



## CT Trip Planning

Thinking of a long-distance journey on the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail? Several factors and considerations should be part of your preparation and planning.

**Pre-Planning.** Download text guides and maps from the Office of Greenways and Trails website or purchase all text in one document on Amazon.

In addition, the [Florida Paddling Trails Association website](#) offers valuable information about the trail, including downloadable satellite-view maps, navigation files, an Interactive Trail map, Trail FAQs, the CT Registry, and links to blogs from past and sometimes current thru paddlers. Some of the information is only available to members. The purchase of navigational charts, available at most marine supply stores, is also recommended.

**Reservations and Permits.** Maintaining the circumnavigational trail is a low-budget operation that largely depends upon volunteers, so there is no central permitting/reservation body for the trail. Where required, permits and reservations must be obtained from the many parks and private businesses along the trail. These may be found by perusing the segment trail guides. Many motels and state park and private campgrounds, especially in central and south Florida and in the Keys during peak seasons (holidays and early spring), require advance reservations in order to be assured a spot. Bring a cell phone and call ahead as soon as you have a good idea of your schedule.

**Segment 5 - Crooked River:** To reserve Crooked River campsites online, go to Reserve America ([www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com)) – Tate’s Hell State Forest.

Once there, you’ll find 12 areas listed. Only 4 have campsites on the Crooked River. Once you go to any of the 4 areas (in bold) below, you have to click on “Book a Campsite” for the list of individual campsites to come up.

**1. Rock Landing Campground** has campsites #41, #42, and #43. All those sites are in the same location at Rock Landing.

**2. Crooked River Primitive Campsites** section has campsite #44 and #45.

**3. Pickett’s Bay Primitive Campsites** section has #46 (Rollaway), #47 (Oxbow) and #48 (Warren Bluff)

**4. Womack Creek Primitive Campsites** section has Campsite #28 (Loop Road)

**Segment 6 – Big Bend:** Camping in the Big Bend portion of the trail managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (Aucilla River to the town of Suwannee, part of segment 6), free permits are required and can be [reserved online](#).

**Segment 14 – Everglades National Park:** Before camping in Everglades National Park, you must obtain a permit, preferably online or at Everglades City’s visitor center. **Wilderness permits are required for all overnight camping in the backcountry.**

Campers have a choice: (a) Advanced reservations or (b) Walk-up reservations.

(a) **Advanced Reservations:** Campers can make advanced reservation which are available on a rolling basis, three months in advance of the start date. Wilderness **permits must still be picked up in person** at the Gulf Coast Visitors Center at Everglades city or Flamingo Visitor Center no sooner than 24 hours in advance of your trip. Wilderness permits can be picked up between 8:00am and 4:30pm year-round (hours subject to change, please call ahead to confirm).

(b) **Walk-up Reservations:** Campers may still pick up a permit in-person at the Gulf coast or Flamingo Visitor Centers on a first-come, first-served basis. Permits cannot be obtained sooner than 24 hours in advance of the start of the trip.

**There is a \$21 administrative fee plus an additional \$2 per person per night use fee.** The costs will apply for advanced reservations and walk-up permits year-round. A credit card is needed for both online and in-person permit reservations.

There are multiple primitive campsites in the ENP stretch of the CT, so to be assured of getting campsites reserved, be flexible in your planning. [Reservations can be made online](#).

ENP primitive campsites are listed in **three sections**, and you will likely have to go to all 3 to make your reservations. Below are the locations of the primitive campsites for the coastal (outside) route:

**Gulf coast:** Rabbit Key, Turkey Key, Highland Beach

**Flamingo:** Graveyard, Northwest Cape Sable, East Cape Sable

**Key Largo:** Little Rabbit Key

To make reservations for the **Flamingo Campground**, call 855-708-2207 or go [online](#).

Be sure to leave a detailed float plan with a reliable friend or relative before you begin your journey.

**Experience.** Long distance paddlers should be competent in all types of environments and conditions, capable of dealing with strong winds and currents, and skilled at crossing open water stretches and boat channels. You should be able to navigate at night and in poor visibility, capable of using navigational maps and charts and a GPS system, and trained in advanced rescue techniques, wilderness first aid and primitive camping skills. The trail is marked by GPS points on a map, not by signs. Cell phone coverage can be spotty in some sections. A SPOT tracking device is recommended.

It is especially important to field test your equipment beforehand under various conditions, especially all electronic equipment and items such as dry bags, tents and rain gear. Some paddlers have learned the hard way that the “waterproof” label is not always accurate. Online and magazine reviews of equipment can also be helpful, along with consultation with outfitters and other paddlers.

**Distances.** In several stretches, one must paddle more than 20 miles to reach a legal campsite or motel. For this reason, proper conditioning and equipment, and awareness of weather forecasts and wind conditions, are all imperative. Stiff fines and possible arrest can result from illegally camping on private or public lands, especially military lands and national wildlife refuges. Only emergency conditions such as injury or dangerous weather should dictate a decision to stop short of an authorized overnight stop.

**Weather.** As with any long-distance paddling journey, weather may not always be ideal. Storms and high winds can prohibit travel for a day or more. Lightning can be especially dangerous. Occasional storm days should be factored into your planning. A weather radio is an important addition to your equipment list along with the ability to read changing weather conditions while in the field.

**Timing.** Generally, it is best to avoid the summer hurricane season for a long-distance journey. Recommended paddling months are late October through April. Bugs and hot steamy weather, along with lightning storms, will be less prevalent as well. The entire trail is about 1,515 miles, but side trips and extreme low tides can add more miles. Allowing for some days off, plan to take about four months if planning to traverse the entire trail. Or, paddle the trail in segments over a longer period of time. Make your trip a journey of discovery, not a race.

**Budget.** Be realistic about costs. While every effort has been made to provide low cost or free campsites for paddlers, motel stays will occasionally be necessary. Waterfront motels, and some established campgrounds, can be expensive, depending on the season and locale.

**Supplies.** Plan on having 4 to 7 days’ worth of supplies at any given time, depending on the segment. The longest stretch without an opportunity to re-supply will be from Everglades City to the Keys in segments 14 and 15. While we list or describe a few supermarkets within easy

walking distance of the trail, there are several more that may require a longer walking distance. Inquire locally for directions. Some small towns or fish camps may only have a convenience store for re-supply. In some places, care packages can be sent ahead to post offices in care of general delivery, but your arrival time needs to coincide with post office hours. Also, for those with special dietary restrictions and/or the need for certain prescription medications, post office drops may be essential in some areas. See data book summary for list of recommended post offices.

Regarding water, you'll be able to replenish water supplies almost daily in developed sections of the trail due to the many parks along the route. However, in the Big Bend and Ten Thousand Islands/Everglades in particular, fresh water re-supply opportunities can be spaced several days apart. See segment guides for specifics. The general rule is to figure on one gallon of water per person per day. Be mindful that animals such as raccoons on remote coastal islands may seek your fresh water as much as your food. Hang food and water or store in secure hatches.

**Trail Direction and Camping.** Although the trail was originally designed to go north to south along the Gulf Coast, and south to north along the East Coast (counterclockwise), the trail can now be paddled in either direction. For many fragile coastal camping sites, the size limit is 8 persons and 4 small tents. Campsites are often on a first-come, first-serve basis and are not always limited to paddlers. Camping rules may differ according to the managing entity. Follow [Leave No Trace guidelines](#) when primitive camping.

**Trail changes.** Hurricanes, business closings and other factors can alter trail conditions and overnight stays. Check the Circumnavigational Trail website for trail updates. Maps and segment guides on the website will occasionally be revised, so download or peruse the latest versions before beginning serious planning. Contact the trail manager if you encounter situations that differ from what is currently on the website.