



**Get Outdoors Florida!** is a coalition promoting outdoor experiences to help Floridians have healthier lifestyles and develop an appreciation for our abundant natural resources.

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## Welcome to the Apalachicola National Forest!

By Denise Rains

The 571,000 acre Apalachicola National Forest, the largest National Forest in Florida, lies just southwest of Tallahassee. The Apalachicola National Forest is richly diverse with sensitive plant and animal species. It is a landscape of ephemeral ponds, pitcher plant bogs, endangered and threatened plant and animal species, and sensitive cultural sites that could yield valuable insights about our ancestors. Not only does the Forest offer the local community many ecological benefits, it affords us many traditional recreational opportunities including camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, swimming, horseback riding, cycling, ATV and motorcycle riding.

Did you know that many unique opportunities also await you on the forest?

**Geology** – 5 miles of hiking trail lead to a series of sinkholes big and small at the Leon Sinks Geological Area. Leon Sinks is a series of wet and dry sinkholes in the unique Woodville Karst Plain (terrain that rain and groundwater have changed by dissolving through underlying limestone bedrock) that extends from Tallahassee south to the Gulf of Mexico.

**Scenic drives** – An excellent way to see the forest, the Forest's two scenic byways, the Apalachee Savannah (Liberty and Franklin counties) and Big Bend (Franklin, Wakulla and Leon counties), provide viewing opportunities of well-managed and pleasing forest landscapes and are great for a Sunday drive.

**History** – For history or Civil War buffs, a visit to Fort Gadsden Historic Site is a must. Fort Gadsden is the site of an old British fort on the Apalachicola River. Although, nothing remains of the fort except the rubble from the fort's stone walls, a short interpretive trail leads visitors around the site. The site is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and was named a National Historic Landmark in 1972.

**Bird and wildlife watching** – The best times of year to see birds and wildlife is in late spring and early fall. Resident birds include woodpeckers (pileated, red-bellied, and downy), pine warblers, brown-headed nuthatches, and northern bobwhites. Early in the morning and in the evening, you may see wild turkeys, fox squirrels, and white-tailed deer. Perhaps our highest profile endangered species is the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW).

**Wildflowers** – Many species of threatened and endangered plants are found here. The grassy, open Apalachee Savannahs sport the most diverse collection of wildflowers in the panhandle. These savannahs, often holding water all year long, host a stunning display of pitcher plants, sundews, wild orchids, asters, black-eyed susans, blazing star, Harper's Beauty, sneeze weed, and meadow beauty, among others.

**Seeking solitude** – The Forest's two wilderness areas (32,692 acres of federally proclaimed Wilderness) will give you an idea what Florida looked like before "civilization" arrived.

Having a National Forest in your backyard has many concrete and intrinsic values. Choose one way to enjoy your National Forest soon and Get Outdoors Florida! You will not regret it.

To learn more about these and other ways to experience the Apalachicola National Forest, contact your local Ranger District office or visit our web site at [www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida).

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