

NOTICE TO HIKERS PROCEDURE:

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Title of Notice: Eglin Permits: Overview and Updates

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Region (Panhandle, North, Central, South): Panhandle

FTA Map No. 2, 3, 4

Perm. Change? Yes

Effective Date: Oct. 1

Ending Date: Till further notice

Description/Map:

ACCESSING THE FLORIDA TRAIL IN EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE:

The Eglin Reservation is divided into a series of administrative units known as Tactical Training Areas (TTAs); while some sensitive areas are perpetually off-limits, many are available for use by hikers, hunters, and other recreational users. An overview of the various units and permitted uses of the base can be found in the Eglin Outdoor Recreation, Hunting and Freshwater Fishing Regulations booklet available at <https://eglin.isportsman.net/Regs.aspx>.

Additionally, even TTAs open to recreational use are occasionally closed due to military training and testing; this is done for the safety of recreational users. These closures are published on the Public Access Map (PAM), an online chart showing the current statuses of each TTA. Access is further regulated via a permitting system.

Hikers and trail maintainers wanting to access the Florida Trail in Eglin must: 1.) purchase an annual recreation permit; 2.) consult the Public Access Map daily before entry. A separate camping permit is also required for overnight use of any designated Eglin campsites. Permits can be purchased on the Jackson Guard website at <https://eglin.isportsman.net>. Applicants must create an account, watch a safety video about unexploded ordinance, and are then able to purchase general recreation permits for \$20 and camping permits for \$5. Hikes must have their permits and a photo ID with them while on the reservation. There is a separate permitting system in place for thru-hikers; details are described below.

After obtaining a permit, hikers must also consult the Public Access Map before entering Eglin. Jackson Guard updates the PAM every afternoon and forecasts closures for the upcoming 3 days; this information can be accessed via the Jackson Guard website at <https://eglin.isportsman.net>, as well as by phone at (850) 882-0007. These forecasts are generally reliable, however, unscheduled closures can occur; for this reason hikers are required to check the PAM every day and must follow the instructions of any posted signs or military personnel encountered while on the trail. Please keep in mind that the military training missions always take priority over recreational use of Eglin Reservation, and hiker access is a privilege that can be revoked.

A great resource available for trail users traveling along the Florida Trail within Eglin is the Avenza App. This smartphone app, available for both iPhone and Android devices, allows users to access a GPS-enabled map that indicates your current location within the reservation. This lets you easily identify your location relative to the various TTAs. To install the app, follow the link and instructions located at <http://jacksonguard.com/>.

THRU-HIKER PERMITS:

Thru-hikers follow the same process outlined above, only they select the free Florida Trail Thru-Hiker Permit from the list of available permits listed on the <https://eglin.isportsman.net> website. During checkout, hikers must provide their anticipated start date for crossing Eglin; this date must be within the next 60 days. The permit lasts for 7 days, and users can order an additional permit if more time is needed during the base traverse. Hikers must be able to produce a physical or digital copy of their permit and a photo ID when request by base law enforcement or Jackson Guard personnel.

Finally, keep in mind that thru-hikers are still required to check the PAM daily; the easiest way to do this as a thru-hiker is to contact Jackson Guard at (850) 882-0007. For this reason a cell phone and battery charger is strongly recommended for thru-hikers planning to travel across Eglin. It is also important to consider the implications of an unexpected closure influencing your trip; plan for alternatives or delays, and be aware of the closest trailheads in case a bailout is necessary.