



Florida's Designated Paddling Trails

From spring-fed rivers to county blueway networks 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. This link to trip tips and safety information may assist you in planning your trip: http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/paddling/Segments/Tips_Safety.htm.

The Visit Florida trails and greenways website can help you identify overnight accommodations and points of interest near the established trails: <http://www.visitflorida.com/trails/>.

Local outfitters, paddling clubs and the non-profit Florida Paddling Trails Association (<http://www.floridapaddlingtrails.com/default.asp>) 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, <http://www.paddleflorida.org/>.

The first Florida paddling trails were designated in the early 1970s, and trails have been added to the list ever since. The Florida Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) coordinates the designated trails and seeks to identify local and regional managers. For a waterway to be included as a state-designated paddling trail, a government or non-profit entity must agree to manage the trail and apply for designation through an established process: <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/designation/>.

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 OGT paddling trails coordinator, Doug Alderson: doug.alderson@dep.state.fl.us.

Alafia River

Trail length: 10 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

For freshwater rivers, 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 seen. When the water is high and the current becomes swift, the river is not recommended for beginners. Most of the trail's shorelines are in public ownership. Occasional snags or strainers may require portaging.

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 Strenuous

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.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, (850) 488-5520

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 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: 11-13 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Bulow Creek begins at 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.

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

Beginning at the bridge on State Road 166 in Marianna, 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.

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 sandbars.

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's Bridge and Walsingham Park) is one of the most difficult stretches of river in the state. Narrow, with tight curves and several fast water chutes, log jams and shallow water also make paddling difficult on the upper river, so expect to portage. The lower section is spring-fed and slower. 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 blackwater river is narrow in places and canopied by cypress and sable palm. It is the second largest tributary of the storied St. Johns River.

Estero 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 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

A tidal estuary with extensive salt marshes, the Hillsborough runs from Crystal Springs to the City of Tampa's Rowlett Park. Because of the length, and huge variations along the route of the Hillsborough River, the paddling trips have been separated into four sections: the North, Seventeen Runs, Middle and South Sections. The scenic North section is short and well suited for beginner paddlers. The river's headwaters begin here as a slow-moving sheet flow through a heavily vegetated riverine forest with no discernible channel. 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: 9 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.

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.

Little Manatee River

Trail length: 12 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. About two miles downstream of the Leonard Lee Road put-in, an old railroad bridge marks the spot where the famous “Orange Blossom Special” once crossed the river.

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.

Ochlockonee River (Upper)

Trail length: 27 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

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: 65 miles

Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

More than 50 miles of this trail winds through the Apalachicola National Forest, 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 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: 4-6 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. Numerous sandbars make for scenic rest stops. Deer can often be seen along the shore or swimming across the river. At 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. Marys 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.

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.

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.