

# Florida National Scenic Trail



PC: CHRIS A. JOHNS

## Find Your Adventure



PC: CRISTINA LAMBARO

Threading its way from the sugar sand beaches of Gulf Islands National Seashore in the Florida Panhandle to the cypress domes of Big Cypress National Preserve in the Everglades, the Florida National Scenic Trail (or Florida Trail for short) connects the state's most outstanding scenic, natural, cultural and historic resources. The Florida Trail travels 1,300 miles throughout the state, offering recreational opportunities year-round as the nation's only subtropical National Scenic Trail. Located within a one-hour drive of most major metropolitan areas, the Florida Trail is the perfect destination for new hikers, families and even experienced thrill-seekers. Explore Florida's wild side and find your adventure on the Florida Trail!

### RECREATION

Whether you want to trek through the wilderness in solitude or explore a Gateway Community along an urban rail-trail, your adventure starts nearby on the Florida Trail.

**Hiking and Backpacking** are favorite activities on the Florida Trail. Trips range from short day hikes by crystal clear springs to longer treks through tracts of old-growth forest. Spend an afternoon or a couple months on the trail; the choice is yours.

**Biking\*** allows you to access the statewide network of multi-use paths and rail-trails. Bike sections of Cross Florida Greenway, the Palatka-Lake

Butler Trail and the St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail.

**Horseback Riding\*** in national forests, state forests, water management districts and state parks provides riders backcountry access to outstanding natural landscapes throughout the state. Experience Florida cowboy culture first-hand, or enjoy a great view over a pine savannah on your ride.

**Water Sports** in rivers, springs and lakes along the Florida Trail are a great way to explore the state. Cool down and paddle the famous Suwannee River, explore the disappearing Aucilla Sinks or swim in cool waters at Juniper Springs.

*\*Please refer to local land manager rules and regulations*

*to see if these activities are available and/or permitted on a trail segment near you.*

### SCENERY AND NATURE

The Florida Trail is the perfect destination to surround yourself in the misty morning sunrises of Lake Okechobee or to enjoy crisp winter views of jungle-like hardwood hammocks. No matter the time of the year, the Florida Trail provides front-row seats to Florida's natural wonders.

**Ecosystems** in Florida are unlike any other in the nation, ranging from sand dunes to cypress swamps. The trail passes through undisturbed old-growth forests and actively managed lands, including the Everglades

Headwaters Restoration, one of the world's largest restoration projects, along the Kissimmee River. Florida's unique geology is easily viewed from the trail, where karst topography swallows rivers and streams into deep sinkholes and underground cave systems.

**Flora and Fauna** biodiversity reigns supreme in Florida, from pitcher plant savannahs in the Panhandle to bromeliads in Big Cypress National Preserve. Over 900 miles of the Florida Wildlife Corridor follows the Florida Trail, helping the trail to protect and connect habitat for many rare and endangered species, such as the Florida panther, gopher tortoise and even sea turtles. The trail is also renowned for its birding opportunities, home to such unique birds as the crested caracara, Florida scrub jay, Florida grasshopper sparrow and red-cockaded woodpecker.

### CULTURE AND HISTORY

A hike along the Florida Trail can be a journey through time, connecting you with cultural and historic sites throughout the state. Develop a deeper understanding of Florida's shared heritage on the Florida Trail!

**Cultural Resources** provide perspective on the people who once inhabited and continue to reside in Florida. Learn more about Native American, Florida Cracker cattlemen and early United States culture as you follows the steps of Florida's rich history on the Florida Trail.

**Historic Sites** dot the length of the Florida Trail. You can visit one of the nation's largest Civil War reenactment sites at the Olustee Battlefield, explore a historic fort at Fort Pickens in the Gulf Islands National Seashore or trace Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto's footsteps along the Suwannee River.

PC: CARLTON WARD JR.

## Creating & Completing The Trail

James Kern envisioned the Florida Trail while hiking the Appalachian Trail in the early 1960s. Upon returning to Florida, he founded the Florida Trail Association (FTA) to help create a long-distance hiking trail in the Sunshine State. The efforts of this dedicated volunteer organization helped establish the first orange blaze on the Florida Trail, painted in Ocala National Forest in 1966.

The Florida Trail was officially recognized as a National Scenic Trail in 1983, joining a select group of congressionally designated long-distance trails. Today you can follow the orange blazes of the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) for more than 1,300 miles, crossing more than 76 partner land management units within the state.

The USDA Forest Service is the administrator of the Florida Trail, charged with planning routes, overseeing development and establishing partnerships to complete the trail. The National Forests in Florida and FNST Coalition, an advisory group of public and private partners, work collaboratively to close the last remaining gaps and establish permanent protection along the entirety of the Florida Trail.

### TRAIL COMMUNITY

Outside of its nationally significant resources, the Florida Trail is known for its vibrant trail community. Among the most inspiring members of the trail community are its dedicated thru-hikers, who complete the length of the

Florida Trail in one season or over multiple years. Each year an annual kick-off at Big Cypress National Preserve sends a group of adventurous hikers on a 2-3 month journey across the state.

These individuals are supported by a large network of volunteers and avid trail enthusiasts. Whether our volunteers are assisting thru-hikers as "trail angels" or enjoying their own weekend adventure, a friendly smile is never hard to find on the Florida Trail.

Along their journeys these hikers pass through Florida Trail Gateway Communities. These small communities, such as White Springs or Blountstown, support the trail with guided excursions, transportation shuttling and locally owned shops, restaurants and lodging.

### YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

Volunteerism is integral to the mission and operation of the trail, mandated in the founding legislation of the Florida Trail.

From its inception, dedicated volunteers have played an important role in bringing the Florida Trail to life, working tirelessly to make the trail accessible to the public. Volunteers connect with other outdoor enthusiasts through the Florida Trail Association.

They do this by building and maintaining the trail, and by guiding hikes, paddles and other social activities. For more information on how you can get involved, please contact the FTA.



## Enjoying The Trail



PC: JACOB SREEN

You may enjoy the Florida Trail in a variety of ways. For additional information, please check with the FTA, the local land manager or the US Forest Service.

**Trail markings** are characterized by painted 2x6 inch orange blazes. A double blaze indicates a turn, junction or other area that requires hikers to be alert. Blue blazes mark side trails leading to campsites, water supplies and/or special features. Florida Trail logo signs also identify the trail.

**Permitted uses** vary by section. The Florida Trail is a non-motorized trail. Foot travel is allowed on all segments of the trail. Other non-motorized

uses, including bicycling and horseback riding, are permitted on specified segments.

**Fees and Permits** may apply when accessing the Florida Trail, including parking, state park entrance and camping fees.

**Camping** facilities along the Florida Trail vary by trail section. Some land managers may require users to camp at designated sites, obtain permits or pay fees.

**Fishing** is permitted in lakes and streams along the trail with a valid Florida fishing license. Please be aware of state and local fishing ordinances, restrictions and seasons.

**Hunting** near the trail is permitted during specified seasons. The trail remains open during hunting seasons, typically September through January. Land managers may impose some restrictions on camping or access during hunting seasons. Trail users are required to wear hunter orange clothing, vests and caps. Check the local land manager website in advance for exact dates, requirements and restrictions.

**Safety** is a priority on the Florida Trail. Plan your trip ahead of time, bring a map and compass, food, adequate water supply or purification equipment and appropriate clothing and footwear. Leave your

planned itinerary with friends or family in case of emergencies and report any safety hazards to the proper authorities. To check the status of prescribed fires and discover bear safety tips, please check with the local land manager.

**Leave No Trace** is a set of outdoor ethics used to ensure a quality experience for all present and future Florida Trail users. Please use Leave No Trace principles while planning your next adventure. These guidelines include packing out waste, only creating fires in designated fire rings and disposing of any human waste at least 200 feet from any water source. For more information, please visit [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org).



**Trail Courtesy** is urged for all Florida Trail users. Comply with any applicable rules and regulations for the land managing unit. Stay on the trail and respect the privacy of trail neighbors by not trespassing onto private property. There are many sections of the trail which are multi-use; please be courteous by sharing the trail with other users. Report any unsafe or illegal behavior.

**Local Land Managers** work as partners to ensure safe, accessible and memorable recreation experiences along all segments of the Florida Trail. Aspects of the trail differ by land management unit including camping, permits, fees and allowable uses. For more information about a specific trail segment, please visit the land managing agency's website or contact the US Forest Service.

This publication was developed through collaboration of the USDA Forest Service National Forests in Florida and the Florida Trail Association.

The USDA and the FTA are equal opportunity providers and employers.

## National Scenic Trails

### National Scenic Trails

Growing conservation ethic and a desire to access the nation's unparalleled outdoor spaces led Congress to pass the National Trails System Act in 1968. Today the National Trails System consists of 11 national scenic trails, including the Florida Trail. There are also 16 National Historic Trails and over 900 National Recreation Trails. For more information about the National Trails System, please visit [www.nps.gov/nts](http://www.nps.gov/nts).

### Information and Publications

Online maps, itineraries and other resources are available through the US Forest Service and the FTA. For more information on trailheads, trail conditions, closures and to purchase print materials, such as guidebooks and maps, please visit the FTA website at [FloridaTrail.org](http://FloridaTrail.org).



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### CONTACT

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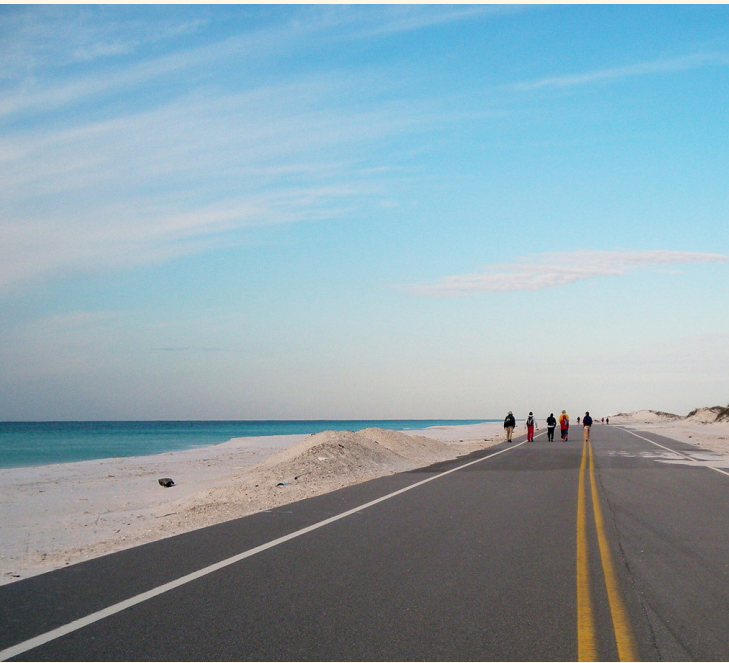
f FloridaTrailAssociation  
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Top Destinations On The Florida National Scenic Trail



Panhandle

Starting just south of the state capitol and reaching the Northern Terminus at Fort Pickens, the Panhandle is home to the world’s 5th largest biodiversity hotspot. Explore salt marshes, beach dunes and restored longleaf pine forests in this remote section of Florida.

- 1 Gulf Islands National Seashore is the Northern Terminus of the Florida Trail and home to the only National Scenic Trail beach hike in the nation. Get immersed in colonial history at Fort Pickens, search for wildlife along Santa Rosa Sound or simply enjoy the white quartz beaches on the Gulf of Mexico.
- 2 Econfina Creek Wildlife Management Area travels along bluffs, deep ravines and first magnitude springs. Cross two of the trail’s largest suspension bridges, while strolling along beautiful, spring-fed Econfina Creek.
- 3 St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is world renowned for the more than 300 species of migratory birds who find habitat here. A trip here is not complete without a visit to the 2nd oldest lighthouse in Florida, or a hike along the abundant salt marshes throughout the refuge. Make sure to bring binoculars!

PC: LINDA BENTON



North Florida

North Florida is a window into the past, passing through 1700’s plantations and civil war battlefields. The region is known primarily for its flatwood forests and hilly terrain along spring-fed, tannin-rich rivers.

- 4 Aucilla River Sinks is one of the more unique geological features on the trail. Follow the Aucilla River as it is swallowed underground and reappears in a series of massive sinkholes.
- 5 Suwannee River is considered an artery of Northern Florida, providing stunning views of sandy beaches, Florida springs and even whitewater rapids. The Florida Trail follows conservation lands along the river for more than 60 miles, intersecting with everything from Florida Folk Culture to secluded swimming holes.
- 6 Rice Creek Conservation Area was originally an 18th century indigo and rice plantation. Now the trail is connected by a series of boardwalks and bridges that highlight a Florida Trail shelter and one of the state’s largest cypress trees.

PC: BART SMITH



Central Florida

Circling conservation areas around the Greater Orlando Metro Region, the Florida Trail splits into its Eastern and Western corridors. Travel through palmetto and pine flatwoods, creekside hammocks, rolling sandhills and floodplain forests.

- 7 The Ocala National Forest is known as the heart of the Florida Trail. From shady wilderness hikes through hydric hammocks or open prairies filled with wildflowers, Ocala is known for its diversity of ecosystems and recreation experiences. Don’t leave without jumping into sparkling Alexander Springs.
- 8 Little Big Econ State Forest provides hikes along the narrow and winding Econlockhatchee River. Trek through historic turpentine distilleries, a railroad bed built by Henry Flagler and jungle-like riverside views in this state forest.
- 9 Withlacoochee State Forest is known for its abundant wildlife and challenging loop hikes, which have helped many outdoor enthusiasts train for the Appalachian Trail. The “crooked river” connecting its three large tracts helped this location earn the title of “10 Coolest Places You’ve Never Been in North America” by the World Wildlife Fund.

PC: BART SMITH



South Florida

Explore the wet wilderness of sawgrass prairies, hardwood hammocks and dwarf cypress swamps of Southern Florida. Start your journey at the Southern Terminus in Big Cypress National Preserve, trek through swamps and follow the winding Kissimmee River through historic cattle country.

- 10 Kissimmee Prairie Preserve is one of South Florida’s premier locations for birding, wildlife viewing and stargazing as a designated Dark Sky Park. Discover this successful restoration project and the vast biodiversity of the state’s largest dry prairie by foot, bike or horse.
- 11 Lake Okeechobee is the 2nd largest freshwater lake in the continental United States, encircled by 113 miles of the Florida Trail. Whether you take a paved levee walk around its eastern shore or explore the more remote marshlands to the west, make sure you’re there in time for an unforgettable sunrise.
- 12 Big Cypress National Preserve is often noted as the most remote wilderness hike on the Florida Trail. Get your feet wet while you trek through cypress groves in search of rare ghost orchids, migratory bird populations or even a glimpse of the endangered Florida panther.

PC: WINNIE LO



As Florida’s official statewide non-motorized trail, the Florida National Scenic Trail is made possible through the efforts of our partners including

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Water Management Districts
- Florida Forest Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service
- U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- And many universities, city and county government partners