

BARNETT to McCORMICK CREEK

PADDLE #9

Tidal Creeks thru saltwater marsh into maritime hammock.

Length: 3.5 miles from launch at Barnett Creek to confluence of McCormick Creek then north to dead end where creek intersects refuge road.

Time: 2 hours

Skill Level: Suitable for beginner paddlers because waters are protected from winds; however, creeks are tidal and will require paddling against tides which at times can be very strong. Basic navigational skills are required to follow map.

CAUTIONS: Check times and levels of high and low tides to determine time and strength of water movement. Regardless of incoming or outgoing tides, paddler will be subject to paddling against the tide in either Barnett or McCormick Creeks. Strong tides will require paddler to have reasonable physical stamina.

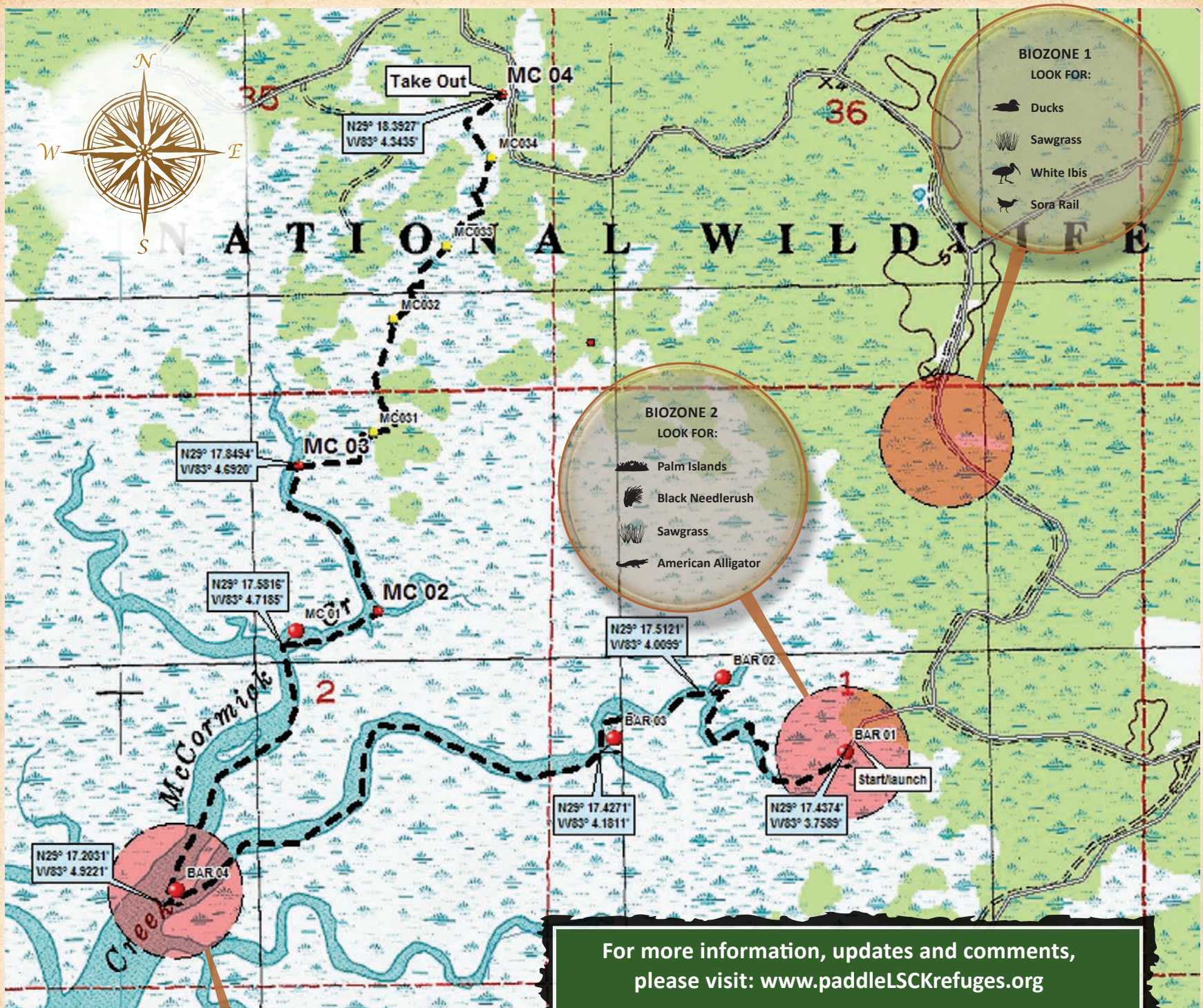
NOTE: It is generally easier to paddle around high tide.

DIRECTIONS TO LAUNCH SITE:

From US19 in south Chiefland, take CR 345 west then south (90° bend in road) approximately 4.7 miles to CR 330.

Look for sign on right to Fowlers Bluff. Turn right and go west on CR 330, then southwest. Road merges with CR 347 (approximately 5 miles); continue on CR 347 past the Refuge Headquarters to the south entrance of the loop road, approximately 5.6 miles.

Turn right at the Loop Road South Entrance and follow sign to McCormick Creek unpaved launch at end of road.



INFO ABOUT KAYAK RENTALS, GUIDE AND OUTFITTER SERVICES, LODGING AND RESTAURANTS GO TO: www.purewaterwilderness.com and click on appropriate links for Dixie and Levy Counties.

TIDE CAUTION: Certain paddles may not be passable at low tides. All paddles are safer and easier to navigate at mid to high tides. For tides schedules go to www.saltwatertides.com/dynamic.dir/floridagulfsites.html, click Crystal River to Apalachee Bay, choose either Cedar Key or Suwannee River entrance, and select month and day(s).

NOTE TO USERS: Great care has been taken to ensure this guide's accuracy, but tides, weather, depth and other conditions can change rapidly and create potentially hazardous conditions. Users should have proper safety equipment and check conditions prior to departure.

Barnett to McCormick Creeks

Before launching, visit the short boardwalk and overlook on the loop road, 2/3 mile north the McCormick Creek road intersection. You will find a small natural freshwater pond where you may be able to see species of wildlife not visible on any of the other paddles. Shallow and with abundant submerged vegetation, the pond is ideal habitat for aquatic invertebrates and amphibians, and the wading birds that forage on them. Even birds that do most of their feeding in salt water habitats may visit ponds like this to drink.

Biozone 1. The Freshwater Pond

A visit to this headwaters pond in the winter offers the opportunity to view several species of wintering waterfowl. So-called puddle ducks that feed primarily on vegetation, pintails and green-winged teal have been spotted here, as have species of diving ducks. Mottled ducks and wood ducks may also use the pond. The overlook provides a good opportunity to get a closeup view of sawgrass. This emergent grass-like plant is not a true grass, but rather a sedge, and is a common resident of Florida freshwater wetlands. Growing around the edges of this pond, it is tall, has triangular stems, and sharp sawtooth margins on the leaves.



Three adult and eight juvenile white ibises feed in a shallow freshwater pond in the headwaters area of McCormick and Barnett Creeks.

Biozone 2. The Brackish Marsh

Take a brief walk around the area of the launch site. Here you will see a rather abrupt transition between the brackish marsh and the uplands. Looking out toward the creek you will see a broad expanse of brackish marsh dominated by black needlerush, with an occasional fringe of smooth cordgrass. Palm islands are visible on the distant horizon. Behind you are forested uplands. Between the brackish marsh and the uplands is a narrow zone in which a struggle between the marsh and the uplands seems to be underway. Palm trees and occasional red cedars appear to be growing out of the marsh. Some of the palms are dead, and there are snags of deciduous trees. Here, as in other parts of the Gulf Coast, the gradual rise in sea level is moving the marsh landward. As you paddle away from the boat ramp, submerged eelgrass may be seen beneath the boat. You will be surrounded by an irregular transition between fresh-and saltwater dominated habitats. Black needlerush, characteristic of salt and transitional marshes intermingles far downstream with large patches of sawgrass, a plant of freshwater marshes. These patches of sawgrass occur on areas of higher ground large enough to capture sufficient rainwater to support grasses, but not trees and shrubs.

Biozone 3. The Salt Marsh

Barnett Creek gradually broadens out as it approaches its confluence with McCormick Creek. Even here, however, small patches of sawgrass and a woody shrub called high tide bush occupy higher spots. Narrow ridges support occasional cabbage palms, but pines and deciduous trees drop away as you get closer to the Gulf. Ospreys, bald eagles, and wading birds may be seen overhead. You may hear the clicking call of a rail, but are unlikely to see one. Although few animals are seen, the salt marsh is teeming with life. Marsh grasses capture the abundant nutrients flowing into the estuary. The living grasses provide shelter, and the residue of dead grasses provides nourishment for many small animals. These small animals provide sustenance for larger fishes, wading birds, and predators like pelicans, ospreys, and eagles. These marshes benefit man by serving as nurseries for the immature stages of many important marine fishes and invertebrates, and by protecting the land from storm surge conditions. Animals and plants characteristic of both the uplands and the coastal marshes can coexist here when conditions are favorable. Alligators are common, as are freshwater fishes like smallmouth bass; both may venture into brackish waters to feed on abundant small fishes and invertebrates. Raccoons and river otters may forage here as well. Bald eagles and swallowtail kites may be seen overhead.



Sawgrass, a plant normally found in freshwater marshes.



Spyglass: Freshwater Wetlands and Waterfowl

Ducks and geese much prefer freshwater wetlands to brackish or saltwater wetlands. Conservation of migratory waterfowl is a major mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and many coastal refuges have built dikes around coastal marshes, protecting them from tides and turning them into freshwater wetlands. The practice is controversial because creating habitat for waterfowl degrades or makes inaccessible essential habitats for juvenile saltwater fishes. The Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge has never employed this kind of habitat improvement and is not known as a haven for waterfowl. You can see impounded coastal marshes by visiting St. Marks or Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuges, among others.

This tiny island in McCormick Creek supports both wetland and upland plants, some of which are intolerant of salinity. Fresh water is less dense than salt water, and rainfall falling on the island "floats" above the salt water that saturates the lower layers of the soil.