



Trip Spotlight: Suwannee River Paddling Festival, April 5-7, 2019



Please join us for our 7th annual Suwannee River Paddling Festival which will take place at Suwannee River State Park near Live Oak from April 5-7. A few spots still remain. Supported trip options on Saturday and Sunday offer paddlers the opportunity to experience the scenic Suwannee and Withlacoochee rivers in segments ranging from 8 to 12 miles. We will also present our 2019 Environmental Leadership Award. One of Paddle Florida's favorite entertainers, Katherine Archer, will perform a benefit concert Saturday. Proceeds will be donated to the Florida Paddling Trails Association. The weekend will also feature kayak/canoe demos, a silent auction, and an opportunity to hear from local experts dedicated to preserving North Florida's rivers, springs, and water-sheds. [Click here](#) to register for this trip.



Upcoming Trips

[Flori-Bama Expedition on the Perdido River](#)
March 10-15, 2019
Paddling the Florida/Alabama border, enjoy beach camping along a cozy meandering river to the more open waters of Perdido Bay as we explore the most diverse set of ecosystems of the season. **This trip is full!**

[Suwannee River Paddling Festival](#)
April 5-7, 2019
With camping atop the bluff overlooking two beautiful rivers, our season-capping festival takes place at Suwannee River State Park near Live Oak. The weekend will offer supported 8-12 mile paddling options on both the Suwannee and Withlacoochee Rivers, a concert featuring Paddle Florida's favorite musicians, and educational presentations from regional waterway experts. Register by: March 22

We are currently entertaining proposals and ideas about where to host paddling events next season. [Contact us](#) with your suggestions!



Paddling on the Suwannee River near Manatee Springs State Park

By Eric Draper

Director, Florida State Parks

Florida has had a very rainy 2019, and many streams and rivers are flooded. A ranger at Manatee Springs State Park told me that these high waters make for great paddling at the park. Normally-unreachable backwaters are now easy to access. The floodwaters reveal hidden sanctuaries for birds and my favorite river reptile, the Suwannee cooter.

The excitement I felt at the chance to explore new areas of the park reminded me why I love paddling. Nearly a fifth of Florida's surface area is rivers and lakes. These water wonderlands are some of our state's most beautiful places. I love paddling because it lets me get close to the wildlife and the water. It's the best way to explore the hidden estuaries and backwaters that give Florida life. Those moments of exploration and excitement restore my curiosity and energy.

I'm thankful that Paddle Florida helps share Florida's special places. When people see those places and feel the excitement of exploration, they care more about protecting natural resources. As the director of Florida State Parks, I look forward to sharing more state park paddling experiences in future issues of the 'Happy Paddler.'

Dog Paddling Tips: Teaching your pup to be a perfect canoeing companion

By Shawn James



Canoe outings should be a fun adventure for your dog, as it is for you. Cali looks forward to every outing because she never knows where we are going to end up.

Sometimes we camp and explore waterways of dog-friendly Ontario Parks but often, our trips involve day trips with overnight stay at a pet-friendly accommodation, which adds another level of excitement. Training your pup helps to make all adventures more enjoyable.

Plan Your First CANOE Outing

Pushing off from shore into the gentle current of a shallow river, the wooden canoe rocks softly as Cali, our four-month-old Golden Retriever, paces from starboard to portside, peering over the sides at her reflection in the water. Confused, she puts her front paws up on the gunwale, staring over the edge calmly until a small stick floats by and it is just too much to resist—she leaps into the water and immediately disappears below the surface. I reach overboard and haul her back into the canoe, amused at the look of surprise on her face. [\[Read more...\]](#)



Beyond significant harm

By Dr. Robert Knight

Executive Director, Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute

In December 2010 the Governing Board of the Suwannee River Water Management District (WMD) published their Water Supply Assessment. This document concluded that: "... groundwater levels in the Upper Floridan aquifer have declined significantly during the past 75 years as a result of regional groundwater withdrawals..." and that "...unacceptable impacts to flows in the Lower Santa Fe River and springs were predicted for the 2010-2030 planning period...". In April 2014, in response to this unfolding tragedy, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and Suwannee River WMD jointly published the Santa Fe River Basin Recovery Strategy.

Their recovery strategy concludes that groundwater from the Floridan Aquifer is the primary source of water for human activities throughout north Florida. The estimated average pumping rate affecting this region was 551 million gallons per day (MGD) in 2015. This pumping rate has been increasing throughout the previous century, resulting in significant regional groundwater declines and negatively impacting spring flows, their important contributions to stream and river baseflows, and support of wildlife and recreational habitats. WMD studies concluded that long-term flow reductions evident in the Lower Santa Fe River and springs and its major tributary the Ichetucknee River exceed thresholds of significant harm to the ecological and human resource values allowed by Florida law. [\[Read more...\]](#)

Flora & Fauna Spotlight

A reef called the crown jewel of Florida on the verge of death, scientist says

By Jay Cashmere, WPTV



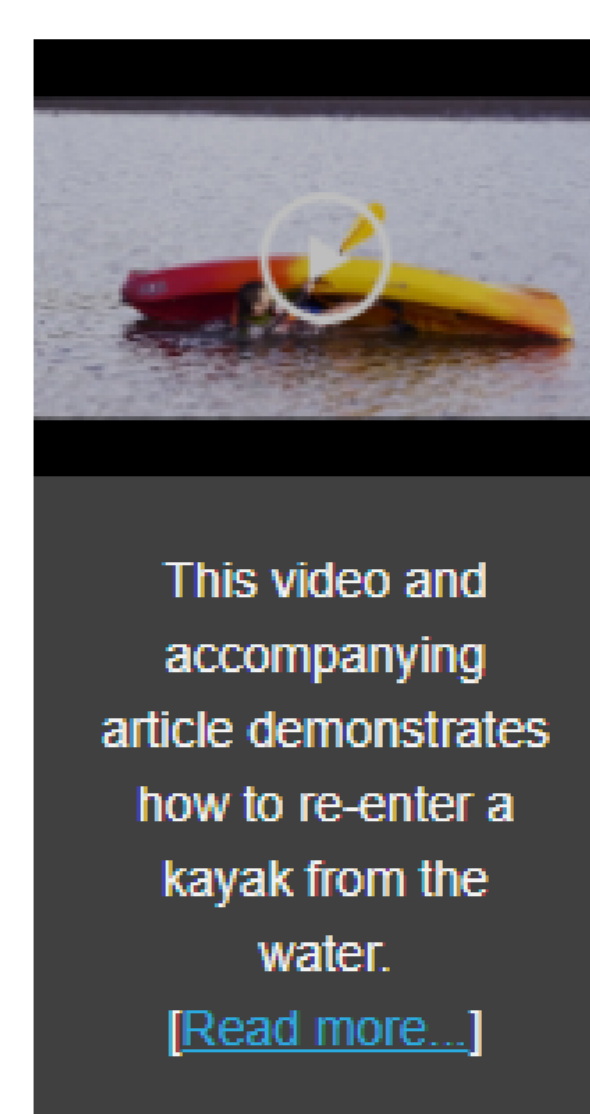
Photo: WPTV

If there's one place where nature and divers meet it is Big Pine Key. Here boats at Looe Key Reef Resort carry 20,000 divers a year to one place, Looe Key Reef. It is known as "The crown jewel of the Florida Keys," yet some don't see it that way anymore.

"I'm glad I'm the Captain on most days because I don't have to get in the water and be sad," says Katie McHugh, of Looe Key Reef Resort.

To understand what happened here, you have to talk to one man who's bringing a secret to the surface and he says he has the science to prove it. [\[Read more...\]](#)

How To: What happens if I flip?



This video and accompanying article demonstrates how to re-enter a kayak from the water. [\[Read more...\]](#)

Upcoming Community Events



March 2-3: [Florida Springsfest](#) (Ocala)



March 13: [Florida Tourism Day](#) (Tallahassee)



March 16: [Workout on Waterfront](#) (Cedar Key) [\[Register here...\]](#)

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