

Touring down the Suwannee River

Paddling. Hiking. Camping. Nature watching. The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail offers 173 miles of "wild river" for exploration. From its source in Georgia, the Suwannee meanders through eight counties in north central Florida on its way to the Gulf of Mexico.

173 miles of Suwannee River Wilderness Trail

Highlights

10-year conservancy efforts to protect and support the river have brought together state parks and land owned by the Water Management District and private sector to make up the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail, the only federally designated "unspoiled" waterway in the state.

The river travels **206** miles through Florida



The Suwannee River



Paddlers prepare to launch on a trip

30 miles along the river shores have been acquired for conservation and ecotourism recreation.

70 natural springs
12 state parks

Be sure to try:

- Big bird watching.
- Hiking around Big Shoals area – several trails offer access to rich forestry and a rare waterfall in Florida on the Columbia County side.
- Visiting the Stephen Foster Park, Carillon Towers, and area historic buildings in White Springs.
- Swimming at the Spirit of the Suwannee, where unusual water flow features have created a white sandy beach.
- Spring-hopping in the central region around Mayo.
- Paddling through the scenic southern marshes and watching for alligators.

7 river camps offer raised screened wood platforms and electrical power for campers. Multiple "hubs" offer cabins and lodgings. The network ensures camping and rest areas every 10 miles.



Hiking the trails



Camping platforms

The Suwannee watershed has the highest density of springs in the world:
253

The area is considered the underwater "Cave Diving Capital of the World."

you are here



8 Florida counties: Hamilton, Columbia, Suwannee, Madison, Lafayette, Gilchrist, Dixie, Levy

72° year-round water temperature of the area springs makes the river a natural habitat for the endangered Florida manatee.



Manatee in a Florida spring

Only **3** class-3 rapids in the state of Florida

Paddling

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is a system of public and private recreation facilities for paddling the Suwannee River from White Springs to the town of Suwannee on the Gulf coast. High season is October through April, when it is not as hot and there are fewer mosquitoes.

4 miles of white water rafting at Big Shoals and Little Shoals near White Springs

Along the way

Visitors can see many species unique to Florida

Trees: Cypress, maple, planer elm, buttonbush, oak, swamp privet

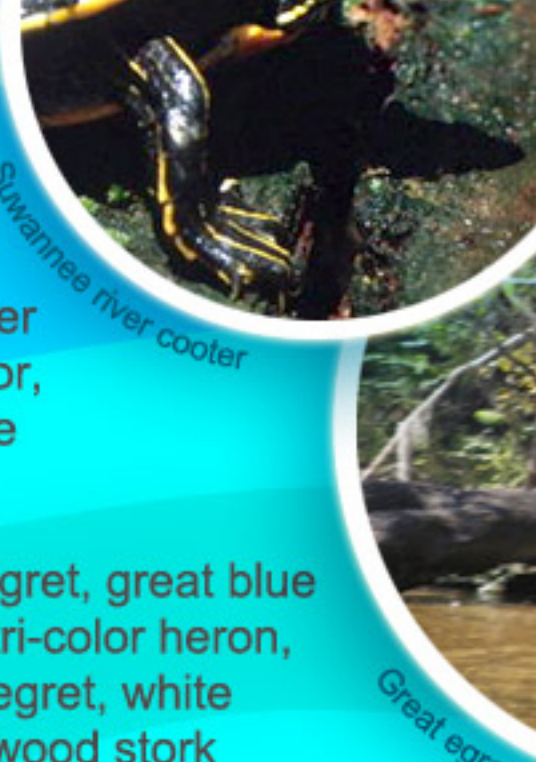
3 rivers is how some describe the Suwannee because of the changes in scenery.

The Upper river (White Springs to Mayo) has steep banks and rougher waters. Most of the 70 springs occupy the Middle river (Mayo to Branford). The Lower river (Branford to the Gulf of Mexico) is broader and interrupted by scenic marshes.

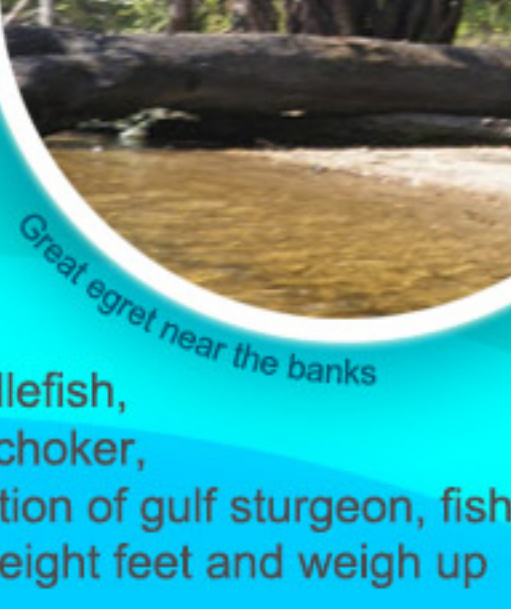
Reptiles: Suwannee river cooter, alligator, snapping turtle

Birds: Great egret, great blue heron, tri-color heron, snowy egret, white ibises, wood stork

Fish: Atlantic needlefish, striped mullet, hogchoker, and a large population of gulf sturgeon, fish which can grow to eight feet and weigh up to 200 pounds.



Suwannee river cootier



Great egret near the banks

Temperatures **68-94°** average highs
41-71° average lows

Know-how



1 Wear a personal flotation device. It is Florida law.

2 Though there are many places to stop this is a rustic area. Bring plenty of water and food in safe containers.

3 Wear sunscreen and bug repellent.

Paddlers in the early mornin fog.

Area history

1500s Early European settlers encountered the Timucua indians navigating these waters.

1605-1700s Establishment of the Spanish-Indian mission of San Juan de Guacara, on the land route connecting the forts at Pensacola and St. Augustine. Some believe the river's name was derived from the name of the mission.

1851 Seminole Indians came down the river from Georgia.

1800s The Suwannee river area became popular for healing retreats that offered access to the natural sulphur springs.

1851 Popular composer Stephen Foster was looking for a river's name for a new tune. Though he'd never visited Florida, he was told about the Suwannee and immortalized the river in a melody that would eventually become the state song — "Old folks at home."

1860s Captain James Tucker and his steamboat, the Madson, became fixtures on the Suwannee. He was famous for turing nickels onto shore when they made port to draw crowds and customers to the floating country store. The Madson was scuttled during the Civil War but can be seen by divers at low tide at the bottom of Troy Springs.

1900s 1923: Last riverboat on the Suwannee.
1950: Opening of the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park and the Florida Folk Festival.
1980: Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park opened, hosts many annual folk and country music events.

today must see and do

The area hosts several yearly festivals and cultural events:

The Suwannee River Jam is in May with about **20,000** per day in attendance.

Wannee in April with about **30,000** per day in attendance.

3-day annual Florida Folk Festival is on Memorial Day weekend.

About **35** music events are hosted at the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park every year.

2 annual events on the Suwannee offered by PaddleFlorida.org:



Performers and dancers at the Florida Folk Festival

5-day fall paddle **2**-day spring festival

plan your visit

Tip: Before you head out to the Suwannee, be sure to check on river depths and conditions with the Nature and Heritage Center, Florida State Parks or Suwannee River Water Management District. Water levels vary. Waterfalls sometimes run dry and the white water rapids may not be running. Alternately, waters might be high and too dangerous for recreational safety.

