

The Florida Trail aka Florida National Scenic Trail

The Florida Trail Association (FTA) was founded in 1964 and the first section of the Florida Trail (FT) was opened to the public in 1966 in the Ocala National Forest. In 1983 the FT was officially designated the Florida National Scenic Trail. At that time a partnership was established which to this day includes landowners and managers, the FTA, and the USDA Forest Service. In addition to the "thru" trail, FTA members actively maintain trails on public lands throughout the state. Those trails form the Florida Trail System.

Since its inception, the core mission of the FTA has been to build and maintain a long-distance hiking trail the length of Florida, the FT. You are welcome to join with us by providing both financial and volunteer support. Without volunteers like you the FT would not exist.

FTA Hiker Publications

This data book was developed to supplement, not replace, the maps published by the FTA. It includes mileage tables and information hikers will find useful while traversing the FT. FTA tries to make each edition as accurate as possible, but the trail and trail conditions can and do change. This book should only serve as a guide to help with your planning and hiking. Basic hiker amenities found along the trail are listed here, but hikers looking for detailed descriptions of town services should consult the [The Florida Trail Guide](#) by Sandra Friend and John Keatley.

The Data Book

The trail and mileage charts in this data book are divided into geographical regions based on the various routes a hiker may follow to thru-hike the trail (see the following table). Cumulative mileages are shown for each region. It should be noted that at the major decision points, hikers are not required to hike both routes to qualify as an FT End-to-End. Thus, hikers may elect to hike either the east or west route around Lake Okeechobee, or the East or West Corridor from Three Lakes to the Ocala National Forest. For the purposes of thru-hiking, the Ocean to Lake Hiking Trail (Region 9) is considered an independent trail. The trail north through Blackwater River State Forest (Region 8N) to Alabama is the only officially designated FT side trail. In **2020-2021** the minimum thru-hike (using the shorter alternatives at each decision point) would be 1098.5 trail miles. The maximum thru-hike would be 1146.9 trail miles. Total mileage covered by this data book is 1512.9 miles.

Region 1	South Florida	94.2 miles
Region 2E	Okeechobee East	57.4 miles
Region 2W	Okeechobee West	55.5 miles
Region 3	Kissimmee River	112.5 miles
Region 4E	Eastern Corridor	203.2 miles
Region 4W	Western Corridor	240.0 miles
Region 5	North Florida	219.8 miles
Region 6	Eastern Panhandle	192.0 miles
Region 7	Western Panhandle	175.4 miles
Region 8S	Western Gate	55.6 miles
Region 8N	Blackwater River	45.9 miles
Region 9	Ocean to Lake	61.4 miles

The trail data is listed south-to-north and north-to-south so that the same page can be used for hiking in either direction. "South-to-North" is always as if you were hiking from Big Cypress toward Gulf Islands, "North-to-South" is always as if you were hiking from Gulf Islands to Big Cypress. The distance shown by each entry is the trail mileage from that point to the next point farther north. Major waypoints are shown on the maps using a map number (or abbreviated name) and sequence number (e.g., 24-5) and listed adjacent to the corresponding entry in the Data Book.

Rules and Regulations

Until public lands are secured to protect the FT corridor, some portions of the Trail will cross private property. While the USDA Forest Service and the FTA always negotiate with the private property owner with the intent of having the FT open to the general public, it is the landowner's privilege to determine whether the property is open to all or open only to FTA members.

Hikers are responsible for knowing whose property they are on (not always easy to determine on the ground) and for abiding by the access and camping rules established by the landowner or manager. The maps indicate the land management boundaries and the major rules governing hiking and camping. When in doubt, hikers should contact the managers whose phone numbers appear on the maps.

Long-distance hikers are NOT exempt from many fees and camping permits on public lands. A few permits or advance permission is required. A list of all permits long distance hikers are subject to can be obtained by contacting the FTA office and asking for the "Long Distance Hikers Info Packet".

Blazing Conventions

The centerline of the trail on the maps is, as closely as possible, colored to indicate the blazing or signage colors. The route of the Florida Trail is marked by 2" x 6" orange-painted blazes on trees or wooden posts at approximately adult eye level. The thru or main route of the Florida Trail is marked with orange blazes, while spur trails to campsites, trailheads, water sources, scenic views, etc. are marked with blue blazes. Bypass routes and other intersecting trails may be blazed blue or white or (rarely) yellow. The FT is also intersected by trails not built or maintained by FTA volunteers. These trails may be blazed or marked in a variety of colors and methods.

A double blaze means "Heads Up!" — something is about to happen. Double offset blazes are used when the trail makes an abrupt change in direction (more than a gentle curve) with the top blaze offset in the direction of the turn. After a double blaze, watch for the next blaze. If

you go more than ten steps without seeing a blaze, you may have left the trail. Stop and retrace your steps. If blazes have been obliterated or have faded, please make a note of the location and report the problem to the FTA office.

Water Sources

Water sources indicated in this book are those normally available during the FT prime hiking season of October through April. Note that local weather conditions may mean that some sources dry up and that other sources may become available. The potable water sources are generally reliable and available 24 hours a day unless otherwise noted. For potable water sources located at businesses or private homes, please ask permission.

Hunting Seasons

Florida offers more days of hunting than almost any other state, with only a couple of months in the summer totally hunt free. It is important for hikers to know the hunt dates for each particular section of trail, for while the trail is open to hiking year-round, camping may be illegal or limited to specific sites. The hunt seasons of particular concern to hikers occur in the fall and winter and during spring turkey season.

The state is divided into 4 hunt zones with the hunting season starting (and ending) earlier in the south and later in the north. Since many land managers do not allow camping during hunting season, FTA **recommends** thru-hikers start in the south in early January and hike north. Doing so means hikers can avoid almost all of the hunting restrictions. Hikers should wear a safety orange vest and it is recommended that backpackers also use a safety orange pack cover.

Major Hunt Seasons, 2020-2021:

	Deer and Fall Turkey	Spring Turkey
South Zone:	Aug 1 - Jan 3	Feb 27 - Apr 11
Central West Zone:	Oct 17 - Feb 21	Mar 13 - Apr 25
Central Zone:	Sep 19 - Jan 24	Mar 13 - Apr 25
Northwest Zone:	Oct 24 - Feb 28	Mar 13 - Apr 25

In addition to the basic hunt schedule, some land managers offer special opportunity hunts. Hunters pay a premium price for special opportunity permits. These hunts are generally of short duration — two weeks or less. Check the Florida Fish and Wildlife website for hunt schedules for each land unit: <http://myfwc.com/hunting/> or call the local land manager.

Florida Weather

Florida's prime hiking season runs roughly from October through April, so when other trails are covered with snow and ice, the FT is at its best. Hikers should plan on at least doubling their water supply when hiking May through September. Hiking in Florida "out of season" requires being prepared for intense heat, high humidity, and insects. Once November and the end of hurricane season arrives, the Trail starts to dry out and the weather becomes relatively cooler. Winters are generally mild in Florida compared to the rest of the US, but it is common for winter temperatures in North Florida to drop into the 20's overnight. FTA recommends raingear year round, and both a 20-degree bag and layered clothing for winter hiking. In the summer months, heat exhaustion and heat stroke are major concerns.

Sensible Precautions for Swamp Tromping

In spite of what you may have been told, the Florida Trail really only passes through two large swamps and they could not be more different from each other.

The **Bradwell Bay Wilderness Area (BBWA)** in the Apalachicola National Forest (ANF) is a typical "swamp". Still black water, sucky mud underfoot, trees strewn like pickup sticks, dense green Titi (pronounced TIE-tie) shrubs, and ankle to waist deep water. Of the 12.5 miles of FT in the BBWA only 5.2 miles are normally wet and of that only about 3.7 miles is actually swamp habitat. However, hikers should be aware that those 3.7 miles are an obstacle course and you will be climbing over, under, around and through downed trees and old logs. Hikes through the BBWA generally consume the major part of a day.

Tip: for NOBO hikers (going east to west thru ANF) the deepest water will be found at the Monkey Creek crossing on the eastern end. Judge by the depth of water there whether it would be more prudent to roadwalk around the swamp section. FTA strongly advises hikers to traverse the BBWA in groups of two or more.

Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) is the largest swamp section, covering (for NOBO hikers) the first 39 miles of the Florida Trail. This part of the Everglades ecosystem is very different from BBWA. Wide vistas and crystal clear water runs in sheet-flow from central Florida to the Everglades through Big Cypress. When the water is low the marl ground surface can be very slippery, and the best time to hike BCNP is when the water is about ankle deep. The northern portion of BCNP — from about three miles south of I-75 to the Seminole Reservation boundary is not normally wet, reducing the swamp segment to around 28 miles.

Hikers should also be aware that BCNP from the Tamiami Trail (US 41) to I-75 is true wilderness. There are very few man-made structures to help determine your exact location, water depth varies tremendously from year to year, blazes can be obscured, and cell phone coverage is spotty at best. FTA suggests hiking through BCNP in small groups of 2-6. A GPS unit is recommended. This FT segment takes extra effort and sensible planning.

Food Storage

The three National Forests in Florida require all backpackers to hang their food bags or use a bear canister. This is especially important if you plan to camp in the developed campgrounds. While not required elsewhere, "bear bagging" is a good idea everywhere along the Florida Trail

General Disclaimer

The Florida Trail is a work in progress. Constant change is the norm. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of trail data at the time of publication, the Florida Trail Association, Inc., its officers, directors, staff and members assume no liability arising from the use of the information contained in the publications. Persons using the information do so at their own risk and must rely on their own judgment.

The FTA maps and data book are updated at least annually, however, changes to the trail may occur between these updates, and these are published as Notices to Hikers and posted on the FTA website (www.floridatrail.org). While the entire FT has been minutely GPS'ed over the past 20 years, we have also relied upon various forms of information provided by FTA volunteers and land managers.

To help hikers following in your footsteps, please report any major discrepancies in the maps and data book to FTA at: Florida Trail Association, 1022 NW 2nd Street, Gainesville, FL, 32601, mapping@floridatrail.org, or 1-877-HIKE-FLA.

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