

Big Bend Wildlife Management Area: Tide Swamp



Photo by David Moynihan

Recreation Guide

Your guide to hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
MyFWC.com

What You Can Do



Photo by David Moynihan

Step off the beaten path for a memorable experience at the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Whether hiking, bicycling, viewing wildlife, hunting or fishing, adventurous recreationists will enjoy the diverse habitat at the Tide Swamp Unit of this WMA. Come, discover and explore!

Planning Your Visit

There is something to do year-round at Tide Swamp, whether it's a spring turkey hunt, scalloping season, summer beach time, or birdwatching during fall warbler migration. Find the information you need to plan your trip by visiting MyFWC.com/Recreation. Note that hunts occur on scheduled days, in specific areas. Wear bright orange clothing if you use trails during a seasonal hunt. Planning a picnic? Share your snacks with friends, but not the wildlife – for your safety and theirs. Vehicles are allowed on named and numbered roads only; four-wheel-drive is recommended in wet or sandy areas.

Wildlife Viewing



Photo by David Moynihan

View a great variety of shorebirds and waders year-round at Tide Swamp, a site on the Great Florida

Birding and Wildlife Trail (floridabirdingtrail.com). The observation tower at Hagen's Cove offers a particularly good view of area bays, marshes and mudflats; a spotting scope is helpful.

Plovers, sandpipers, marbled godwit, willet, American oystercatcher, dunlin, dowitchers and whimbrel gather here during spring and fall migration. Reddish egrets are sometimes spotted during late summer and fall. Special summer sightings include the magnificent frigatebird, swallow-tailed kite and gray kingbird. Bald eagles nest nearby and often soar overhead. Ospreys and brown pelicans fish year-round. In winter, expect flocks of white pelicans and a variety of waterfowl in open Gulf waters.



Photo by David Moynihan

Spot the single marbled godwit in this flock of wilets.

Keep an eye open for raccoons or white-tailed deer making their way through the marshes. Legions of tiny fiddler crabs scurry out of your path when you explore the water's edge. In the pine woods, watch for wild turkey, brown-headed nuthatch and a variety of woodpeckers. In the swamp, prothonotary warblers, barred owls, red-shouldered hawks and a range of songbirds are likely. You may spot a bobcat, otter, or fox if you explore the old tram roads. Winter months bring flocks of robins, goldfinches, yellow-shafted flickers and kinglets, as well as a phoebe or two.

Hiking, Bicycling and Horseback Riding

Recreationists can explore dozens of miles of largely remote, unpaved roads in Tide Swamp. The



FWC photo

area's many abandoned logging trams allow outdoor enthusiasts to design the length of ride or hike to suit their preferences.

Several bicycle routes following area roads are suggested on the map; park your car at the Dallus Creek boat ramp. Because the surface of some roads may be rough or sandy, off-road or fat-tire bicycles are recommended. Short marked walking trails at Dallus Creek Landing and Hagen's Cove allow nature-lovers to enjoy the area's great vistas. Horseback riders can use these trails or travel on the Driving Tour road.

Driving Tour

Roads pass through a variety of natural communities and offer scenic opportunities to observe wildlife and the ongoing restoration of wild lands. Pick up a copy of *An Afternoon at Tide Swamp* to guide you through the area's hardwoods and restoration areas. Check the vehicle use regulations in the Regulations Summary online.

Paddling

Paddlers can enjoy vistas of seemingly endless salt marsh and cabbage palm hammocks on the Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail that runs alongside the Big Bend coastline. (Details about the trail are featured on the map page of this brochure.)

Fishing and Scalloping



Creeks, streams and small ponds throughout Tide Swamp support many species of game fish including largemouth bass, catfish and several species of sunfish. Boat ramps provide access to the Gulf for anglers using shallow-draft boats. Always check the tide schedules before heading out. Spotted sea trout are abundant in March and April, and again in October and November. Hagen's Cove is a popular place to gig flounder at night. Scalloping is popular in summer months. Recreational harvesters need a Florida saltwater fishing license (see exemptions and harvest updates in MyFWC.com/Marine). Harvest regulations are subject to change.

Hunting

People have hunted on the lands now constituting the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area for many years. The Regulations Summary online outlines opportunities for archery, muzzleloading, small game and general gun hunting. Visit MyFWC.com/Hunting for a map or brochure of the individual units that make up this WMA.

Managing wildlife openings with prescribed fire and mowing encourages native plants that provide high-quality forage for dove, quail, deer and wild turkey, as well as for nongame wildlife and pollinators. As habitat restoration improves the upland portions of Tide Swamp, habitat quality and wildlife numbers also continue to improve.



How to Get to Tide Swamp

From Perry, travel 4.5 miles south on U.S. 19/98. Turn right on C.R. 361 and drive 22 miles to Hagen's Cove Road and turn right. To visit Dallus Creek, continue six miles south and turn right on Dallus Creek Road.

What it costs to visit

No entrance fee is required. To hunt or fish, you must possess the appropriate licenses and permits.

Want to know more?

MyFWC.com/Recreation

Need a hunting or fishing license?

Toll-free at 888 HUNT-FLORIDA (486-8356) or 888 FISH-FLORIDA (347-4356) or MyFWC.com/License

Area lodging, camping and restaurants

Perry-Taylor County Chamber of Commerce (850) 584-5366 or taylorcountychamber.com

Dixie County Chamber of Commerce
dixiechamber.org

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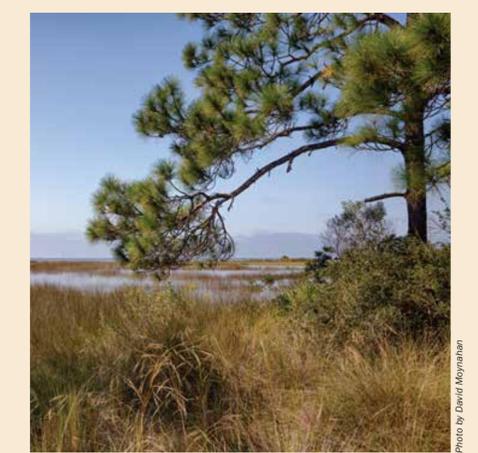


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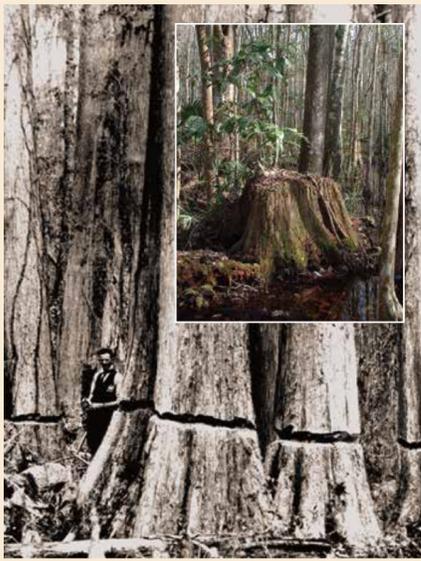


Photo by Susan Cornilean

Cypress stumps are all that remain of these vanished giant trees.

During the 1920s and early 1930s, timber companies cut and removed virtually all the mature longleaf pine and cypress trees. Visitors can now walk or drive on the remnants of the raised trams that had been constructed to support railroads to transport enormous trees to lumber mills farther inland. Building these logging roads through the dense swampy forest was a daunting task that required many laborers and much financial backing. Although an industrial achievement for the times, these logging practices scarred the pristine land for many years.

The first step was to cut down the hardwood trees, placing them end-to-end in two parallel lines, the length of the planned tram. Cypress crossties were placed across the hardwood trunks, and steel rails were anchored to the crossties with spikes. "Sand cars" backed down the crossties, pouring sand among the trees and ties to stabilize the tram. At

that point, railroad cars were able to motor into the swamp along the tram system to bring the enormous cypress back to the camp. After most of the original cypress and longleaf pine trees were harvested out, the upland portion of the property was further degraded when it was converted into plantations of fast-growing sand pine and slash pine for commercial pulpwood production.

The value of Tide Swamp's marshes, swamps and uplands to the water quality and overall health of the Gulf and its fisheries is undeniable. In 1986, the Nature Conservancy purchased the land from Buckeye Cellulose; a year later the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) purchased and now manages this irreplaceable coastal landscape for a wide variety of wildlife, and for an abundance of human recreational uses.

From top down: gopher tortoise, indigo snake. Butterflies are Appalachian brown, cloudless sulphur, zebra swallowtail, banded hairstreak.



Photo by Cliff Leonard



Photo by David Moynihan



Restoring the Uplands

Inland from the great expanse of forested wetlands, ongoing restoration of important upland wildlife habitats continues. Nearly all of the once-commercial pine plantation acreage is being transformed back into a sandhill, scrub or pine flatwoods community.

Well-planned site restoration began at Tide Swamp in 2006, with removal of the commercial sand pine plantations. The managers conducted intensive site preparation activities, which included stump removal, disking and grading. The sites were then seeded with native grasses, herbs and forbs, which are maintained with periodic prescribed burning. Soon after a burn, a carpet of wiregrass, deer tongue, liatris and other native plants will thrive.



FWC photo

Restoring the area began when biologists removed the old pine plantations and invasive plant species.



FWC photo

Biologists use specialized equipment to plant native plant seeds; longleaf seedlings are planted by hand.



Photo by Susan Cornilean

Tide Swamp is the largest of the five units that make up the Big Bend WMA. With active management practices, this unit's native habitat is being restored.

These native plant communities create favorable conditions for the gopher tortoise, northern bobwhite quail, indigo snake, songbirds and other wildlife. Restored areas are home to a large variety of resident and migratory butterflies as well, including: Appalachian brown, great southern white, zebra swallowtail, spring azure, banded hairstreak and several skippers. Butterflies and other important pollinators are attracted to native plants, and depend on the flowers, leaves, seeds and fruits for food and shelter. Managers at Tide Swamp adjust mowing schedules during peak wildflower periods to provide butterflies with two types of plants – nectar for the adults to feed on and host plants for the caterpillars to eat.



FWC photo

Ongoing restoration encourages high-quality forage for dove, quail and wild turkey.



FWC photo

Why Use Fire?

Prescribed fire restores habitat conditions that benefit wildlife. Controlled burns clear dead and overgrown brush from beneath trees and release nutrients into the soil, which allows sunlight to reach the ground and stimulate seeds to sprout. This low-growing new growth provides a nutritious food source for wildlife.



Photo by David Moynihan

After a controlled burn, the process of renewal begins – nourishing grasses burst from the enriched soil to provide forage for deer and other wildlife.

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GRAB YOUR PADDLE

Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail

Sea kayaking enthusiasts with advanced paddling and navigational skills may want to explore this challenging state-designated trail, which traverses 105 miles of shallow, remote coastline. Starting at the Aucilla River, the trail ends at the Suwannee River. Endless vistas of salt marsh and cabbage palm hammock create a backdrop for seasonally abundant waterfowl, pelicans and marine life.



Photo by David Moynihan

The Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail is part of the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail, which connects and promotes trails managed by numerous agencies and communities along Florida's coastline.

This true wilderness adventure may include high winds, waves and lightning, as well as shallow waters during low tides. Cell phone coverage is not dependable in this area. It is essential to use charts, tide tables, a compass and reliable GPS unit.

For more information on the Big Bend Saltwater Paddling Trail or to purchase a paddling guide, visit MyFWC.com/Recreation, then click on "paddling trails." The paddling guide is divided into sections, each covering about five miles of coastline (four trip options of three days/two nights); the entire trail takes nine days/eight nights.



Photo by Tim Donovan



Photo by David Moynihan

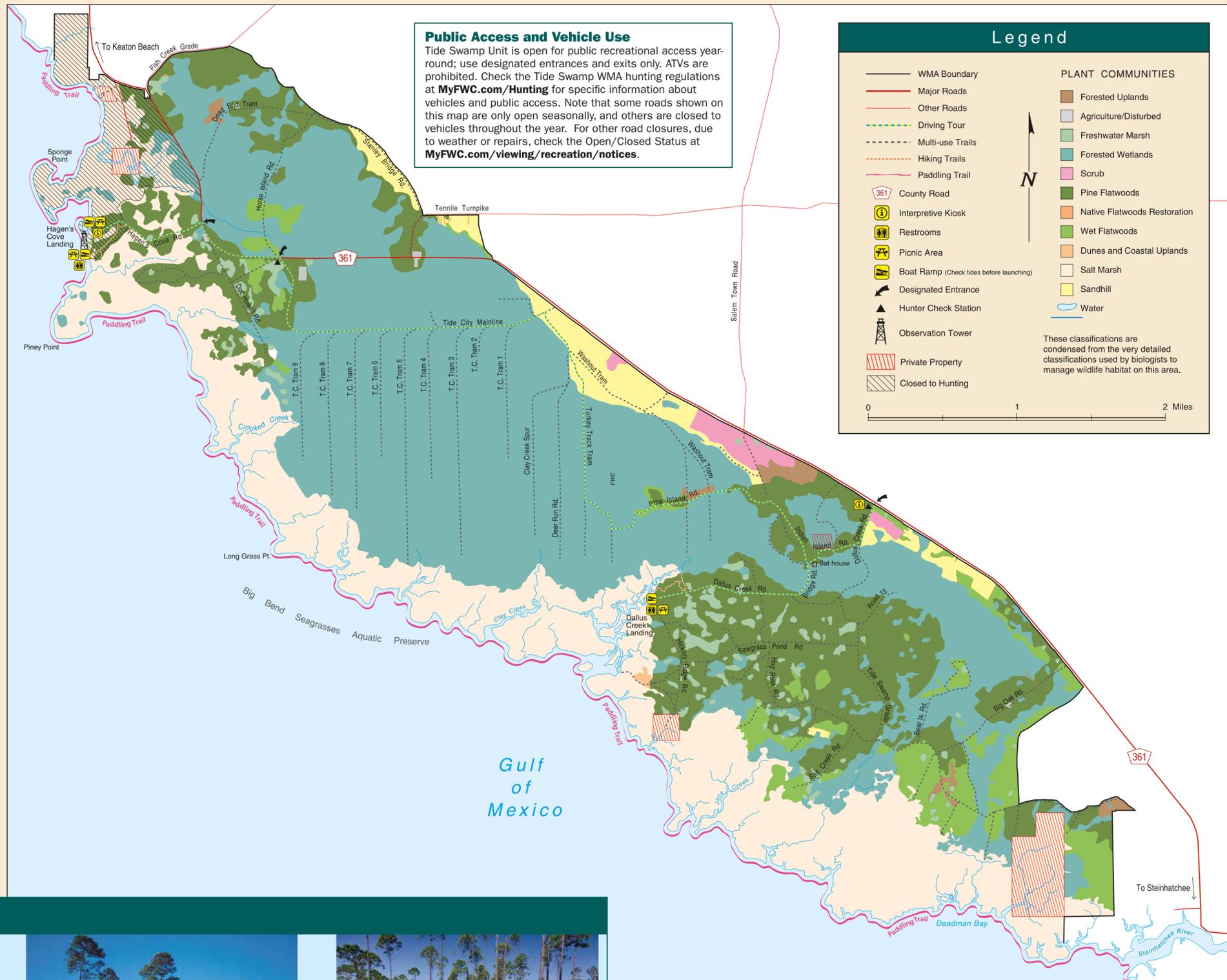
In the Seagrasses and on the Shore – Find Scallops, Crabs and so Much More

Delicious and beautiful, bay scallops are indicators of the health of Florida's seagrass beds. Marine scientists consider bay scallops as "the canary in the coal mine" because their sensitivity to environmental disturbances reflects the health of the shallow saltwater communities where they live. Many Gulf Coast areas have seen a loss of bay scallops over the past 50 years. Most recreational harvesters need a Florida saltwater fishing license (unless they are exempt from needing a license; or have a shoreline fishing license and are only wading to collect).



Watch for throngs of fiddler crabs at the edge of the salt marshes, where they scurry and scavenge among the grasses. At high tide, they'll be hiding in burrows, but at low tide, you'll need to step lightly to avoid them, as they roam about in search of food. They serve as a vital part of the coastal food chain for fish, birds and a host of mammalian predators. Anglers use them as bait to attract black drum, redfish and other crab-eating fish species.

Sometimes horseshoe crabs swim into shallow water or soft sandy areas to feed or mate. Horseshoe crabs are often called "living fossils" because fossils of their ancestors date back about 450 million years. Horseshoe crabs are not true crabs at all – they are more closely related to spiders, scorpions and other arachnids.



What does this wild land grow?



Salt Marsh

Expansive miles of salt marshes threaded with remote tidal creeks fringe the western border of Tide Swamp. A host of animals in various stages of life take refuge in the tangled salt marsh grasses and reeds. Many of Florida's popular marine fisheries species spend the early part of their lives protected in salt marshes.



Forested Wetlands

The interior of Tide Swamp is comprised of thousands of acres of hardwood swamp and forest, often flooded with standing water. Huge stumps remind us of the impressive bald cypress that once dominated the forest. Cypress trees have not regrown in the numbers they once occurred – red maple, sweet gum, winged elm, magnolia, ashes and red cedar now dominate the forest overstory. Luxuriant ferns and palms enliven the forest floor.



Pine Flatwoods

These forests of widely spaced pine trees with sparse oak understory and a fairly dense ground cover of grasses and herbs were once more widespread on this WMA, and are being restored. Gopher tortoise, northern bobwhite, fox squirrel and the indigo snake were among the native wildlife that once lived in these forests. After the virgin pines were logged out, much of this plant community was converted to sand or slash pine plantations.



Native Flatwoods Restoration

Previous landowners replaced the native forests with more commercially valuable pine plantations. Most of these former sand pines and slash pines have been replaced with native longleaf pine. The dense row-crop pine plantations were "wildlife deserts" where few native species prospered. By using prescribed fire and other management techniques, the restored native plant communities now provide food and habitat for wildlife.

American Oystercatcher

The distinctive black and white American oystercatcher is a Species of Special Concern in Florida. Its thick, reddish-orange, knifelike bill can probe wet sand, jab into partially-open shellfish, or pry open bivalves. These large waders are often spotted along the Gulf Coast, in Apalachicola Bay, Tampa Bay and the Cedar Keys.

The adult birds scrape out several depressions in the sand before choosing one to line with pebbles, shells or vegetation. Oystercatchers nest on high, sandy dunes or low, flat sandy areas close to the high-tide line. Since the best nesting sites are limited, it's important to steer clear of posted areas to give these rare birds the best chance of reproductive success.

