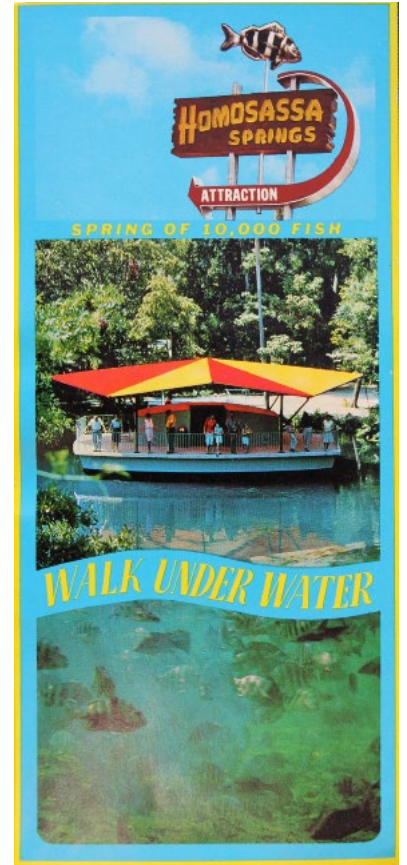




Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

4150 S. Suncoast Boulevard
Homosassa, Florida 34446
(352) 628-5343

This state park is one of several old Florida tourist attractions built around first-magnitude springs. The park showcases native Florida wildlife, including red wolves, Florida panther, black bears, bobcats, Key and white-tailed deer, alligators, river otter and many more--all seen by visitors from an elevated boardwalk that winds through their enclosures in a natural setting. The main attraction is the Florida manatee. Homosassa contains a native wildlife zoo and a rehabilitation facility for injured manatees, and the spring provides a natural winter refuge for a large wild manatee population.



As early as the 1940s, Homosassa Springs attracted tourists as “Nature’s Giant Fish Bowl” as it was called then and people could look into the crystal clear waters of the spring from an observation tower. Today, visitors can see manatees from the park’s underwater observatory in the main spring. In the 1960s pontoon boats equipped with lawn chairs and would take hotel guests on the waterway past citrus trees and non-native vegetation and small islands occupied by Black Spider Monkeys to the zoo-like park which was filled with exotic animals such as lions, bears, hippo, monkeys, deer and goats. These same boats are still in service today to transport visitors between the Welcome Center and the west entrance of the park.



Homosassa Springs State Park offers manatee programs three times daily along with Wildlife Encounter programs where snakes and other native animals are featured. A popular children's education center provides hands-on experiences about Florida's environment. Transportation from the visitor center on U.S. 19 to the west entrance is available by tram or boat. Plan on 3 to 4 hours to tour the park and check the Ranger Programs for a list of daily interactive events.

Lu the Hippo



Lu, an African hippopotamus, was born at the San Diego Zoo on January 26, 1960. He weighed 90 pounds at birth and now weighs more than 6,000 pounds. As a vegetarian, Lu consumes 15 pounds of alfalfa hay, four scoops of herbivore diet and a five gallon bucket of vegetables and fruit every day. Although Lu's fame has remained steady for more than four decades, his state park habitat was once jeopardized. When the Florida Park

Service purchased the attraction in 1989, the state planned to shift the emphasis of the park to native Florida wildlife and find homes for all the exotic species, including Lu. Public support, however, led Governor Lawton Chiles to grant Lu an exemption in 1991. Special Florida citizenship has allowed Lu to stay at the park, and his fans to continue to display their appreciation annually at his birthday celebration every January.

In 1924, Mr. Bruce Hoover from Chicago made a trip on the Homosassa River and stated: "The most beautiful river and springs in the world." After he had a bridge built over the Fish Bowl, he called the carpenters onto the bridge and looked down into the



springs and said: "I hope mankind will never see fit to destroy this spring, nor enclose it behind iron gates from the eyes of the world. For only God could create such a majestic sight. For truly it is a wonder of the world and a natural bowl of fish."

The train would often stop at the springs to allow the passengers a close look at the crystal-clear, 55-foot deep springs which form the headwaters of the Homosassa River. It was rumored that the real reason for the stop at the springs was to give the train crew an opportunity to catch fish that were abundant in these waters. A bathing suit rental nearby was enticing the brave at heart to swim in the lagoon next to the springs. Visitors taking the boat ride on Pepper Creek can still see large concrete footings which were constructed in the 1920s, intended for a water tower to serve the city of Homosassa, (what is now Homosassa Springs) the new city the Homosassa Development Co. had planned.



The ownership of the springs area changed many times since 1940. At that time only a single building occupied the area now known as the Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park. In later years, this building became the entrance to a zoo-like park of exotic animals and is now used as the park's Education Center.

In 1963, the Chicago Cattle Feed Holding Company purchased virtually all of the land surrounding the springs. The land holdings included what is now the park, Sugarmill Woods, Riverhaven Village, the Crows Nest 8 miles down river, hotels and many



commercial properties along Hwy 19. Mr. Bruce A. Norris, owner of this holding company, planned to build a large city in the area. He spent a lot of money dredging the waterway that is now used to transport visitors from the Visitor Center on Hwy 19 to the West Entrance of the Park. Visitors can still see large concrete footings once intended for a water tower for Mr. Norris's planned development.

Mr. Norris was impressed by a pontoon boat that he saw at the World's Fair. He purchased it and had five more boats built. These same boats are still in service today to transport visitors between the Welcome Center and the west entrance of the park.

The 180-ton floating underwater observatory, also known as the "Fish Bowl," was built in Ocala and assembled on-site on a ramp. Once assembled, the structure was slid down on hundreds of bananas to reduce friction and to prevent polluting the spring with grease or oil. This idea was borrowed from a Max Sennett movie. Once in place over the springs, concrete ballast had to be attached to sink the platform enough so that all windows would be below the waterline.



Before Mr. Norris could realize his dream of a large city, the country entered into a period of recession and the holding company had to be dissolved. Canadian Pacific purchased the area of the park. They held on to the park for about four years, after which they decided that the investment did not meet their requirements. Canadian Pacific put the park up for sale and the citizens of Citrus County persuaded the county government to purchase the park. County commissioners



reluctantly took ownership of this still exotic, zoo-like park. On Jan. 1, 1989, the Florida State Park Service purchased the park from the county.

All exotic animals and non-native plants have been removed to restore and return the park to a more natural state. Lu the Hippo is the last exotic animal who remains in the wildlife park from the attraction days.



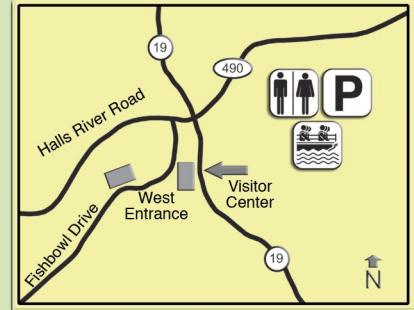



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Manatee
 11:30 am, 1:30 pm, 3:30 pm
 Nov. 15 - March 31 at Manatee Pool
 April 1 - Nov. 14 at Bleachers
 near the underwater observatory

Wildlife Encounters
 10:30 am, 2:30 pm

Alligator & Hippopotamus
 12:30 pm



 Smoking is prohibited inside the wildlife park

-  Boat Tour
-  Concession
-  Parking
-  Pavilion
-  Picnic
-  Restroom

