

PADDLE #6

LOCK SHINGLE CREEK

A tidal creek flowing through fresh water marshes along the Suwannee River.

Length: 6.9 miles from Anderson Landing boat ramp, along residential canals to Lock Creek; continuing through riverine floodplain, freshwater water marsh to the Suwannee River and return to Anderson Landing boat ramp.

Time: 3.5 hours

Skill Level: Not recommended for beginner paddlers due to length of paddle, and navigational skills required. Waters are protected along canal and Lock and Shingle creeks, but are subject to wind and tides along the Suwannee River. Advanced navigational skills are required to follow lat/long waypoints.

CAUTION: Creek may be impassable at very low tides, due to fallen trees and mud flats. Winds stronger than 10 mph can create waves of 1-2 feet in Suwannee River and not safe for beginner paddlers.

DIRECTIONS TO LAUNCH SITE:

From US 19 in Old Town, take CR 349 south to Suwannee, approximately 23 miles.

Look for paved boat ramp on left just before Anderson Landing Campground.



For more information, updates and comments, please visit: www.paddleLSCKrefuges.org

INFO ABOUT KAYAK RENTALS, GUIDE & 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/floridagulf/sites.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.

Lock and Shingle Creeks

This route takes one over much of the refuge maintained way-marked Lock Creek paddling trail, but is extended to include areas of freshwater marsh and greater portions of the main channel of the Suwannee River. Backwater portions of the trail are serene, and particularly where motorized watercraft do not travel, the peace and solitude around paddlers may be deeply affecting.

Along a sleepy Suwannee creek.

Biozone 1. Lock Creek

Possibly the most alluring of Suwannee paddles takes one through the small creeks off the mainstem of the river that wend through swamps and marshes. Light filtered through the leaves of tupelos, ashes, and swamp bay, and reflected off still waters casts an enchanted glow on a surprising variety of wildflowers. Fishes and alligators are abundant here, but this is the true haunt of wood ducks, river otters and turtles—as many as 13 species of freshwater turtles may be found in the Suwannee, including a local specialty called the Suwannee cooter. The aspect of this paddle may soon change by the disappearance of two trees, swamp bay and pumpkin ash, both of which are important in providing the tree canopy. They are dying throughout the region from infections promoted by two exotic insect pests.



Biozone 2. Freshwater Marsh

Shallows in backwaters of the Suwannee are often covered by vegetation characteristic of ponds or marshes. Spatterdock is a normally pond-dwelling plant that is very common in the backwaters and in shallows in the main stem of the river. It adds to habitat diversity, providing shade and cover to many invertebrates and fishes, and food to some of them. Small animals provide food for larger predators like basses, aningas, otters, and alligators, all of them most at home in fresh water environments. Sawgrass and wild rice occupy patches in still shallower areas and, like spatterdock, add to habitat diversity. More importantly, the leaves and seeds of these these plants provide food for ducks and other wildlife.



Spatterdock (left foreground) and sawgrass (mid right) in a quiet area off the Suwannee.



Basking alligator. Photo courtesy of Richard Herman

Biozone 3. The Suwannee River

The parts of the lower Suwannee coursing through the refuge are mostly freshwater, but tidally influenced. The regularity and degree of the twice-daily flooding greatly affect the vegetation; bald cypress, tupelo, and pumpkin ash dominate areas regularly flooded areas of swamp. Away from the river they are joined by other swamp dwelling trees, and in further inland bottomland hardwood forests take over. Large animals that may be seen in the Suwannee and in few other rivers include Gulf sturgeon, an ancient fish that may reach eight feet in length and weigh 200 pounds. They are found in the Suwannee in spring and summer, and may be seen making spectacular jumps out of the water. Many species of fishes and turtles inhabit the river. Another large animal seen less frequently is the West Indian manatee. Manatees are in the river during the warmer months and migrate into warmer spring runs in the winter.



Bald cypress on the Suwannee riverbank.

Spyglass: Bald Cypress

Alligators are emblematic of southern swamplands, and if they have a counterpart in the plant world, it has to be bald cypress. Living for hundreds of years and growing to enormous size, their one tragic flaw is the great value of their wood. Soft, light, and resistant to decay, it has been relentlessly sought after. It is so resistant to decay that logs lost and sunken in the river for decades can be recovered and sold for lumber. Specialized for periodic flooding, cypress knees are a unique adaptation. Thought to function in providing carbon dioxide and oxygen to roots, the height of knees is often an indicator of the average heights of floods. Not evergreen, cypresses lose their needle-like leaves in the winter, possibly to avoid excessive moisture loss when roots are cold and not pumping water upward. A commercial market for cypress wood remains, but trees on the refuge are protected.