

## Suwannee River Paddle

As the namesake of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, the Suwannee River offers paddlers a protected paddle through calm waters inhabited by numerous species of fresh and saltwater fish.

### Information:

The headwaters of the Suwannee River lie in southern Georgia within the Okefenokee Swamp. From this swamp in Georgia, the river flows south into Florida as it snakes its way westward towards Florida's Gulf coast, where upon reaching the Gulf of Mexico the river comes to an end. Due to the river's close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, the Suwannee River is tidally effected.

### Boat Ramp Address:

Camp Azalea Boat Ramp  
N.W. 128<sup>th</sup> Court, Chiefland, FL 32626

### Top Baits:

Skirted bass jigs with weed-guards such as V&M's Pacemaker series jigs

Rebel Popper

Baby Bass Bomber

Beetle Spin

Zoom Trick Worms - Texas Rigged in Watermelon Seed or Watermelon Candy colors

Gambler Lures – EZ Swimmer in Simmer New Shad or Simmer Lane Toad colors rigged unweighted on 4/0 offset shank worm hook.

Zoom Mag II Worm in Junebug color

Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw in Green Pumpkin Orange color

### Length:

4 miles (paddling from Camp Azalea Boat ramp north to Manatee Springs and back)

### Resources:

Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge

16450 NW 31st Place

Chiefland, FL 32626

Phone: (352) 493 – 0238

### Weather, Wind, Lunar:

<http://www.accuweather.com/en/us/fowlers-bluff-fl/32626/hourly-weather-forecast/2256905>

<https://www.windy.com/29.397/-83.024?29.399,-83.237,9>

### WARNINGS:

Paddlers should remain vigilant of changing weather conditions on the Suwannee River and should familiarize themselves with the forecasted weather for the dates of their outing. The Suwannee River is home to the American alligator and the venomous water moccasin and it is recommended that paddlers maintain a safe distance from these dangerous reptiles. The Suwannee River is also home to the Gulf Sturgeon which can grow to a length of eight feet and

weigh up to 300 pounds. During the summer months, these fish will jump from the water, soaring two to three feet above the water's surface before landing with a loud crash. These jumping behaviors occur most commonly from May – August. Although a spectacle to see these huge fish flying through the air, these leaping fish can inflict serious injury or even death on unlucky boaters when a collision occurs. The waters directly below Manatee Springs are a hot spot for jumping sturgeon and paddlers must be aware of the risk of collision with a jumping sturgeon.

#### Information:

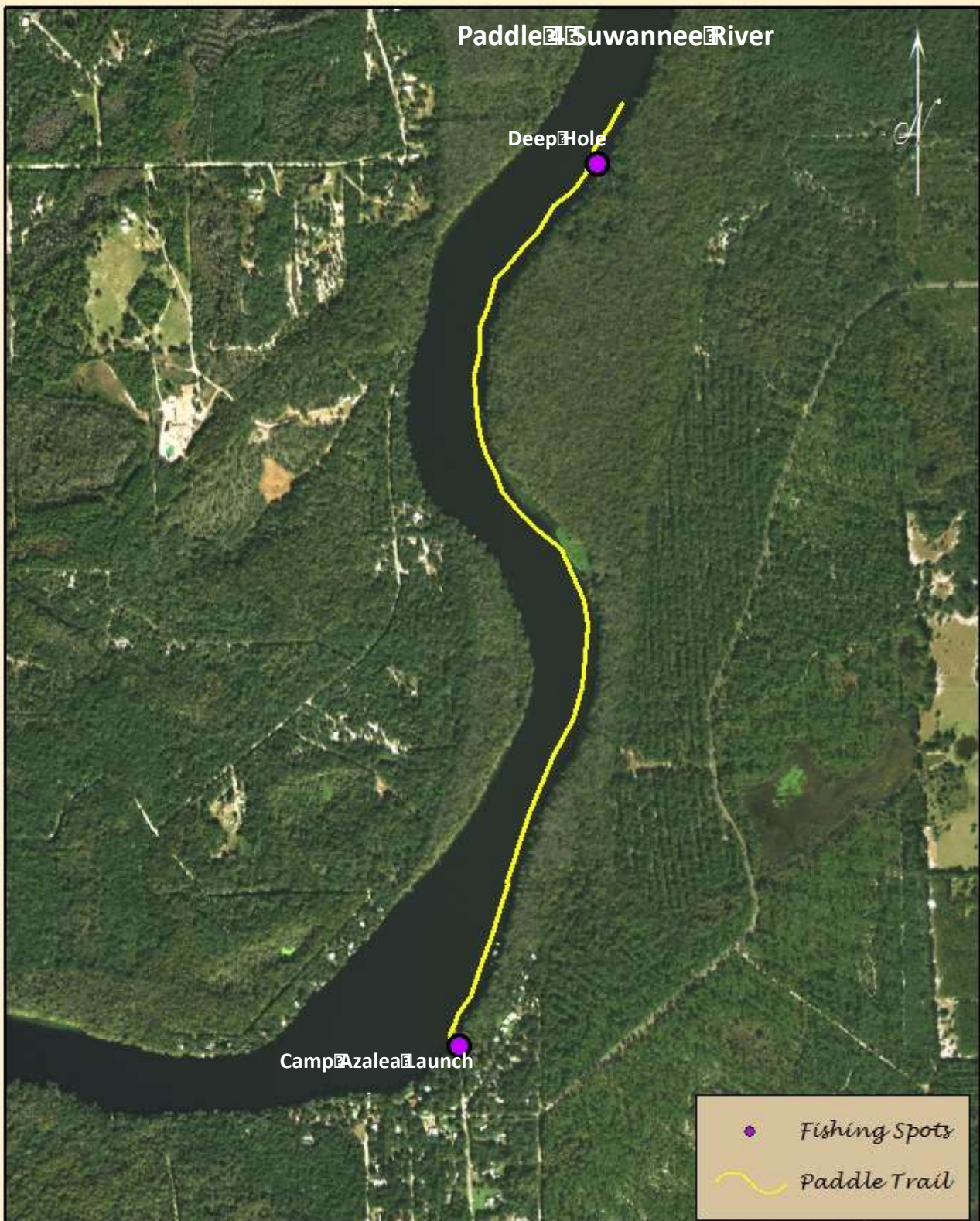
Paddle time from Camp Azalea paddling upriver (north) to Manatee Springs and back will take approximately three hours. Extra time should be allocated for fishing purposes. This paddle is a good option to consider on windy days when bigger-water paddles should not be attempted. Due to the sheltering nature of the heavily wooded shoreline along the Suwannee River, this paddle can be completed in higher winds but the paddler should always remain vigilant to changing weather conditions and should keep a watchful eye on the weather radar.

#### Peak Fishing Times and Areas:

As many anglers already know, a significant portion of fish feeding activity occurs in the early morning and late afternoon. This is also the case on the Suwannee River, although fish can be caught during all hours of the day. The best time of year to fish the Suwannee is January – April when cooler weather will push the fish up tight against the bank in search of shallow water and hard structure to keep warm. These types of cold days will produce good numbers of fish for anglers capable of accurately casting to the shoreline.

Upon launching from the Camp Azalea boat ramp, turn right and head north (upriver), anglers should target their casts towards blown over trees, stumps and vegetation that lay along the eastern shoreline of the river. Fishing the lily pads with weed-less rigged baits can be effective but the most productive patches of lilies are the less densely populated clumps consisting of some open water patches between lilies to allow for proper lure presentations. In low light conditions look for schooled up bass assaulting bait fish on the surface. If you do come upon one of these “feeding frenzies” be sure to cast into action, you will likely hook up. While fishing the shoreline, look to target sandy holes and the lighter colored bottom as these spots tend to hold the fish. As the day warms up, most of the game fish will move from the shallow water, out into the middle of the river where the cooler, deeper water is located. Slowly trolling rubber worms along the bottom in the middle of the river has the potential to turn up some nice sized largemouths. Look to find these big bass in depths ranging from 15 – 22 feet of water. The Suwannee River also offers anglers the opportunity to catch a bass found nowhere else in the world, known as the Suwannee River bass. Endemic to this region, the Suwannee River bass does not grow as large as a largemouth but many anglers will say that the Suwannee River bass fights much harder than the average largemouth. The easiest way to identify the Suwannee Bass is by its red eyes and the scales located on the bases of the dorsal, anal and caudal fins. These fish also tend to be darker than the largemouths that they live alongside. The Suwannee Bass is most typically found around moving water near structure such as blown over trees, dock pilings, stumps and rock piles. Catfish can be targeted within the deeper channels along the river by soaking a piece of pork or beef fat on the bottom. Fishermen equipped with a bottom scanning electronic device will be at an advantage due to their ability to locate submerged structure, channels and potholes within the river. Bream, sunfish and other varieties of panfish can also be caught around shallow structure

in the river using small crank and spinnerbaits. More traditional methods, utilizing a worm, sinker and bobber should also produce plenty of panfish.



*Lower Suwannee  
National Wildlife Refuge*

