

At the end of this boardwalk you reach the uplands. A sign explains the value of fire in maintaining pine forests which once dominated much of the Florida peninsula. A short path then a right turn to the parking area puts you on drier land. To the left of the trail is a small area of sandhill dominated by scrub, a forest consisting of small, twisted oak trees.

If you have time, follow the Tram Ridge Loop Trail, where you will learn more about habitat management for Florida wildlife.



photo: Larry Woodward

## TRAM RIDGE LOOP TRAIL (2.8 mile loop)

Part of the Tram Ridge Trail follows a historic tram road (railroad bed) built to haul lumber to nearby sawmills.

Walking to the right at the sign, one begins the trail in pine flatwoods where most of the larger trees are slash pines. These fast growing native trees were planted in close rows by timber companies. Historically these areas were dominated by widely-spaced old growth longleaf pines, with scattered slash and loblolly pines in wetter sites.

Restoration of the longleaf pine forests is ongoing in several parts of the Refuge. In areas like this one, planted trees are severely thinned to recreate the savanna-like conditions of the past. Pine flatwoods habitats, and wildlife that live here, are critically dependent on fires every two to four years which promote the growth of diverse low-growing plants.

Just beyond a park bench on the right is a small usually water-filled depression with cypress trees. And a bit further along the trail on the left is a dry sand hill covered with thorny, scrubby-looking plants. This diversity of habitats in close proximity is the reason that the southeast and the Florida Peninsula are recognized



Gopher Tortoise  
photo: Larry Woodward

for their world-class biodiversity. Typical wildlife species found here include Bachman's sparrow, bobwhite quail, gopher tortoise, and fox squirrel.

As you continue on the trail, the pines begin to disappear and transition to a bottomland hardwood forest, then another drop into a cypress dome dominated by bald cypress and black tupelo. Diversity and abundance of plants dramatically increases in the transition zones between these forest types. Some wildlife, such as salamanders, depend solely on these narrow ecotones.

On the very northern portion of the trail, sand live oaks dominate a sandy ridge, creating a shady zone that naturally deters fire. These areas favor oak toads, Cooper's hawks and black bears.

Looping toward the south you soon reach the old railroad bed. It runs along the top of a straight, sandy ridge for nearly half of its length. In more broken terrain, ditching and filling were needed for the roadbed. These activities created drier and wetter conditions than occurred naturally and interrupted normal water flows. The vegetation near the tram road probably little resembles what occurred there naturally. Here and elsewhere on the Refuge, road building and other logging activities have had dramatic and long lasting effects on landscapes and habitats.

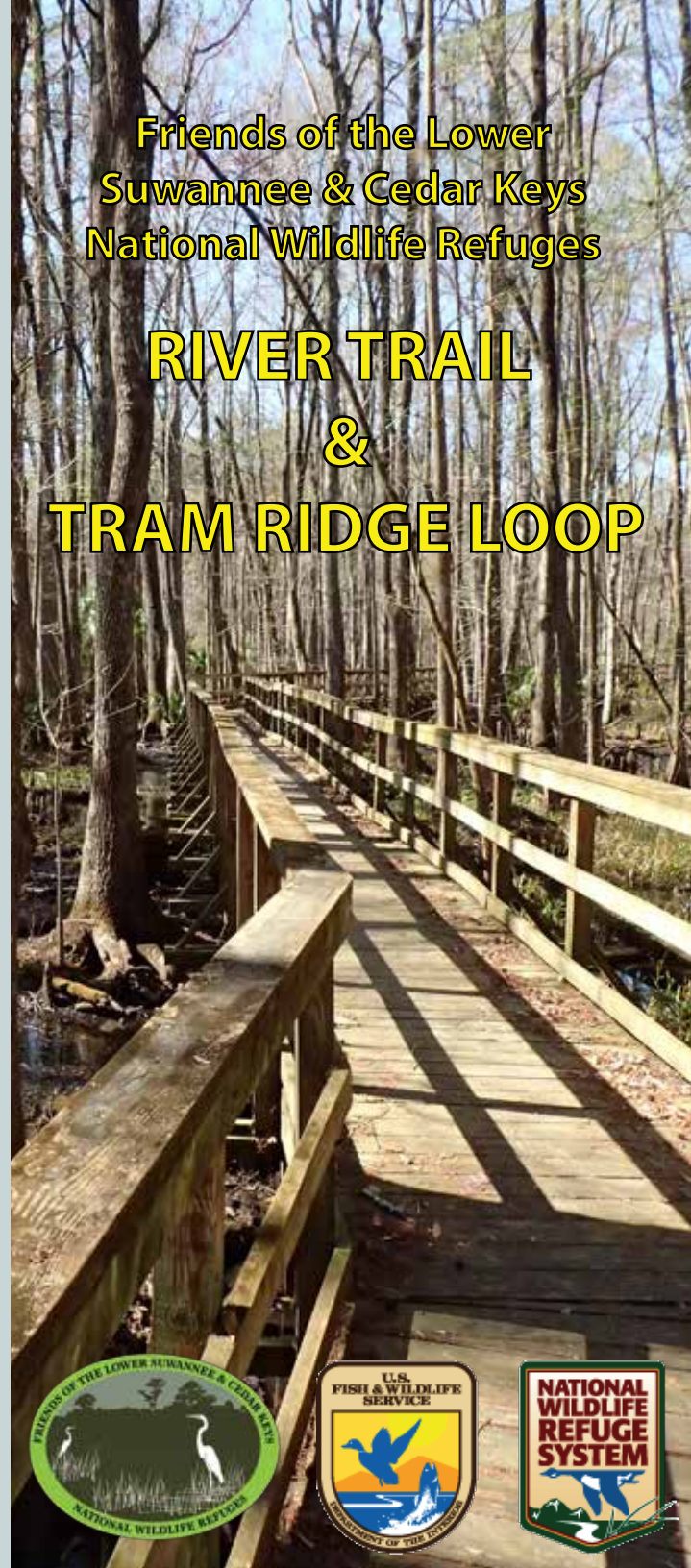
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**Design** – Debbie Meeks, Friends of Refuges  
**Map** – Daniel Barrand, Refuge Forester

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## Friends of the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges

# RIVER TRAIL & TRAM RIDGE LOOP





# RIVER TRAIL LOOP

(0.3 mile spur to the river, 0.7 mile loop)

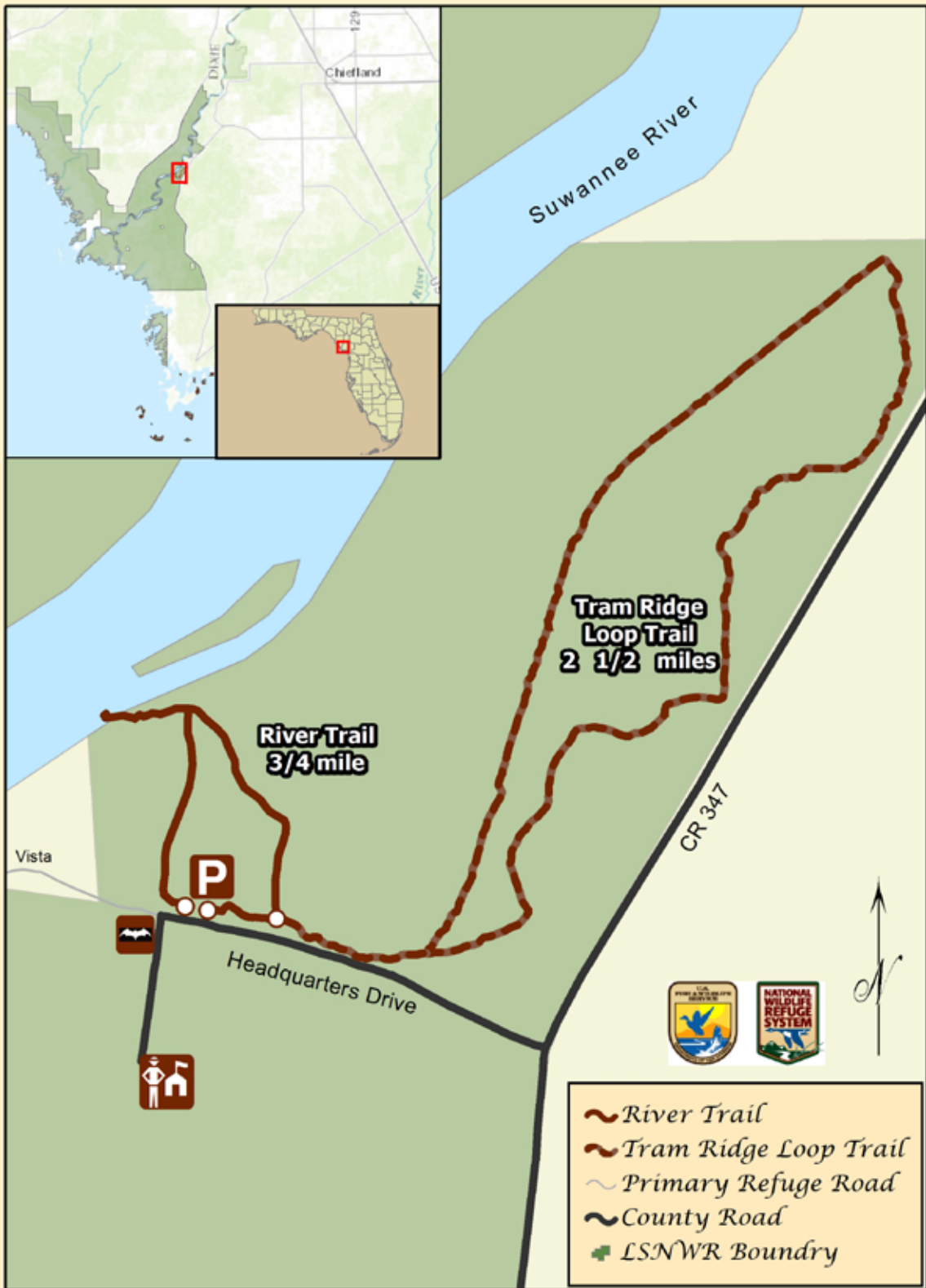
photo: Russ Hall

Begin the River Trail loop along a shaded, old logging road through a seepage swamp and over a low bluff. It ends at an old logging platform—a place where cut logs were collected to be loaded onto wagons or trucks.

Turning to the left a boardwalk guides you over a river swamp. Unlike the swamp you crossed earlier, this one is influenced by tides and river levels. Both wetlands are dominated by cypress trees and various species of hardwoods. The boardwalk ends at an overlook on the majestic Suwannee River—the largest river in the southeast that is not modified by dams and/or navigational improvements. The river’s waters are black with tannic acid that leaches from vegetation. As you contemplate the dark, misty, waters try to envision Potano tribespeople silently sliding their canoes along the swampy banks, the chugging mumble of early settlers’ steamboats transporting goods to Cedar Key, or pirates hiding in the calm backwaters. The rich history of the Suwannee River has always been shaped by the landscape, and vice versa. These forests were harvested many times in past centuries. If you look closely you will see stumps of trees that were cut a century or more ago. Today the Refuge manages and protects regenerating forests for the many wildlife species that depend on them.



Returning to the old logging platform, follow the other boardwalk across a quieter river swamp. Near the end of this boardwalk on the left you may glimpse a huge cypress tree that early loggers spared because its timber was not of commercial quality.



**Caution:** Be aware that this is a wildlife refuge and while on this trail, you might encounter alligators or snakes. Ticks are common in tall-grass areas and poison ivy vines grow on many trees along the trail.

Visit the Friends website, [FriendsOfRefuges.org](http://FriendsOfRefuges.org), for more information and downloadable GPS file.

