

Florida Trail



USDA Forest Service
Southern Region

Florida National Scenic Trail

Recreation Guide FB-RG 331



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Big Cypress National Preserve Kitching Creek, Jonathan Dickinson State Park

Sunrise over Lake Okeechobee

Ocala National Forest

Ocoosa National Forest

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Suwannee River

Florida: a land of natural wonders. From the world's only Everglades to the sparkling white quartz dunes of the Florida Panhandle, the Sunshine State hosts an incredible diversity of habitats. Haunting forests of dwarf cypress, tangled thickets of saw palmetto, open prairies bursting with wildflowers, and deep ravines lined with mountain laurel and rhododendron—the Florida Trail enables hikers to explore landscapes unlike any other trail in the nation.

Stretching more than 1,400 miles across the state of Florida, from the sawgrass prairies of Big Cypress National Preserve to historic Fort Pickens at Gulf Islands National Seashore at Pensacola Beach, the Florida Trail provides opportunities for both short hikes and extended backpacking outings. Walking is one of the best ways to maintain your health, so head outdoors and explore Florida's natural attractions along the Florida Trail.

The Florida Trail: Florida's Footpath Forever

History. The Florida National Scenic Trail leads hikers through Florida's natural wonders as it meanders 1,400 miles across the state. In 1983, the U.S. Congress designated the Florida Trail as part of the National Trails System, making it one of only eight National Scenic Trails. It is the only National Scenic Trail where hikers can enjoy both subtropical and temperate ecosystems year round, and is fully blazed from end to end. The Florida Trail is recognized as Florida's official statewide trail and the state's Millennium Legacy Trail for connecting its culture, heritage, and communities.

James Kern, a wildlife photographer and real estate broker, envisioned the Florida Trail while hiking the Appalachian Trail in the early 1960s. To generate support for the project, Kern created the Florida Trail Association (FTA). Since the group's first trail blazing in the Ocala National Forest in 1966, the volunteers of this nonprofit organization have dedicated themselves to building, maintaining, and protecting the Florida Trail and other hiking trails and to educating trail users on careful use and enjoyment of the outdoors. With more than 5,000 members, this association built and maintains more than 1,800 miles of hiking trails, including both the Florida Trail and loop trails near

urban areas. Seventeen geographically distributed chapters serve the state. The association's headquarters are in Gainesville; trail staff of the FTA share an office with the USDA Forest Service in Tallahassee.

Trail Administration. The USDA Forest Service has overall administrative responsibility for the Florida National Scenic Trail. The USDA Forest Service certifies that trail segments meet standards established in both federal law and in the trail's comprehensive plan; manages trail lands; and coordinates trail planning, development, and protection with Florida Trail partners.

To close gaps in the trail, the USDA Forest Service seeks to purchase land or permanent easement agreements from willing landowners. Through cooperation, sections of the trail are opened for the public to enjoy.

The Florida Trail Association manages the trail's day-to-day operations. Through a cost share agreement with the USDA Forest Service, the nonprofit Florida Trail Association oversees trail maintenance, promotes its use, and works to acquire and protect trail corridor to complete the trail. The volunteers of the FTA donate tens of thousands of hours annually building and

maintaining the trail and its bridges and boardwalks, mowing and cutting ever-growing vegetation, and painting orange trail blazes to make it easy to follow. Trail maintainers are a common sight on the trail during all but the hottest months of the year.



Crosscut saw crew using traditional tools to clear the trail in the Juniper Prairie Wilderness

Your Help is Needed to complete the Florida National Scenic Trail. Join the Florida Trail Association and its local chapters and volunteer to assist in building and maintaining a wilderness hiking trail the length of Florida. Your financial assistance or gifts of land or easements for the trail are also welcome. For more information:

Florida Trail Association
5415 SW 13th Street
Gainesville, FL 32608-5037
toll-free phone: 877-HIKE-FLA
email: fta@floridatrail.org
web: www.floridatrail.org

Enjoying the Trail

Many public agencies and private interests participate in the development and management of the Florida National Scenic Trail. Because of this diversity, rules and regulations governing use of the trail vary. Contact the land managers listed in this brochure or the Florida Trail Association for information particular to the section of the trail you intend to travel.

People using the Florida National Scenic Trail are urged to show appreciation to the volunteers and land managers who make this trail possible. The best way to do this is through good stewardship, practicing Leave No Trace ethics while hiking. Travel in groups of ten or fewer if backpacking; 25 or fewer on day hikes. Dispose of human waste at least 200 feet from the trail, campsites, and water. Use a camping stove instead of building fires. If you pack it in, pack it out.

Users should be especially careful to respect the rights of private property owners, particularly those who have generously allowed the trail to cross their land. Please stay on the trail respecting the privacy of trail neighbors by not trespassing onto private property.



Trail register at Hickory Hammock



Florida's state bird, the mockingbird, on an FNST signpost

Permitted Uses. The Florida National Scenic Trail is primarily a footpath, and all segments are open to travel by foot for walking, hiking, and backpacking. Based on considerations of resource sensitivity and the intended recreational experience the trail is to provide, other non-motorized uses include bicycling and horseback riding which may be permitted on a given segment by the land manager. Please respect any trail closures. Ride bicycles and horses only on those segments designated for such use. If you take a dog, keep it on a leash. Dogs are not allowed in Eglin Air Force Base. Some segments of the Florida Trail are not safe for dogs due to native wildlife or swampy conditions. Leave No Trace (www.lnt.org) provides information on respecting wildlife when hiking with your dog. If in doubt, contact the land manager when planning your trip.

Trail Markings. Trail segments open to the public are signed with the FNST logo shown to the left. The trail is marked with 2-inch by 6-inch vertical orange paint blazes. A double blaze, one above the other, is placed before turns, junctions, or other areas that require hikers to be alert. Blue and other color blazes mark side trails leading to campsites, water supplies, or special features.

Fees and Permits. Fee payments or permits are required for use on many Florida National Scenic Trail segments and overnight facilities. Fees are charged for camping in many developed federal, state, and county campgrounds. The trail is still a work in progress; some segments of trail are not yet open to the general public and may only be accessed by members of the Florida Trail Association. Check with the Florida Trail Association or the area's land manager in advance to determine if FTA membership, fees, or permits are required. FTA offers special informational packets for long distance hikers that include up-to-date maps, permitting requirements, and an FTA membership.

Camping. Facilities for backpacking along the Florida National Scenic Trail vary. Some managing authorities permit primitive camping anywhere along the trail. Others permit camping only at designated sites. Utilize maps and guidebooks to plan your trip accordingly. Follow Leave No Trace ethics when camping and minimize your impact; many of Florida's habitats are extremely fragile.



Pausing at a trail junction

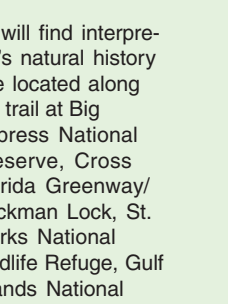


A camping hammock is ideal in many Florida habitats

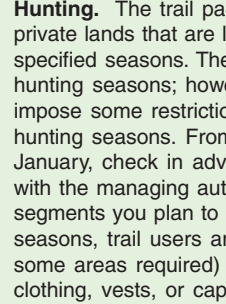


F-Trop Volunteers building a bridge

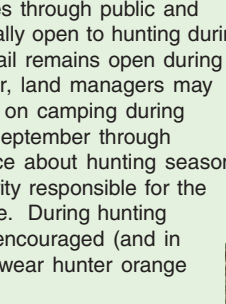
Interpretive Facilities. Hikers will find interpretive centers that explain Florida's natural history and geology. These centers are located along the trail at Big Cypress National Preserve, Cross Florida Greenway/Buckman Lock, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Gulf Islands National Seashore, and Florida state parks.



Shepherd Spring



Fishing. A Florida fishing license is required for fishing in lakes and streams along the trail.



Hiking with a buddy through Marshall Swamp



Bluff Hammock boardwalk, along the Kissimmee River



Cardinal wild pine, Big Cypress



Kickoff of annual Big O Hike around Lake Okeechobee, Pahokee



Cypress knees, Suwannee River



Mourning dove, Seashore



Econfina Creek



Sand pine scrub, Ocoosa to Lake



Volunteer trail maintainers learn rigging techniques



American alligator, Big Cypress National Preserve



Great blue heron, St. Marks

Trail Partners

Publications and Information. The Florida Trail Association acts as a clearinghouse for the Florida Trail by publishing maps and guidebooks and providing up-to-date information on the Florida Trail web site, www.floridatrail.org. FTA members receive a bi-monthly magazine, the *Footprint*, with articles, photos, trail routing notices, and a roster of chapter activities throughout the state. The FTA manages a catalog of trail-related items, including hiking guidebooks and FT logo items such as hats and t-shirts. For FTA membership, information, maps, and volunteer opportunities, including volunteer vacations, contact:

Florida Trail Association
5415 SW 13th Street
Gainesville, FL 32608-5037
toll-free phone: (877) HIKE-FLA
e-mail: fta@floridatrail.org
web: www.floridatrail.org

Partnerships for the Trail. The Florida Trail represents a unique and highly productive partnership between local, state, and federal agencies; private landowners; and trail volunteers to conserve and showcase Florida's natural beauty and heritage. As of December 2005, nearly 1,000 miles of the Florida Trail are open for the public to enjoy; the remainder is accessible to members of the FTA by agreement with private landowners. The progress made to date and in the future depends upon these partnerships. Credit should be given to the volunteers, agencies, and partners listed in this brochure. Without their commitment, the dream would never have become a reality.

Since 1988, the USDA Forest Service and the FTA have entered into cooperative trail management agreements with nearly two dozen public and private land managers covering nearly 70 sections of trail. These agreements certify that trail segments meet minimum standards, are open to the public, are protected, and provide the public with quality recreation opportunities. Only through the generosity of public-spirited landowners who join this cooperative venture will more trail sections become available to the hiking public.

Trail Partners. The following lists the contact information for the partner agencies that generously allow the Florida National Scenic Trail to cross their lands.

USDA FOREST SERVICE
National Forests in Florida
Supervisor's Office, 325 John Knox Rd, Suite F-100,
Tallahassee, FL 32303-1160 (850) 523-8500 www.fs.fed.us/r9/florida
Ocala National Forest. Ocala/Walton Visitor Center, 3199 NE CR 315, Silver Springs, FL 34488, (352) 236-0288. Salt Springs Visitor Center, 14100 N SR 19, Suite A, Salt Springs, FL 32154 (352) 695-3070. Pittman Visitor Center, 45621 SR 19, Altoona, FL 32702 (352) 669-7495
Ocoosa National Forest. US 90, P.O. Box 70, Ouluste, FL 32072 (386) 752-2577 or (386) 752-0147
Apalachicola National Forest. Apalachicola Ranger District, SR 20, Revel Bldg, PO Box 579, Bristol, FL 32321, (850) 843-2282, and Wakulla Ranger District, 57 Tall Dr, Crawfordville, FL 32327 (850) 926-3561
CAMP CRYSTAL OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER
6274 Camp Crystal Rd, Starke, FL 32091 (352) 475-1414
CITY OF BLOUNTSTOWN
20591 Central Ave W, Blountstown, FL 32424 (850) 674-5488, www.blountstown.org

CITY OF KEYSTONE HEIGHTS
Keystone Airport Authority, 7100 Airport Rd, Starke, FL 32091-9347 (352) 473-0031, www.keystoneheights.us

CITY OF ORLANDO
Orlando Wetlands Park, 25255 Wheeler Road, Christmas, FL 32709 (407) 568-1706

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES, DIVISION OF FORESTRY
Division of Forestry Headquarters, 3125 Coroner Blvd, MS C25, Tallahassee, FL 32309-1650 (850) 488-4274, www1.dof.com

Blackwater River State Forest
11650 Munson Hwy, Milton, FL 32570, (850) 957-6140
Etoniah Creek State Forest. 390 Holloway Rd, Florahome, FL 32140 (386) 329-2552
Little Big Ecan State Forest. 1350 Snow Hill Rd, Geneva, FL 32732 (407) 971-3500
Pine Log State Forest. 5583-A Longleaf Rd, Ebro, FL 32437, (850) 535-2888
Seminole State Forest. 9610 CR 44, Leesburg, FL 34788 (352) 360-6677
Twin Rivers State Forest. 7620 133rd Rd, Live Oak, FL 32060 (386) 208-1460 or (386) 208-1461
Whiticochee State Forest. Citrus, Crom, Richloam Tracts Recreation/Visitors Center 15003 Broad St, Brooksville, FL 34601, (352) 754-6896

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Office of Greenways & Trails Headquarters, Rm 853
Douglas Bldg, 3900 Commonwealth Blvd, MS 795,
Tallahassee, FL 32393 (850) 245-2052
www.FloridaGreenwaysAndTrails.com

Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway. Field Office, 6282 SE CR 314, Ocala, FL 34470 (352) 236-7143.
Palatka-Lake Butler Trail. Buckman Lock Visitor Center, 200 Buckman Lock Rd, Palatka, FL 32177 (386) 312-2273
General James A. Van Fleet State Trail. 7305 US 27, Clermont, FL 34711 (352) 516-7394
Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail. 3900 Commonwealth Blvd, MS 795, Tallahassee, FL, 32301 (850) 245-2052 or (877) 822-5299
Florida Park Service, Division of Recreation and Parks. 3900 Commonwealth Blvd, MS 500, Tallahassee, FL 32399 (850) 245-2157, www.floridastateparks.org
Blackwater River State Park. 7720 Deaton Bridge Rd, Holt, Florida 32564 (850) 963-5363
Gold Head Branch State Park. 6239 SR 21, Keystone Heights, FL 32566 (352) 473-4701
Jonathan Dickinson State Park. 16450 SE Federal Hwy, Hobe Sound, FL 33455 (561) 744-9814
Suwannee River State Park. 20185 CR 132, Live Oak, FL 32080 (386) 392-2746

Stephen Foster Folk Cultural Center State Park. Ouluste Battlefield, Big Shoals, PO Drawer G, White Springs, FL 32096-0435 (386) 397-2733 or (386) 397-4331
Tosohatchee State Reserve. 3395 Taylor Creek Rd, Christmas, FL 32709 (407) 568-5893

Lower Wakulla River Preserve State Park. Wakulla Springs State Park, 1800 Wakulla Cir, Apopka FL 32712, (407) 884-2008

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
SR 20 Choctawhatchee River Bridge, SR 20
Apalachicola River Bridge, US 98 St. Marks Trail to
Wakulla River, FDOT District 3 Bicycle and Pedestrian Program, PO Box 607, Chipley, FL 32426 (850) 698-0250 ext. 1-547, www.dot.state.fl.us/Safety/peid_bike/peid_bike.htm

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION (FWCC)
Office of Recreation Services, 600 S Meridian St., Mail Code 554, Tallahassee, FL 32309-1600, (850) 488-5520, www.myfwc.com/recreation/
Aucilla Wildlife Management Area. 620 S. Meridian St, Tallahassee, FL 32309, (850) 421-1883 or (850) 488-5520

Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area. 1231 Prairie Lakes Rd, Kenansville, FL 34739 (407) 436-1818
J.W. Corbett WMA. 8535 Northlake Blvd, West Palm Beach, FL 33412 (561) 624-6989

NORTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
Choctawhatchee River, Econfina Creek, Headquarters
Office, 81 Water Management Dr, Havana, FL 32333 (850) 539-5999, www.nwfwmd.state.fl.us

PLUM CREEK TIMBER COMPANY
Lake Butler Forest. PO Box 157, Gulf Hammock, FL 32639 (352) 486-4301, www.plumcreek.com

ST. JOHNS RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
Rice Creek Management Area. Division of Land Management, 4049 Reid St, Palatka, FL 32178-1429 (904) 529-2380, www.sjrwmd.com
Bull Creek Wildlife Management Area. 1239 SW 10th St., Ocala, FL 34474 (321) 676-6614, www.sjrwmd.com
Seminole Ranch Conservation Area. P.O. Box 871, Christmas, FL 32709, (407) 349-4972, www.sjrwmd.com

SANTA ROSA COUNTY
Seashore Trail. Administrative Services, 6495 Caroline St, Suite J, Milton, FL 32570 (850) 983-1940, www.co.santa-rosa.fl.us

SANTA ROSA ISLAND AUTHORITY
Seashore Trail. PO Drawer 1208, Pensacola Beach, FL 32562, (850) 932-2257 www.sria-fla.com

SEMINOLE COUNTY
Cross Seminole Trail. 520 W Lake Mary Blvd, Suite 200, Sanford, FL 32773-1458, (407) 695-2093, www.seminolecountyfl.gov/trails/

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
Kicco WMA, Bluff Hammock, DuPuis Reserves, Hickory Hammock, Yates Marsh, Miami Canal, Levees 1, 2 and 3. 3301 Gun Club Rd, West Palm Beach, FL 33406 (800) 432-2045 ext. 6640
www.sfwmd.gov/site/index.php?id=35

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
Green Swamp. 2379 Broad St, Brooksville, FL 34609, (352) 796-7211 x4482, www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/recreation/

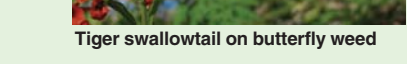
SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
Holton Creek, Camp Branch, Econfina River, Aucilla River. 9225 CR 49, Live Oak, FL 32060 (386) 362-1001, www.mysuwanneeriver.com

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
Big Cypress National Preserve, National Park Service, Headquarters. 33100 Tamiami Trail E, HCR 61, Box 110, Ochopee, FL 34141 (239) 695-2000, and Ocala Visitor Center, 52105 Tamiami Trail E, HCR 61 Box 11, Ochopee, FL 34141 (239) 695-1201, www.nps.gov/bicy
Gulf Islands National Seashore, National Park Service, Headquarters and FL Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center. 1801 Gulf Breeze Pkwy Center, Gulf Breeze, FL 32563 (850) 934-2600; Fort Pickens Visitor Center, (850) 934-2635 www.nps.gov/gulfis/
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. PO Box 68, St. Marks, FL 32355 (850) 925-6121, www.fws.gov/saintmarks

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
Avon Park Air Force Range. US Air Force, 347 ROW, DET 1, OL ACEVN, 29 South Blvd, Avon Park AFB, FL 33825. Call (850) 452-4119 (ext. 5) for 24/7 recording to learn if trail is or will be temporarily closed.

Camp Blending Joint Training Center, Department of Military Affairs. 5622 SR 16 W, Starke, Florida 32091-9703
POC: Range Control, (904) 882-3121
Eglin Air Force Base. US Air Force, Jackson Guard, 107 SR 85 N, Newville, FL 32578, (850) 882-4164
Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail. US Army Corps of Engineers, 525 Ridgeland Rd, Clewiston, FL 33440-5399 (863) 983-8101, www.saj.usace.army.mil/recreation/index.html

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA
Seashore Trail. 11000 University Pkwy, Pensacola, FL 32514-5750 (850) 474-2005



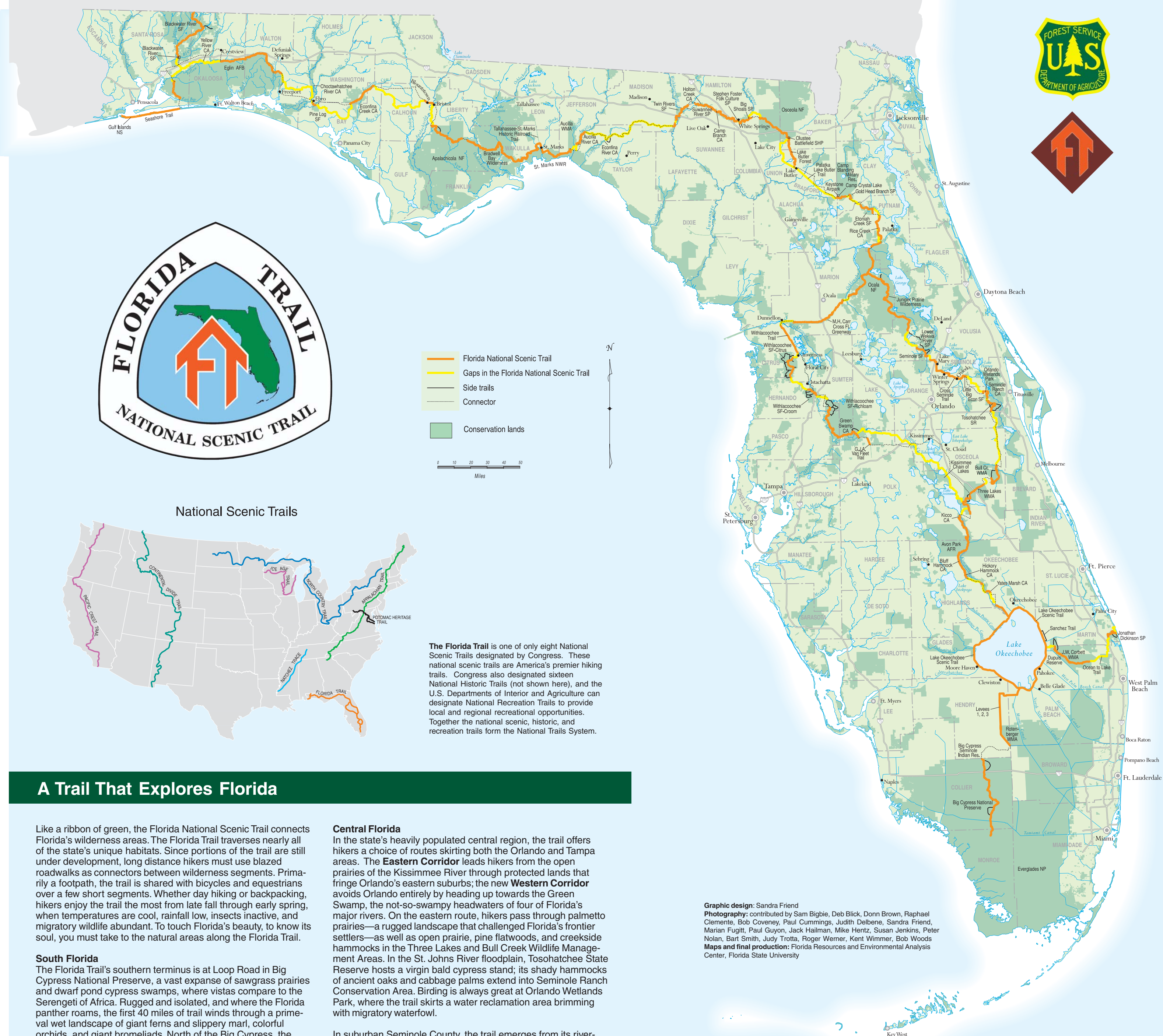
Tiger swallowtail on butterfly weed

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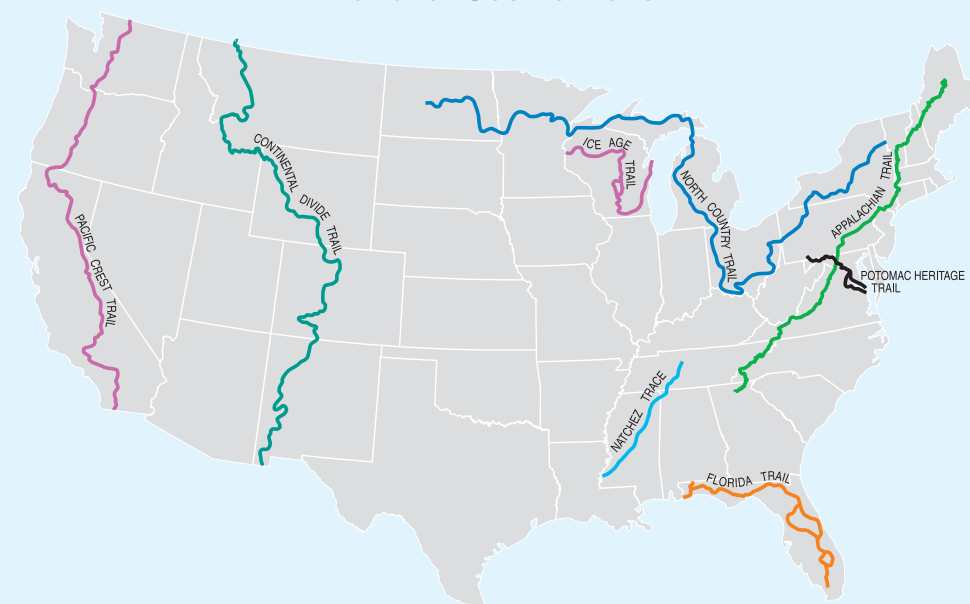
www.floridatrail.org

(877) HIKE-FLA

Florida National Scenic Trail



National Scenic Trails



The Florida Trail is one of only eight National Scenic Trails designated by Congress. These national scenic trails are America's premier hiking trails. Congress also designated sixteen National Historic Trails (not shown here), and the U.S. Departments of Interior and Agriculture can designate National Recreation Trails to provide local and regional recreational opportunities. Together the national scenic, historic, and recreation trails form the National Trails System.

A Trail That Explores Florida

Like a ribbon of green, the Florida National Scenic Trail connects Florida's wilderness areas. The Florida Trail traverses nearly all of the state's unique habitats. Since portions of the trail are still under development, long distance hikers must use blazed roadwalks as connectors between wilderness segments. Primarily a footpath, the trail is shared with bicycles and equestrians over a few short segments. Whether day hiking or backpacking, hikers enjoy the trail the most from late fall through early spring, when temperatures are cool, rainfall low, insects inactive, and migratory wildlife abundant. To touch Florida's beauty, to know its soul, you must take to the natural areas along the Florida Trail.

South Florida

The Florida Trail's southern terminus is at Loop Road in Big Cypress National Preserve, a vast expanse of sawgrass prairies and dwarf pond cypress swamps, where vistas compare to the Serengeti of Africa. Rugged and isolated, and where the Florida panther roams, the first 40 miles of trail winds through a primeval wet landscape of giant ferns and slippery marl, colorful orchids, and giant bromeliads. North of the Big Cypress, the Seminole Tribe of Florida permits Florida Trail Association (FTA) members to follow roads through its reservation, where stops at Billie Swamp Safari and the Ah-Tha-Thi-Ki Museum are a must in learning about Seminole culture.



Backpackers enjoy a cypress strand on the Ocean to Lake Trail.

North of the reservation, the trail passes through the relic Everglades, now almost entirely converted to ranch lands and sugar cane fields. The trail continues on the levees of the South Florida Water

Management District on its way to Lake Okechobee, where hikers have the choice of walking atop the Herbert Hoover Dike around the east or west sides of the second largest freshwater lake in the United States. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed the dike in the 1940s after a storm surge cost the lives of thousands along the lake. On the west side of Lake Okechobee, hikers are treated to views of the lake's expansive wetlands, while on the east side, they enjoy colorful sunsets along the vistas of this inland sea. Every Thanksgiving week for more than a decade, the Florida Trail Association's popular Big O Hike draws participants from across North America on a series of nine supported day hikes that circle the lake on a 109-mile segment of the Florida Trail. A new spur trail, the 72-mile Ocean to Lake Trail, leads west through wilderness in northern Palm Beach County and Martin County.

North of Lake Okechobee, the Florida Trail continues along the Kissimmee River floodplain, historically Florida's cattle country. Winding through beautiful hammocks such as those at Hickory Hammock, Bluff Hammock, and KICCO, the trail parallels the river for more than 50 miles, passing through ghost towns and abandoned homesteads of Florida's early settlers before crossing the broad prairies of the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area, where sandhill cranes abound.



The palmetto-dotted prairies of Central Florida

Central Florida

In the state's heavily populated central region, the trail offers hikers a choice of routes skirting both the Orlando and Tampa areas. The **Eastern Corridor** leads hikers from the open prairies of the Kissimmee River through protected lands that fringe Orlando's eastern suburbs; the new **Western Corridor** avoids Orlando entirely by heading up towards the Green Swamp, the not-so-swampy headwaters of four of Florida's major rivers. On the eastern route, hikers pass through palmetto prairies—a rugged landscape that challenged Florida's frontier settlers—as well as open prairie, pine flatwoods, and creekside hammocks in the Three Lakes and Bull Creek Wildlife Management Areas. In the St. Johns River floodplain, Tosohatchee State Reserve hosts a virgin bald cypress stand; its shady hammocks of ancient oaks and cabbage palms extend into Seminole Ranch Conservation Area. Birding is always great at Orlando Wetlands Park, where the trail skirts a water reclamation area brimming with migratory waterfowl.

In suburban Seminole County, the trail emerges from its river-side route in the beautiful Little-Big Econ State Forest to follow bike paths across Seminole County. Turn off the beaten path to explore shady Spring Hammock along Lake Jesup and Big Tree Park where "The Senator," one of the largest (17.5 feet diameter, 138 feet high) and oldest (3,500 years) cypress trees in the world still towers. Crossing Interstate 4 on a suspension bridge, the trail continues on bike paths to the wild and scenic Wekiva River, where Florida black bears roam the corridor through Seminole State Forest. When hikers reach the Ocala National Forest, it's a step back in time—the first segment of the Florida Trail was built here in 1966, and the unbroken 70-mile route is the most popular segment of the trail for backpacking. Hikers can expect to meet up with pleasant company as they walk through the world's largest sand pine forest, the Big Scrub, and roam through the prairies and pine flatwoods of the Juniper Prairie Wilderness past beautiful springs that invite a stop for a swim.

On the **Western Corridor**, hikers experience different terrain and more immersion into Old Florida. Roadwalks connect completed segments, taking hikers through St. Cloud and Kissimmee—where they are sure to see sandhill cranes along the road, as well as wood storks on Lake Tohopekaliga—and up along the Old Tampa Highway, a section of which still retains its 1930s cypress planks and red bricks.

A short walk on the Van Fleet Rail Trail, north of Polk City, brings hikers closer to the Green Swamp, where the first significant wilderness segment begins, offering several days of peace and quiet through pine flatwoods, rolling sandhills, and the floodplain forests of the Withlacoochee River. Emerging from the Richloam Tract of Withlacoochee State Forest, the trail then connects to the Croom Tract, offering a nice day's walk through hardwood forests along the Withlacoochee River, and on to the Withlacoochee State Trail, a rail-trail passing through the historic towns of Istachatta, Floral City, Inverness, Hernando, and Dunnellon, paralleling part of the route of explorer Hernando de Soto.

After crossing the Withlacoochee River, hikers enjoy the challenging slopes and scenic vistas of the Cross Florida Greenway, a green ribbon of reshaped landscapes created during the 1930s diggings of the failed Cross-Florida barge canal. Crossing Interstate 75 on the nation's first land bridge, the trail continues up the Greenway and through the jungle-like forests of the Silver River and Ocklawaha River floodplains before meeting up with the eastern route in the Ocala National Forest.

North Florida

Long on scenery, the Florida Trail through North Florida entices with beauty spots connected by roadwalks on rural dirt roads. The first stop is Rice Creek, where a 1700s indigo and rice plantation thrived in the shade of giant cypresses. Dogwoods and azaleas lend their color to the scenic Etowah Creek ravine; the trail parallels its lip before heading through dense oak forests to Gold Head Branch State Park, with its beautiful streams and eerie Devil's Washbasin. Following the Palatka-Lake Butler Trail, hikers reach the Lake Butler Forest and then wind through timberlands to Oulustee, site of Florida's largest Civil War battle. In Osceola National Forest, watch the white-banded trees for signs of the red-cockaded woodpecker. Persons with disabilities can view a large colony of these endangered birds from an accessible portion of the trail near Oulustee Battlefield. Nearly 60 miles of trail parallels one of Florida's most beautiful rivers, the Suwannee, requiring some stamina and acrobatics for stream crossings and rapid elevation changes along the high bluffs. Camp on white sand beaches; explore the waterfalls. Heading west into the Big Bend, walk through more timberlands to reach the Aucilla River and its sinks, an unusual place where the river appears and disappears through "windows" in the limestone aquifer. Birding is fabulous in the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, where the trail passes through cathedrals of cabbage palms and along salt marshes en route to the heart of Florida's Panhandle.



Hiking sand dunes in the Seashore section, Santa Rosa Island

The Florida Panhandle

Wild and wooded, the Florida Panhandle is especially diverse in flora and fauna. Although the trail breaks into more segments connected by roadwalks, the future is bright. Most of the Panhandle remains undeveloped; protection of the trail corridor is a matter of developing public and private partnerships or acquiring the land upon the landowner's approval. Leaving the Big Bend area, the trail continues west through Apalachicola National Forest where it enters the 23,000-acre Bradwell Bay Wilderness, described by *Backpacker* magazine as one of the ten toughest hikes in the United States. Here, the trail requires several miles of wading in waist-deep water through dark tilt and gum swamp forests. Beyond, hikers encounter pitcher plant bogs amid vast pine flatwoods, where terrestrial orchids sparkle under the wiregrass. Along Econfina Creek, the trail feels downright Appalachian, with mountain laurel and flame azalea in bloom above the rushing water. The segment through Florida's oldest state forest, Pine Log, treats the hiker to cypress-lined ponds in the midst of the pines. Dozens of tannic streams gurgle through the rolling sandhills of Eglin Air Force Base, creating steep ravines crossed by log bridges; rare varieties of pitcher plants thrive on moist slopes. There are two termini for the northern end of the trail. Long-distance hikers headed north along the Eastern Continental Trail will take on the bluffs and ravines, rolling sandhills, and tilt swamps along the Blackwater River and its tributaries; those completing the traditional Florida Trail route head for the seashore, walking on Santa Rosa Island's famed white quartz beaches and its byside dunes to historic Fort Pickens in Gulf Islands National Seashore.

The USDA Forest Service wishes to thank the volunteers and staff of the Florida Trail Association for their continued service to public lands and trails throughout the State of Florida. Because of the hard work, dedication and vision of the Florida Trail Association, both American and International visitors are offered an unparalleled opportunity to experience the natural and cultural diversity of Florida. Through their members, F-Troop volunteer trail crews, and young adult internships, Florida Trail Association is a pioneer in fostering volunteerism as a form of outdoor recreation in Florida. The Florida National Scenic Trail legacy is a testament to the power of citizens in action, and the National Forests in Florida is proud to be granted the responsibility and honor of administering this amazing resource.