



FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL ST. MARKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SECTION TRAIL AND CAMPING INFORMATION

General Information:

The Florida Trail is one of only eight National Scenic Trails in the United States. This 1,400 mile trail traverses the length of the state from Big Cypress National Preserve to Gulf Islands National Seashore, and is maintained by the nonprofit Florida Trail Association, incorporated in 1964 (<http://www.florida-trail.org>).

Established in 1931, St. Marks NWR is one of the oldest, largest, and most diverse National Wildlife Refuges in the Southeast. St. Marks encompasses over 69,000 acres of pine forests, salt marsh, forested and freshwater wetlands and is managed to protect and enhance those habitats for endangered species, waterfowl and native wildlife. Hikers will see evidence of forest and marsh management along this section of the Trail. Prescribed burns throughout the year may cause Trail segments to be closed temporarily. All plants and wildlife are protected by Federal law.

Location:

This section of the Trail is mostly located in the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, 20 miles south of Tallahassee, adjoining the Apalachicola National Forest to the west and Aucilla Wildlife Management Area to the east. The west terminus is on US 319, 1.1 miles west of Medart, with parking available. The east terminus is on US 98, 1.25 miles west of the Aucilla River bridge, at the entrance to the Aucilla Wildlife Management Area Small Game Hunt area (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission). There is no formal parking at the terminus. It may be possible to arrange permission to leave a car at the public boat ramp in the community of Nuttall Rise, just north of US 98 at the bridge.

Hiking Considerations:

This segment of the Trail provides a primitive hiking experience through Gulf coastal pine flatwoods, hardwood hammocks and a saltmarsh wilderness. The terrain is flat and dry over most of the Trail except during periods of heavy rain. Approximately 15 miles of the Trail follow Refuge roads which are closed to vehicles and offer easy hiking. Several blue-blazed spur and loop trails extend off the main trail. To cross the St. Marks River at the town of St. Marks, hikers must get boat passage (ask locally). From the town of St. Marks to US 98, the Trail follows the old Tallahassee-St. Marks railroad corridor (now a paved bike trail).

Parking:

At the west terminus, a small parking area for 6-8 cars is provided on the south side of US 319 at Carraway Cutoff Road. Other small parking areas are available at the following trail junctions: Lighthouse Road (SR 59); across from the Refuge Visitor Center; Wakulla Beach Road; and the west side of Purifying Creek Road.

Water:

Potable water is available at the Refuge Visitor Center (follow blue blazes on Trail), TNT canoe rental on the east side of the Wakulla River Bridge, the town of St. Marks, and the town of Spring Creek.

Conveniences:

Supplies - St. Marks, Spring Creek, Medart, Newport, Panacea

Mail - St. Marks, 32355 Panacea, 32346

Motels - Wakulla Springs State Park, St. Marks, Spring Creek, Panacea

Public Campgrounds - Ochlockonee State Park, Newport Campground (Wakulla County)

Emergency - Wakulla County Sheriff:850-926-8080

Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission: 888-404-3922

Refuge Headquarters: 850-925-6121 – day 850-251-8523 - night

Refuge Visitor Center Hours: 8 am - 4:00 pm, Monday - Friday; 10 am - 5 pm, Saturday and Sunday.

Precautions:

All Trail users must wear 500 square inches of safety orange while on the Trail during Refuge big game gun hunts. Seasonal hunt dates available at the Refuge Office or posted at trailheads. Big game hunts typically occur on selected dates from mid-November until mid January. There is a spring turkey hunt each April.

Weather – Comfortable hiking weather may occur during any month of the year, but typically, the spring and fall months offer moderate temperatures and relatively low humidity. Summer months are hot and humid with average daytime high temperatures in the upper 80's to low 90's. Nights are seldom below 70F. Winter daytime highs usually range between 45-75F. Winter nights can be near or below freezing. The rainy season is primarily June through September, with another rainy period from January through March. Average rainfall is 55 inches per year. Lightning is common, especially during afternoon summer thunderstorms. Avoid standing in an open area or under a lone tree during a lightning storm.

Insects - Trail users should be prepared for ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, yellow flies, and sand gnats. Visitors should be aware of the potential presence of Lyme's Disease carried by ticks, and should wear light-colored clothing with overlapping layers and use a repellent with 30% or higher concentration of DEET. Wash clothes promptly after leaving the woods and check yourself thoroughly for ticks each day.

Camping Fees:

A non refundable fee of \$1.00/person/night is charged. The following information must be submitted no later than 15 days prior to the start of the trip; otherwise the reservation may be cancelled:

1. Dates campsites needed.
2. Expected number in party (maximum 20 people, 10 tents).
3. Name, address, and phone number of group leader, tag number of car(s) left at trailhead(s).
4. Names and addresses of all participants.
5. Check or money order made out to "U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service" totaling \$1.00/person/night.

Camping and Trail Regulations:

Camping along the 49.5-mile long segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail is for through hikers only. Each of the seven campsites will be limited to no more than 20 people per night and reservations must be made in advance through the Refuge office. Cars left at the west terminus trailhead near Medart at Carraway Cutoff Road must display permit inside windshield.

Campsites in the Wakulla and Panacea Units (#'s 1-3) will be closed during big game hunts in those respective areas.

Refuge staff will provide hunt dates in July for each upcoming hunt season.

Reservations - Write or phone:

St. Marks NWR
P. O. Box 68
St. Marks, FL 32355
(850) 925-6121

Office hours: Monday - Friday 8:00 am - 4:00 pm

Saturday & Sunday 10:00 am - 5:00 pm

1. Overnight camping at designated sites for through hikers only.
2. Campers should remain at campsite from sunset to sunrise.
3. Campers may camp only one night at each campsite.
4. If camping or hiking plans change, notify the refuge office.
5. No open fires. Camp stoves recommended.
6. Human waste and toilet paper should be buried in shallow holes at least 200 feet away from campsite, trail, and water sources.
7. Cars left at trailhead must display permit inside windshield.
8. All Trail and Refuge regulations apply.
9. Violation of permit or regulations will result in a fine and/or revocation of permit and removal of hiker from Refuge.
10. Only foot and bicycle traffic permitted on the Trail.
11. Horses prohibited on the Trail.
12. Camping by permit only.

13. Dogs must be kept on a leash.
14. No firearms permitted.
15. No trees or limbs can be cut.
16. Trash must be packed out.
17. No swimming permitted.
18. 500 square inches of safety orange must be worn during Refuge big game gun hunts.
19. Feeding or disturbing wildlife prohibited.
20. Collecting plants or artifacts prohibited.
21. Low impact trail techniques should be practiced.
22. Failure to follow trail regulations could affect future trail and campsite use.

Low Impact Trail Techniques:

1. Know your route and the area.
2. Take adequate water and food.
3. Bring clothing and equipment to keep you dry, warm and comfortable.
4. Wear footwear appropriate for safety, comfort, and the terrain.
5. Select tent site that has already been used to eliminate further expansion of the camp.
6. If site is a mess, clean it up and report it to the Refuge office.
7. No digging or trenching in camp.
8. Carry out all food scraps and packaging.
9. Pick up litter as you encounter it.
10. Use shallow hole for human waste.
11. When using soap, toothpaste, etc., wash at least 100 feet away from water sources.
12. Filter or purify open water before drinking.

As the Refuge encompasses a fragile environment and as through hikers along the Florida National Scenic Trail are the only ones permitted to camp in the Refuge, it is hoped these hikers will respect the land and wildlife and leave it as they would like to find it.

Trail Descriptions:

The Trail through the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge traverses a greater variety of forest types and wildlife zones than anywhere else along the Trail in north Florida. Besides its rich forests of longleaf pine and turkey oak, the refuge shelters old growth mesic and hydric hardwood forests, cypress and gum swamps, beech-magnolia groves, cabbage palm-live oak hammocks, and a seemingly endless expanse of salt marshes along the coastal fringe.

For about seven miles in the St. Marks Unit the Trail follows a series of dikes built to impound freshwater for the thousands of waterfowl which winter here. Southern bald eagles, ospreys, otters, alligators, turkeys, fox squirrels, raccoons, and white-tailed deer can be seen. More than 300 species of birds have been counted at the Refuge and 98 of these have nested here.

Besides its rich natural history, the area abounds in the human record. Indian mounds dating back more than 2,000 years are scattered along the coastline and up the Aucilla River. Fort San Marcos de Apalachee in the town of St. Marks was established by the Spanish in 1679 and has been occupied by pirates, British, Confederate, and Federal forces since. The area has a State Park and Museum and is well worth a side hike. Remnants of Confederate salt evaporation ponds can be found at several points in the salt marshes. Look for small isolated mounds in the salt marshes covered with red cedar and cabbage palms; on the mounds find evidence of bricks used to construct the kilns and perhaps fragments of iron from the kettles used to evaporate the water. Several segments of the Trail follow abandoned railroad beds, or "tram roads," built shortly after the turn of the century for the purpose of logging the virgin cypress and pine forests still found along the Florida gulf coast. The Trail, upon entering the Refuge on the east, follows a spur and then the main line of the Aucilla Tram Road; in most places, however, these old railroad beds have been converted into refuge roads and are no longer distinguishable. The Trail in the St. Marks Refuge also passes through two federally designated wilderness areas: along the west side of the Aucilla River and continuing along the east side of the St. Marks River where the Trail follows the old road bed north from Port Leon. In 1936 the newly created St. Marks Refuge selected this site for its first headquarters. The fire tower still stands south of this spot. Port Leon was once connected to Tallahassee by the first chartered and second built railroad in Florida's history. The railroad segment between Port Leon and the town of St. Marks was also abandoned after the 1848 hurricane. The remaining twenty mile segment was in use until abandoned in 1984. Sixteen miles were then purchased by the State of Florida. This portion is the state's first hiker-biker recreation trail. The Trail follows this route for 1.6 miles to US 98.

Trail Data - St. Marks NWR West

Mileage E to W		Mileage W to E
43.4	① West Terminus on U.S. 319. Look for FNST sign. Parking available off graded road at Trailhead. Follow highway 0.3 mile west of Apalachicola National Forest Trail.	0.0
42.2	② Cross US 98. Grocery, laundry to north.	1.2
40.6	Trail joins/leaves sand road (Purify Bay Rd.).	2.8
40.3	③ Trail crosses Purify Bay Rd. Parking off woods road to west. Trail register.	3.1
38.9	④ Trail reaches Marsh Point. Blue-blazed trail to view of salt marshes. Marsh Point campsite (#1)	4.5
37.5	Cross grass road. Pass blue-blazed two-mile side trail to FNST and Purify Bay Rd.	5.9
37.1	Cross Spring Creek.	6.3
35.2	⑤ Trail junction with CR 365. Refuge boundary. Seafood restaurant, motel and grocery 1.3 miles south at village of Spring Creek. Follow paved road north for 1.7 miles.	8.2
33.5	⑥ Cross Refuge boundary gate. Trail register. Trail follows woods road for 0.9 mile. Trail turns at red quonset hut.	9.9
31.6	⑦ Wakulla Field campsite (#2) is in the SE corner of old field.	11.8
31.1	Pass blue-blazed path to Blue Springs.	12.3
30.1	Trail-grass road junction. Pass blue three-mile loop to FNST and CR 365. Follow boundary road for 1.7 mile.	13.3
28.4	⑧ Cross graded sand road (Wakulla Beach Rd.) at gate. Parking available. Trailhead. Trail continues on boundary road.	15.0

Description of western segment:

The western segment takes the hiker through hardwood swamps, shady palm hammocks, up to longleaf pines in the higher sandhills. It passes by crystalline Blue Springs, found on a loop trail. Terrain is level and easy walking. Parts of trail are wet throughout the year.

Trail Data - St. Marks NWR Central

Mileage E to W		Mileage W to E
28.4	① Cross graded sand road (Wakulla Beach Rd.) at gate. Parking available. Trailhead. Trail continues on boundary road.	15.0
26.2	② River Hammock campsite (#3).	17.2
25.3	Pass sawdust pile. Cross Refuge boundary fence. Pass blue-blazed loop (2 miles) to FNST and Wakulla Beach Rd. Follow woods road through private land.	18.1
24.2	③ Trail junction. US 98 and woods road. Double blaze on pole. Cross cable gate.	19.2
23.9	Cross Wakulla River on US 98. Water at canoe rental. Follow US 98 for 2.3 miles.	19.5
21.6	④ Junction with US 98 and Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail. FNST follows paved trail south for	21.8

		1.7 miles to town of St. Marks. Food, lodging, supplies available.	
19.9	⑤	Trail crosses St. Marks River. Obtain boat ride for safe crossing. South side of St. Marks River is St. Marks Wilderness Area. Trail follows abandoned railroad bed for 1.6 miles.	23.5
18.3		Cross Lake Leon bridge.	25.1
18.2		Pass blue-blazed trail leading west to St. Marks River.	25.2
18.0	⑥	Trail crosses Refuge and St. Marks Wilderness Area boundary. Follows logging road across private land for 2.4 miles.	25.4
15.6		Trail crosses refuge boundary gate.	27.8
15.5	⑦	Trail turns corner at intersection of refuge roads. Pass blue-blazed trail to East River campsite (#4) and 0.8 miles to Visitor Center. Water.	27.9
		Follow East River Pool dike-road for 1.6 miles.	
13.9	⑧	Cross gate at Lighthouse Rd. (CR-59) -dike junction. Lighthouse south 3.6 miles. Follow paved road north for 0.4 miles.	29.5

Description for Central segment:

The central segment runs from Wakulla Beach Rd. to Lighthouse Rd. It meanders through hardwood hammocks, pine flatwoods, and along the historic old railroad bed near the abandoned town of Port Leon. Terrain is level. Be prepared to find a way to cross the St. Marks River.

Trail Data - St. Marks NWR East

Mileage E to W			Mileage W to E
13.5	①	Cross gate at Lighthouse Rd. (CR-59)-dike junction. Follow dike-road for 4.9 miles.	29.9
10.3	②	Ring Dike campsite (#5).	33.1
8.6	③	Trail-grass road junction. West end of swamp hammock trail. Blue-blazed alternate dry route on road. Trail crosses double pole bridge.	34.8
5.6		Trail-grass road junction. East end of swamp hammock trail. Follow grass road for 1.7 miles.	37.8
3.9	④	Cross Pinhook River on wooden auto bridge. Pinhook River campsite (#6) on west side of bridge. Follow grass road for two miles.	39.5
1.9		Trail at grass road terminus. St. Marks Wilderness boundary. Trail follows abandoned logging railroad for 1.9 miles.	41.5
1.3		Trail turns sharply north.	42.1
0.7		Trail crosses refuge boundary. Keep west on old road bed. No blazes between terminus and refuge boundary.	42.7
0.1		Cross under power lines.	43.3
0.0	⑤	East terminus at US 98. Aucilla River 0.75 miles to east. Look for double blaze on south side of road surface.	43.4

Description of eastern segment: The eastern segment passes by impoundments used by wintering waterfowl and nesting bald eagles, as well as salt marsh vistas and pine flatwoods. Terrain is level and dry, except for the swamp hammock trail section.