

Northeast Florida

Manatee Springs State Park

*A First Magnitude Spring and Haven for
Wintering Manatees*

Real Fun in the Real Florida

Manatee Springs State Park is home to one of Florida's largest freshwater springs. A popular summer recreation site, Manatee Springs is an important winter refuge for West Indian manatees. From November through April, these gentle giants are regular visitors to the spring and a favorite attraction for park visitors.

The **north end trail system** has 8.5 miles of trails for **walking** or **bicycling**.

The spring is ideal for **swimming** and **SCUBA diving**, especially during the warm weather months. The spring run and Suwannee River are well suited for **canoeing** or **kayaking**. Rental canoes are available at the park concession, which is open seasonally.

Boat ramps are located just outside the park. Anglers find the Suwannee River a fine place for reeling in bass, a variety of sunfish species and catfish. A Florida freshwater fishing license may be required.

The park's 92 campsites are equipped with picnic tables, grills, water and electricity. A campground for non-profit youth groups is available for tent **camping**. (Some restrictions and fees apply, contact the park for information.) **Pavilions** located in the picnic area may be reserved for group gatherings.

Seasonal **interpretive programs** and activities are offered on a variety of topics.

Nature & History

For millennia, Manatee Springs and the surrounding area have provided a home site and livelihood for humans. Artifacts found in the spring and adjacent areas indicate that people have been living and raising their families here for at least 9,000 years. The arrival of Spaniards during the 1500s brought an end to a series of cultures that lived in harmony with the earth for thousands of years.

In 1774, William Bartram, a naturalist, botanist and artist, traveled through the area while exploring the Southeast. Later, he wrote a book about his travels, in which he described Manatee Springs in detail and noted the presence of manatees.

Between 35 and 150 million gallons of crystal clear water flow from this first magnitude spring every day. The water percolates through limerock to underground caves that feed the spring. This aquatic cave system is one of the longest in North America and harbors rare species of crayfish.

The spring water flows through the quarter-mile long spring run to join the tannin-stained waters of the Suwannee River en route to the Gulf of Mexico. This brings fresh water to Suwannee Sound, an estuary about twenty-five miles down river.

Water and fire are the two greatest influences shaping the ecology of this park. Water-loving trees grow in the swamps and bottomland forests surrounding the spring and bordering the Suwannee River and spring run. Upland areas of the park host drier habitats such as

sandhill communities and upland pine forests. Here, fire is a naturally occurring event that these habitats depend upon for their survival. To assist in restoring and maintaining these natural communities, the park conducts prescribed burns.

Park Guidelines

- Hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- An entrance fee is required.
- All plants, animals and park property are protected.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet and well behaved at all times.
- Fishing, boating, swimming and camp fires are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida fishing license may be required.

- Fireworks and hunting are prohibited.
- Alcoholic beverage consumption is allowed in designated areas only.
- 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
Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks
Manatee Springs State Park
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(352) 493-6072

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