

Northwest Florida

Ponce de Leon Springs State Park

Florida's Fountain of Youth

Caption: The spring at Ponce de Leon Springs State Park in Florida's panhandle.

Real Fun in the Real Florida

Ponce de Leon Springs State Park provides the backdrop for many recreational activities and adventures. Start the day by jumping into the 68-degree water of the crystal clear spring. You may not regain your lost youth, but you'll definitely know you're alive. **Swimming and snorkeling** are the main activities around the spring. The

shallow waters of the spring run offer children and non-swimmers an excellent opportunity to experience the cool and refreshing waters of the spring.

Bring lunch or a snack for a **picnic**. There are four pavilions around the spring. Pavilions can be reserved for a fee. Reservations are recommended during the summer. The park restrooms have dressing rooms for changing into your favorite swimming attire.

Observe natural wonders of the park while strolling down one of two **trails** that meander through a floodplain forest. Tours are available upon request, or be adventurous and see it for the first time as Ponce de Leon would have seen it more than 400 years ago.

Relax and **fish** from the banks of Sandy Creek. Bluegill, bass and catfish may be the catch of the day.

Ponce de Leon Springs State Park is part of the **Great Florida Birding Trail**. This park offers opportunities to see great horned owls, pileated woodpecker, mocking birds and many other species.

History & Nature

Although there is not a lot written about the history of Ponce de Leon Springs, European settlers and the Indians before them used this spring as a source of drinking water and recreation.

The harvesting of timber and turpentine were the major industries in and around the area that is now Ponce de Leon Springs State Park. The majestic longleaf pines were ideal for building homes, businesses and the railroad that traversed the panhandle of Florida. The spring was owned by the Smithgall family in the mid-1920s. They added many amenities to the property including a restroom with showers, eatery and a skating rink. The Smithgalls also added a wooden retaining wall around the spring to prevent erosion.

The 406-acre park consists of many diverse habitats. Upland pine forest, floodplain forest and wet flatwoods are three of the nine distinct habitats found at the park. Because of the variety, a wide array of plants and animals can be found, including carnivorous pitcher plants, mountain laurel, orange azalea, deer, fox, gopher tortoises,

alligators, bats and numerous other flora and fauna.

Approximately 14 million gallons of pure water emerges daily from the Ponce de Leon Spring. Spring water emanates from the aquifer deep underground keeping the water at a cool 68 degrees year round. An aquifer is a layer of underground rock or sand that stores water. The residents of Florida use over 2.5 billion gallons of water from the aquifer daily. To learn more about these natural wonders and how you can protect them, visit www.floridasprings.org.

Caption: A map of Ponce de Leon Springs State Park.

Directions

Take I-10 to Exit 96. Drive north to Hwy 90 and turn east. Go approximately one half miles. Make a right on Ponce de Leon Springs Road. Drive half a mile to the park entrance.

Park Guidelines

- Hours of operation 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. The collection, destruction or disturbance of plants, animals or park property is prohibited.
- Pets are not allowed in the swimming area. Pets must be well behaved and kept on a 6-foot, hand held leash at all times.

- Fishing is not permitted in the designated swimming areas but is allowed in other areas of the park. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Alcoholic beverages, fireworks and hunting are prohibited.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station or call (850) 638-6130.
- 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

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2860 Ponce de Leon Springs Road

Ponce de Leon, Florida 32455

(850) 836-4281

FloridaStateParks.org