

Northwest Florida

Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park

A Hidden Paradise on the Bayou

Real Fun in the Real Florida

Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park, a 357-acre park, offers family camping, enchanting hiking trails, a children's playground and one of the best boat ramps on Choctawhatchee Bay with year-round saltwater and freshwater fishing.

Camping - Forty-two well-shaded campsites with amenities, including water, a mixture of 30 and 50 amp electricity, ground grills and picnic tables, can accommodate RVs and tents. Four of these sites are ADA accessible and conveniently located next to the heated and air-conditioned shower facility. A picnic shelter, campfire circle, emergency telephone, laundry and vending machines are also located within the campground.

Fishing - Freshwater and saltwater fishing are available within the park on Puddin Head Lake and

on the Rocky Bayou shoreline. *Freshwater and saltwater fishing licenses may be required.*

Boat Ramp - The park boasts one of the best doublewide boat launches with spacious parking and easy accessibility to the Choctawhatchee Bay. All boaters are reminded to respect others and the fragile sea grass shoreline.

Picnicking along the shoreline provides visitors a scenic view of the water while relaxing in the shade of oak, hickory and pine trees. The area includes two picnic pavilions, a playground, tables, grills and several convenient stairways to the shore.

Three **nature trails**—the Sand Pine, Rocky Bayou and Red Ceda—are ideal for birding and nature photography, providing opportunities to see a variety of native flora and fauna.

Canoes and **Kayaks** can be rented for two hours, half day, or full day. Please contact the park office for prices and more information.

History & Nature

Rocky Bayou State Park was established on

July 1, 1966. Before that time, the United States Air Force managed the property as a training area for its personnel. Ceded to the War Department by the U.S. Forestry Service in 1940, 800 square miles of Gulf Coast shoreline and pine forests became a major site for gunnery and bombing practice during World War II. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle spent March 1942, preparing his B-52 squadron for the first retaliatory bombing of Japan. Remnants of his test bombs are believed to still exist in the park. A concrete bomb, still on the park grounds, is believed to have been one of those dropped by Doolittle's squadron.

After the war, urban development quickly made the Rocky Bayou area unusable as a bombing range. In the late 1950s, Colonel Fred Gannon, Director of Civil Engineering at Eglin Air Force Base, proposed to convert this former military practice range into a public-use area.

The Eglin Air Force Base Civil Engineering group began the initial construction of Rocky Bayou State Park under the direction of Colonel Gannon, following the designs he created for the proposed park. In 1966, shortly after completion of the road and trail work, the lands became part of the Florida

state park system. In 2005, the State of Florida purchased the land from the U.S. Forestry Service.

Directions

Take I-10 to exit 56. Turn south onto SR 85; go 16 miles to Niceville. Turn left (east) on SR 20. The park entrance is approximately 1 mile from the bridge.

Park Guidelines

- Hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- An entrance fee is required. Additional user fees may apply.
- All plants, animals and park property are protected. Collection, destruction or disturbance is prohibited.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet and be well behaved at all times.

- Fishing, boating, swimming and fires are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Fireworks, hunting and alcohol are prohibited.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.
- For camping information, contact Reserve America at (800) 326-3521 or (866) I CAMP FL or TDD (888) 433-0287 or visit ReserveAmerica.com.
- Florida's state parks are committed to providing equal access to all facilities and programs. Should you need assistance to enable your participation, please contact the ranger station.

Contact Information

Florida State Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks
Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park
4281 State Road 20 East

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Niceville, FL 32578

(850) 833-9144

FloridaStateParks.org