenter the Intracoastal Waterway is the busy entrance to Port Everglades.

Several city and county beaches along the Atlantic offer opportunities for restroom breaks and picnicking. You can land anywhere at the Hallandale City Beach, but be watchful of swimmers. There, you can witness Italian-Americans playing their traditional bocce ball games. At Hollywood Beach, you must land or launch at the east end of Meade Street (see map for coordinates) and remain 100 yards offshore when traveling north or south.

## **2. Holland Park to Mizell/Johnson State Park boat ramp, 4.5 miles**

A must stop is the [Anne Kolb Nature Center](#), a site on the [Great Florida Birding Trail](#). Here, you can land at the canoe/kayak rental area, parking your boat to the side so it won't be confused with the rental craft. You can't launch a boat here, but kayaking visitors are welcome to land. Tour the exhibit center, view displays of art, sculptures, marine ecology and aquariums. Several trails and boardwalks run through the park, and you can climb a three-story viewing tower.

Proceeding north, you have the option of taking scenic Whiskey Creek through [Mizell/Johnson State Park](#), a quiet refuge for birds, manatees and paddlers. The tidal creek was believed to have figured prominently in "Prohibition Era" liquor running from the Bahamas. Some shallow areas in the creek may not be navigable at low tide, however.

The park's 2.5-mile beach was part of the 68-mile route of the "Barefoot Mailman," named for the carriers who walked barefoot at water's edge from 1885 to 1892. The almost week-long route consisted of 28 miles by small boat and 40 miles by beach from Palm Beach to Miami. Prior to 1885, a letter from Palm Beach to Miami would first make its way to New York and then Cuba, for a total of 3,000 miles and up to two months. The barefoot service was discontinued in 1892 when a rock road was completed from Jupiter to Miami.

## **3. Mizell/Johnson State Park boat ramp to Hugh Taylor Birch State Park, 4.5 miles**

Take special care when proceeding past Port Everglades, where gargantuan cruise ships and other boats frequently dock. Fort Lauderdale boasts of being the "Yacht Capital of the World," and if you're paddling on a weekend or holiday, you might realize why. Be wary of large ships in the ICW and their wakes.

A good rest stop is the Fort Lauderdale South Beach Park. The kayak launch spot is located at the northern end of the park across from the Oasis Restaurant (see map).

[Hugh Taylor Birch State Park](#) was named for the gentleman who settled in the small village of Fort Lauderdale in 1893 and eventually bought a subtropical paradise along

the coast for about a dollar an acre. Witnessing the rapid development growing up around his estate, Birch donated the land for public use and the park was officially opened in 1949. From the ICW, one can access the park at a public dock (see map). On the Atlantic side, visitors take an underpass beneath AIA to reach the main body of the park. The underpass closes at 5 p.m. Canoe rentals are available along an interior landlocked lagoon.

A point of interest just south of the park is the [Bonnet House Museum and Gardens](#), the former home of artists Frederic and Evelyn Bartlett. For a fee, you can tour this 1920s era oceanfront estate with its elaborate architecture, art collections and 35-acre green oasis. A quote from Evelyn Birch Bartlett reveals how much the surrounding area has changed: "When I first came to Fort Lauderdale in 1931, it wasn't a town, just a village. When we drove up the long driveway to Bonnet House, we might see a wildcat, raccoons,...even a panther was seen on the property..." Mrs. Bartlett was determined to preserve the estate and donated it to the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation in 1983. The estate is closed on Mondays. From Bonnet House, it is possible to access Hugh Taylor Birch State Park through the main gate.

If paddling on the Atlantic side, there is no access to the ICW until the Hillsboro Inlet, roughly 12 miles north of Port Everglades. You can stay at a motel along the Atlantic in Fort Lauderdale or Lauderdale-By-The-Sea 1 to 2 miles north of the park. You can find several accessible motels to choose from through the [Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitor's Bureau](#) website. Since most motels do not have secure storage space for paddlers, you may want to secure your boat with a cable to a fence or post.

The [Doubletree Gallery One Motel](#) is along the ICW near the park on the west side (954-565-3800). If staying at the Doubletree, the dock can be 3-4 feet high at low tide, so landing at high tide is preferable. After landing, make sure to pull your kayak completely out of the water as large wakes can swamp your craft.