

Blue Cypress Conservation Area Paddle Guide

This area of the Blue Cypress Conservation Area was one of the largest marsh areas of its type remaining in a region where an expanse of canals and levees were installed that converted much of these marsh areas to farmland in the early 1900s.

Plants and animals

This marsh contains a mosaic of wetland communities dominated by maidencane, sawgrass, willows and buttonbush, open water systems, or floodplain marsh with scattered tree islands and cypress domes.

This marsh contains foraging and nesting habitat for the endangered snail kite. Wetland-dependent species found here include great blue herons, white ibis, snowy egrets, limpkins and night herons. Other species include wood storks, ospreys, bald eagles, otters and alligators. It is not uncommon to see numerous alligators along the trail. Please do not approach or feed the alligators.

The marsh is part of the Upper St. Johns River Basin Project being implemented by the St. Johns River Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This project will reduce flooding, restore and maintain natural hydrologic cycles and protect water quality, and enhance native habitat for fish and wildlife.

Trail information

This area is part of a wildlife management area (WMA) where hunting occurs. Please check for hunting dates before using this trail. Wear bright fluorescent colors during hunt seasons.

This area is also used by small motor boats (10 hp or less) and occasionally by larger vessels used by District staff. Courtesy and common sense are important for a safe and enjoyable trip.

Paddling tips

- Secure your car and take keys with you.
- Paddle in a group or with a buddy.
- Let someone know your plans — where you are going and when you plan to be back.
- Carry drinking water.
- Monitor weather conditions before and during your trip. Be prepared for sun, excessive heat or sudden thunderstorms.
- Time required to paddle a trail loop varies with weather conditions and individual abilities. Plan for sufficient time to complete your trip.

Safety equipment checklist

- Flotation gear (Florida law requires a Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device for each occupant)
- Extra paddle
- First aid kit, insect repellent and sunscreen
- Bow and stern lines (about 15 feet long is recommended)
- Flashlight and extra batteries

Respect property

- Don't litter or pollute the water with trash or other wastes.
- Pack it in, pack it out. Leave no trace of your travels on the trail, take only memories, and help keep this trail clean.

Volunteers

This paddling trail was created and maintained by students of the Environmental Science Academy of Sebastian River High School through the Legacy Program. The Legacy Program is a partnership between the water management district and the Indian River County School District and is funded by a grant from Florida Learn and Serve.

Purchasing land

When the St. Johns River Water Management District buys land, the benefits are far-reaching for the public. The District's main goal of buying land is to protect the water resources within, adjoining or beneath the land's boundaries.

Beyond meeting that goal, District land purchases preserve part of "natural" Florida for the state's future generations.

In addition, putting land into public ownership protects wildlife and plant habitat, opens the land for recreation and provides a place for environmental education.

Ninety-eight percent of the land the District buys is open to the public for activities that are compatible with conservation. Some of the popular uses include hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, canoeing, camping, hunting, fishing and picnicking. Just 2 percent of the District's lands are closed, due to ongoing construction or conservation projects.

To inform the public of recreational and educational opportunities, the District erects entrance signs and informational kiosks. The District also publishes its *Recreation Guide to District Lands*, a free guide to the public properties, which includes maps and information about each property. The guide is available online at floridaswater.com

Contact information

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