



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

ST. MARKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

St. Marks NWR
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St. Marks, FL 32355
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FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL ST. MARKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SECTION TRAIL AND CAMPING INFORMATION

General Information:

The Florida Trail is one of only eleven National Scenic Trails in the United States. This 1,500 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.floridatrail.org>).

As a National Wildlife Refuge, St. Marks is managed to protect and enhance habitat 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. As the Refuge encompasses a fragile environment, it is hoped that all trail users will respect the land and wildlife and leave it as they would like to find it. Detailed trail and hiking maps are available from the Florida Trail Association, 1-877-HIKE-FLA; www.floridatrail.org; fta@floridatrail.org; or 1022 NW 2nd Street, Gainesville, FL 32601.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 82,000+ acres of land along the Gulf of Mexico and is one of the oldest refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Within the refuge is a wide diversity of sensitive habitats that provide food, cover, and protection for wildlife. Natural salt marshes, tidal flats, and freshwater impoundments attract thousands of waterfowl and other water birds. Hardwood swamps are home to night herons, black bears, and raccoons. Pinewoods offer food and cover for turkey, deer, owls and woodpeckers. Alligators bask year 'round in the open marshes and swamps.

The Refuge has long been a major destination for birdwatchers and wildlife observers; but as anyone who has trekked the Refuge's approximately 56-mile portion of the Florida National Scenic Trail or the other Refuge trails will tell you, there are hidden treasures here for everyone!

Location: This section of the Trail is mostly located in the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, 20 miles south of Tallahassee. The west terminus is Apalachicola National Forest where the trail crosses US 319, 1.3 miles west of Medart. The east terminus is on US 98, 1.25 miles west of the US 98 Aucilla River bridge, at the entrance to the Aucilla Wildlife Management Area Small Game Hunt area (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission).

Type of Hiking:

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 24 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 paved Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad Trail. The Trail follows the northern right-of-way of US 98 west to Wakulla River Bridge before crossing US 98 and heading south into the Refuge 0.5 mile west of the bridge. The best trail access points for day hikes are Carraway Cutoff parking area, US 98, Purifying Creek Road, SR 365 (two locations), Wakulla Tract parking area and Lighthouse Road (SR 59).

Parking: Overnight vehicle parking is prohibited on the Refuge. Day hikers are encouraged to arrange for drop-off and pick-up or plan an out and back hike from designated trail head/parking lots. Parking on public road shoulders is highly discouraged.

At the west terminus, a small parking area for 6-8 cars is provided 0.1 mile south of US 319 on Carraway Cutoff Road which is 1.1 miles west of the US 98. 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. There is no formal parking at the eastern terminus.

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, Medart, Panacea

Public Campgrounds - Ochlockonee State Park, Newport Campground

Emergency - Wakulla County Sheriff: 850-926-0800

Fish and Wildlife Commission: 888-404-3922

Refuge Headquarters: 850-925-6121

Precautions:

All Trail users must wear 500 square inches of safety orange while on the Trail during Refuge big game gun hunts. Some campsites are closed during refuge hunts – contact Refuge Office for details. Hunt dates available at the Refuge Office or posted at trailheads.

Weather – The most popular time to hike the trail is from October through April. The summer months of May, June, July, August, and September are hot and humid with average daytime high temperatures in the upper 80's to low 90's. Summer 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. The 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 Disease carried by ticks. Bug repellents with 30% or higher concentration of DEET are effective for ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, sand gnats and flies during the warm months. It is recommended that hikers wear

overlapping layers of light-colored clothing to help you identify and remove ticks. Wash clothes promptly after leaving the woods and check your body for ticks that might be on you.

Camping Regulations

General – Only backpackers hiking all the way through the Refuge on this approximately 56-mile long segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail may camp in the Refuge, and as such only through hikers along the Florida National Scenic Trail are permitted to camp in the Refuge. Campsites in

Wakulla and Panacea Units will be closed during big game hunts in those respective areas with the exception of the Porter Tract and Wakulla Tract campsites in the Wakulla Unit. Hunt dates for the upcoming hunt season are established each July. Each of the eight campsites is limited to no more than 10 people per night and reservations must be made through the Refuge office.

Permits - Campsites along the Trail must be reserved in advance by telephone (850-925-6121), email (lori_nicholson@fws.gov), mail or in person to: St. Marks NWR, P. O. Box 68, St. Marks, FL 32355

Refuge Visitor Center and Headquarters is located on SR 59 (Lighthouse Road). Office Hours are:

Monday to Friday from 8 am to- 4:00 pm, and
Saturday and Sunday from 10 am - 5 pm.

The following information (see permit below) must be submitted no later than 15 days prior to the start of the trip, otherwise the reservation will be cancelled:

1. Dates campsites needed.
2. Expected number in party (maximum 10 people, 5 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. Name and phone number of an emergency contact.

Trail Regulations:

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. Stoves or sterno 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 the west terminus trailhead on Carraway Cutoff near Medart must display permit inside the 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 trees or limbs can be cut.
15. Trash must be packed out.
16. No swimming permitted.
17. 500 square inches of safety orange must be worn during Refuge big game gun hunts.
18. Feeding or disturbing wildlife prohibited.
19. Collecting plants or artifacts prohibited.
20. Low impact trail techniques should be practiced.
21. Failure to follow trail regulations could affect future trail and campsite use.

Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics:

To reduce the damage caused by using the Trail, hikers are encouraged to follow Leave No Trace principles and practices which extend common courtesy and hospitality to other Refuge visitors and to the natural world. For more information on Leave No Trace, visit www.LNT.org or call 1-800-332.4100. The Leave No Trace Principles are:

1. Plan ahead and prepare.
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly.
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfire impacts.
6. Respect wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.

Trail Description:

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. At the Wakulla River and US 98, there is a canoe rental. Several days spent paddling these rivers and exploring the salt marshes is well worth the layover time.

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 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. 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 and became the first rail-trail developed by the State. The Trail follows this route for 1.6 miles to US 98.

For maps and/or databook, visit <https://floridatrail.org/maps-and-databook/>

Complete the following permit and bring to the Visitor Center, mail to St. Marks NWR, FTA Permit, PO Box 68, St. Marks FL 32355, or email to lori_nicholson@fws.gov.



U.S. Dept. of Interior Fish & Wildlife Service—St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL OVERNIGHT USE PERMIT
VISITOR MUST BE THRU-HIKING ENTIRE SMNWR SEGMENT TO CAMP
AND HAVE A COPY OF PERMIT ON THEM DURING HIKE
Please complete entire permit and e-mail to Lelsie_Peters@fws.gov
or fax to 850/925-6930



Name: _____

Location of Entry (check one) ☐ Medart ☐ Aucilla

Address: _____

Location of Exit (check one) ☐ Medart ☐ Aucilla

Date/Campsite Name

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

1. _____

Vehicle tag # _____ State: _____ No. in group: _____

2. _____

Start Date (mo./day/year) _____

3. _____

Finish Date (mo./day/year) _____

4. _____

Emergency Contact/phone no: _____

5. _____

6. _____

Hiker's cell phone: _____

Hiker's e-mail: _____

Hiker's Signature/Date: _____

Refuge Contact—Daytime: 850/925-6121

Emergency Contact: 911 or 850/251-8523 Wakulla Co. Sheriff 850/926-0800

After Hours for urgent issues: 850/251-8525 or 850/210-6405

Mar. 12, 2024