



The Nature Conservancy / Florida Chapter

APALACHICOLA RIVER & BAY

Saving Florida's Last Great Places

rare plants & animals

- red-cockaded woodpecker
- Florida torreya
- Florida yew
- few-flowered croomia
- Florida anise
- fire-back crayfish
- Apalachicola dusky salamander
- flatwoods salamander
- sea turtles
- nesting shorebirds
- migratory birds & butterflies
- Gulf sturgeon



view of Alum Bluff at Apalachicola Bluffs & Ravines Preserve © Harold E. Malde

Description

The lands and waters of the Apalachicola River region are like nowhere else on Earth. The Apalachicola is Florida's largest river. The region's high concentration of rare and unusual plants and animals, and its location in an area of tremendous growth, make it a critical site for conservation.

The Apalachicola River is formed by the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers, which flow from the Appalachian foothills to Apalachicola Bay, one of the most productive and pristine estuaries in the Northern Hemisphere.

The Apalachicola River supports the highest diversity of freshwater fish species in the state, and its

basin holds the second highest concentration of amphibian and reptile species in North America. Bluffs as high as 200 feet lie along the river, and pine woodlands provide habitat for the world's largest population of red-cockaded woodpeckers. Rare geologic formations called steep-head ravines along the river create a dramatic relief on the landscape, shelter rare plants and animals and have crystal clear streams that flow into the river from the bottoms of the ravine.

The bay's barrier islands are nesting grounds for sea turtles and shore birds and provide a critical resting and feeding area for Neotropical migrating birds.

Threats

The Florida Panhandle is experiencing explosive growth and change. Rapid development; forest destruction, conversion and fragmentation; and fire suppression threaten the lands surrounding the Apalachicola River and Bay.

On the river, reservoir operations and water withdrawals from the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers have changed the Apalachicola's natural flow, threatening the survival of native species and cutting off the state's largest forested floodplain. Other threats include navigational channel dredging that destroys river habitat and increases bank erosion. Meanwhile, dams on the rivers



heron and sea oats on Apalachicola Bay barrier island © Richard Bickel

northwest florida preserves

Apalachicola Bluffs & Ravines Preserve, Liberty County

Calhoun Spigellia Preserve, Calhoun County

John S. Phipps Preserve, Franklin County

Jeff Lewis Wilderness Preserve, Franklin County

Rock Hill Preserve, Washington County

Aspalaga Tract, Gadsden County

block fish from important spawning and nursery habitat.

Conservancy Action

The Conservancy works at a large scale to conserve and restore the lands and waters of the Apalachicola River and Bay region. Since 1968 we have helped protect more than 190,000 acres here including 50 miles of riverfront. Two decades ago, The Nature Conservancy led the effort to protect the spectacular bluffs and ravines along the eastern shore of the Apalachicola River in Liberty County. Today the Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve encompasses almost 6,300 acres and a variety of natural areas.

The Nature Conservancy also owns and manages two barrier island preserves and six other preserves. In total, we manage more than 10,050 acres in the region.

The Conservancy is restoring damaged forests and natural areas so that native plants and animals can thrive. We share expertise and resources with other land managers, influencing the conservation and management of hundreds of thousands of acres in the Apalachicola River region and throughout the Southeast.

The Conservancy is actively involved in policy issues of the river and bay, and is working with the states of Florida, Alabama and Georgia to forge an agreement that will lead the way for the future of aquatic conservation throughout the Southeast. The Conservancy is also working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners to develop fish passages and modify dam operations so that species, including the endangered Gulf sturgeon, can find their way to spawning grounds.

Future Goals

We will continue to work with willing landowners on behalf of our state partners to purchase additional acres critical to maintaining a healthy Apalachicola River and Bay system. Our goal is to develop a corridor of conservation land from the Apalachicola Bay to Georgia.

We will expand efforts to restore the biologically rich longleaf pine and wiregrass forests throughout the region and will share scientific expertise with our public and private land management partners. We will also work with partners to develop restoration plans to

repair river areas damaged by dredging and navigation.

With the support of concerned individuals, foundations and corporations, we can ensure a bright future for the Apalachicola River and Bay.

For more information about how you can help, contact the Conservancy's Northwest Florida Office at (850) 643-2756, or the Conservancy's Florida Chapter at (407) 682-3664.

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The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.