

Blueway Trails



**A Guide for the
Canoe/Kayak Enthusiast**

CHARLOTTE
COUNTY
Parks,
Recreation
and
Cultural
Resources
DEPARTMENT

How to Use This Guide

This guide provides information on the excellent paddling opportunities in and around the Charlotte Harbor estuary. Charlotte County's shoreline is divided into the following three regions: West County, Mid-County and East County. Trail routes for each section are shown in color on the aerial photomap. The trails are numbered to correspond with the information provided in the table. The information table shows the trail name, region, lengths, classification, accessibility, and the trail's scenic rating. A lettered facility guide is provided to show launch areas, type of access, parking or launch fees and amenities such as water, food, and restroom locations along the trails.

Explanation of Classifications

These guidelines are for educational purposes only. They are not intended to provide a basis for evidence of responsibility or negligence in any legal action. All uses of the outlined trails are at the users own risk. Each area and each situation may require different responses and judgments by the user based on his/her ability and current evaluation of the situation. Factors that can change the classification of a trail include weather, time of year, time of day, group and individuals needs.

BEGINNER: Involves gentle paddling in lakes, deltas, creeks and embayments, in inhabited, non-challenging, protected waterways exposed to slight currents or tides. Such trips are usually undertaken for a secondary purpose such as birding, fishing, or photography. Trips will generally require less than two (2) hours of paddling.

NOVICE: Involves protected water in lightly populated areas with occasional exposure to moderate currents or tides. Sheltered coves or landing areas available every mile or so with no crossing greater than two miles. Trips will generally require less than four (4) hours. On-board water and snacks are recommended.

INTERMEDIATE: Involves exposure to open water subject to moderate currents, tides and wind. Landing areas may be unavailable for up to five miles. Moderate hazards may exist such as bottom conditions and unrestricted motorboat traffic. Trips will generally require less than six (6) hours. Trail may be difficult to follow. On-board food and water is required.

EXPERT: Involves exposure to broad reaches of open water with potential for heavy currents, tides, wind and surf. Areas may be remote with assistance more than four hours away. Landing areas are not predictable. Uncharted hazards and conditions may exist. Trips may require exceed eight (8) hours. Thorough knowledge of trail route and conditions required. On-board food and water required.

Charlotte County Blueway Trails

	Trail Name	Region	Length	Difficulty	Access		Scenic		Overall Rating
1	Bird Key Trail	West County	.8 miles	Novice	Good	7	Wild	9	8
2	Boca Grande Trail	West County	3 miles	Novice	Good	7	Wild/Dev	8	7
3	Bogges Hole Trail	West County	3.4 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	8	9
4	Buck Creek Trail	West County	2 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	8	9
5	Bull Bay Bypass	West County	4.9 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	9	9
6	Bull Bay Trail	West County	3.3 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	9	9
7	Cantelas Trail	West County	3.6 miles	Novice	Good	6	Wild	9	7
8	Cattfish Creek Trail	West County	1.6 miles	Beginner	Good	8	Wild	8	8
9	Cattle Dock Trail	West County	1.3 miles	Intermediate	Good	6	Open	7	6
10	Coral Creek Trail	West County	1.6 miles	Beginner	Very Good	9	Developed	6	8
11	Grande Tour Trail	West County	2.8 miles	Beginner	Very Good	9	Developed	6	7
12	Inter Coastal Trail	West County	18.3 miles	Novice	Fair	4	Open/Dev	6	6
13	Little Gasparilla Trail	West County	1.1 miles	Novice	Good	7	Dev 6	6	7
14	M Cantelas Trail	West County	7 miles	Novice	Good	7	Wild/Dev	7	7
15	Oyster Creek Trail	West County	1.7 miles	Beginner	Fair	4	Wild/Dev	6	5
16	Rock Creek Trail	West County	1.3 miles	Beginner	Good	6	Wild/Dev	5	5
17	Santa Fe Trail	West County	11 miles	Beginner	Poor	5	Wild/Dev	7	6
18	Shallow Water Trail	West County	2.9 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	9	9
19	Sister Ponds Trail	West County	2.7 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	9	9
20	Tour Trail	West County	2.2 miles	Beginner	Very Good	8	Wild	8	8
21	Trout Creek Trail	West County	1.7 miles	Intermediate	Good	8	Wild	8	7
22	Turtle Bay Trail	West County	4.5 miles	Novice	Very Good	9	Wild	9	9
23	West Wall Trail	West County	12.7 miles	Expert	Good	6	Wild	9	8
24	Whidden Trail	West County	3.9 miles	Novice	Good	7	Wild/Dev	8	9
25	Widden Creek Trail	West County	3.9 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	9	9
26	Woolverton Trail	West County	3.2 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	9	9
27	Arapahoe Trail	Mid County	5.2 miles	Beginner	Good	5	Wild/Dev	8	6
28	Deep Creek Trail	Mid County	1.9 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	9	9
29	East Spring Lake Trail	Mid County	1.5 miles	Beginner	Very Good	9	Wild/Dev	8	8
30	Ghost Point Trail	Mid County	1.6 miles	Novice	Good	6	Developed	9	7
31	Gulf Cove Trail	Mid County	3 miles	Intermediate	Good	7	Open/Dev	6	6
32	Harbor Heights Trail	Mid County	8.7 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild/Dev	9	8
33	Lewis Creek Trail	Mid County	.7 miles	Novice	Good	6	Wild	8	6
34	Long Lake Trail	Mid County	8.9 miles	Novice	Good	5	Wild/Dev	8	9
35	Muddy Cove Cut	Mid County	1 miles	Novice	Good	7	Wild	7	7
36	Muddy Cove Trail	Mid County	1.1 miles	Novice	Good	6	Developed	9	7
37	Myakka Cut Off	Mid County	8 miles	Intermediate	Good	8	Wild	8	8
38	Myakka River Trail	Mid County	14.3 miles	Intermediate	Poor	5	Developed	7	6
39	Sasha's Trail	Mid County	2.7 miles	Novice	Good	6	Wild	8	8

Charlotte County Blueway Trail System

Trailhead Access Points

	Facility	Access Type	Condition	Food	Water	Restrooms	Parking Fee	Launch Fee
A	Middle Beach Manasota Key Dr.; Englewood	Ramp	Good	No	No	Yes	No	No
B	Indian Mound Park 210 Winson Ave.; Englewood	Beach	Good	No	No	Yes	No	No
C	Ainger Creek Park 2025 Placida Rd.; Englewood	Ramp	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
D	Cedar Point Environmental Park 2300 Placida Rd.; Englewood	Dock	Poor	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
E	Oyster Creek Regional Park 2333 Placida Rd.; Englewood	Sand	Good	No	No	No	No	No
F	Stump Pass State Park Manasota Key Rd.; Englewood	Beach	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
G	Buck Creek Preserve 5400 Placida Rd.; Englewood	Sand	Good	No	No	No	No	No
H	Thorton Key Englewood	Sand	Good	No	No	No	No	No
I	Placida Park 6499 Gasparilla Rd.; Placida	Ramp	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
J	Grande Tours 12575 Placida Rd.; Placida	Ramp	Good	No	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
K	Uncle Henry's Marina 5800 Gasparilla Rd.; Boca Grande	Ramp	Fair	No	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
L	Boca Grande Pier Park 5810 Gasparilla Rd.; Placida	Sand	Fair	No	No	Yes	No	No
M	South Gulf Cove Park 10150 Amicola St.; Port Charlotte	Ramp	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
N	El Jobean Park 4333 Kerrigan Cir.; El Jobean	Ramp	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
O	Tippecanoe Environmental Park 2300 El Jobean Rd.; Port Charlotte	Grass	Good	No	No	No	No	No
P	Spring Lake Park 20080 Edgewater Dr.; Port Charlotte	Ramp	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Q	Sunrise Park 20499 Edgewater Dr.; Port Charlotte	Sand	Good	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
R	Tropical Paradise B&B 19227 Moore Haven Ct.; Port Charlotte	Dock	Fair	No	Limited	Limited	No	No
S	Port Charlotte Beach Park 4500 Harbor Blvd.; Port Charlotte	Beach	Good	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
T	Bayshore Live Oak Park 22976 Bayshore Rd.; Charlotte Harbor	Sand	Fair	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
U	Chester Roberts Park 5084 Melbourne St.; Port Charlotte	Sand	Good	No	No	No	No	No
V	Harbor Heights Park 27420 Voyageur Dr.; Harbor Heights	Ramp	Good	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
W	Nav-a- Gator Grill 9700 SW Riverview Ct.; Arcadia	Ramp	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
X	Rhyal's Ranch Preserve East of U.S. 17 North of Washingotn Loop Rd.; Punta Gorda	Sand	Good	No	No	No	No	No
Y	Prairie Creek Access Washington Loop Rd.; Punta Gorda	Roadside	Poor	No	No	No	No	No

Blueway Trails....

Explore the Excitement!

Charlotte County Blueway Trails Continued

	Trail Name	Region	Length	Difficulty	Access		Scenic		Overall Rating
40	Spring Lake Trail	Mid County	.9 miles	Beginner	Very Good	8	Developed	7	7
41	Three Lakes Trail	Mid County	1.2 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	5	8
42	Tippecanoe Trail	Mid County	2.8 miles	Novice	Fair	5	Wild	9	8
43	Tranquility Island Trail	Mid County	10.3 miles	Novice	Good	7	Wild/Dev	7	7
44	West Spring Lake Trail	Mid County	2.3 miles	Beginner	Very Good	9	Wild/Dev	8	8
45	Alligator Creek Trail	East County	4.8 miles	Novice	Fair	6	Wild/Dev	9	7
46	Barge Canal Trail	East County	.6 miles	Intermediate	Very Good	9	Wild	8	8
47	Dead Lake Trail	East County	3.1 miles	Intermediate	Very Good	9	Open/Dev	6	7
48	East Wall Trail	East County	8.3 miles	Expert	Poor	4	Wild	9	7
49	Explorer Trail	East County	2.4 miles	Intermediate	Poor	6	Wild/Dev	7	7
50	Gaspar Trail	East County	.7 miles	Intermediate	Poor	4	Wild	9	7
51	Mosquito Trail	East County	1.2 miles	Intermediate	Poor	4	Wild	9	7
52	North Fork Trail	East County	1.9 miles	Novice	Fair	5	Wild/Dev	6	7
53	Outer Shell Creek Trail	East County	7.4 miles	Novice	Good	8	Wild	8	8
54	Prairie Creek Trail	East County	6.1 miles	Novice	Good	7	Wild	9	8
55	Shell Creek Trail	East County	4.1 miles	Intermediate	Good	8	Wild	9	8
56	Spider Trail	East County	3.4 miles	Intermediate	Poor	4	Wild	9	7
57	Upper Shell Creek Trail	East County	2.2 miles	Intermediate	Good	8	Wild	9	9

Rating System: 1 - Poor 9 - Excellent

Charlotte County Blueway Trail System Trailhead Access Points Continued

	Facility	Access Type	Condition	Food	Water	Restrooms	Parking Fee	Launch Fee
Z	Shell Creek Preserve End of Nellis Ln.; Punta Gorda	Sand	Good	No	No	No	No	No
AA	35461 Washington Loop Rd.; Punta Gorda	Ramp	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
BB	Riverside Park 8320 Riverside Dr.; Punta Gorda	Ramp	Good	No	No	No	No	No
CC	Darst Park 537 Darst Ave.; Punta Gorda	Ramp	Good	No	No	No	No	No
DD	Luishely Park 100 Nesbit St.; Punta Gorda	Ramp	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
EE	Ponce de Leon Park 4000 W. Marion Ave.; Punta Gorda	Ramp	Good	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
FF	Allapatchee Shores Park 3100 Hickory Ct.; Punta Gorda	Ramp	Good	No	No	No	No	No
GG	Taylor Rd. Access Taylor Rd.; Punta Gorda	Roadside	Poor	No	No	No	No	No

Habitats You Can Expect to See

SEAGRASS BEDS

Seagrasses are underwater flowering plants that inhabit the nearshore areas of our coastal waters. They are predominantly found in protected bays and lagoons where the water is fairly clear and wave action is moderate. The four most common types of seagrasses that occur in southwest Florida and the Charlotte Harbor area are **shoal grass** (*Halodule wrightii*), **turtle grass** (*Thalassia testudinum*), **manatee grass** (*Syringodium filiforme*), and **widgeon grass** (*Ruppia maritima*). They can form thick, expansive areas known as **seagrass beds** or **meadows**.



Seagrass beds are of vital importance to the health of our estuarine waterways. Seagrasses form the base of a large underwater community. Seagrasses are vital to water quality by trapping sediment particles and stabilizing bottom sediments. Dense seagrass beds serve as a lifelong shelter for many species of small fish and invertebrates. Many recreational marine fish and crustacean species are dependent upon seagrass beds at some stage of their life. Seagrasses will primarily be found in protected areas of shallow clear water throughout the West County blueway trails. While in the seagrasses, watch for schools of young fish darting past, crabs crawling through the grasses and on occasion catch a glimpse of a manatee or dolphin looking for a snack.

Seagrass beds are fragile and extremely vulnerable to human impacts. Boat propellers and anchors can cut through seagrass blades and roots. Damage from "prop dredging" can take up to ten years to recover. Utilization of best management practices during construction activities, control of contaminants such as fertilizers from entering area waterways, and safe boating practices are necessary in order to preserve and protect our seagrass beds.

SALT MARSHES

Salt marshes are **tidal wetlands** that occur along low-energy coastlines and river shorelines. They are characterized as expanses of grasses, rushes, and sedges, and are usually found in the zone between low and high tide. Typical plant species found in our area salt marshes include **smooth cordgrass** (*Spartina alterniflora*), **black rush** (*Juncus roemerianus*), **salt meadow cordgrass** (*Spartina patens*), **salt grass** (*Distichlis spicata*), and **salt wort** (*Batis maritima*).



Salt marshes are one of our most biologically productive ecosystems. Movement of the tides distributes decomposing plant material through the salt marsh, providing food for many species of animals and forming the base of the marsh food web. The salt marsh serves as a nursery for several species of fish, crabs, and shellfish. Many species of birds forage and nest in salt

marshes. Salt marshes also buffer upland areas from storm surge, helping to protect homes and other developments. Salt Marshes will typically be seen in the riverine systems along the Myakka River in Mid-County and the Peace River tributaries in East County. Expect to see wading birds hunting for food, wide varieties of juvenile fishes and marine life, as well as alligators peering out from the water throughout the riverine systems. Keep an eye out for cypress domes along the upper Peace River and its tributaries.

Despite their ecological importance, nearly half of all of Florida's marshes, both saltwater and freshwater, have been lost to development, dredging, and mosquito control impoundments during this century.

MANGROVE FORESTS

Mangrove forests, or **mangrove swamps**, are also tidal wetlands that inhabit low energy shorelines in the coastal areas of southwest Florida. Mangrove trees are specially adapted to salt- and brackish-water environments. Although there are more than 50 species of mangroves that grow in tropical climates worldwide, there are four species found in our area: **red mangrove** (*Rhizophora mangle*), **black mangrove** (*Avicennia germinans*), **white mangrove** (*Laguncularia racemosa*), and **buttonwood** (*Conocarpus erecta*).



Red mangroves grow at the water's edge, and are nicknamed "the walking tree" for their long, dark-red, aerial prop-roots. In the summer months, they produce pencil-shaped seedlings, or **propagules**. One red mangrove seedling can be the start of a new island. Black mangroves have a dark trunk, and may grow to be 60 feet tall. Their extensive root system has finger-like projections called **pneumatophores** that stick out of the sand by up to six inches. White mangroves are usually found growing landward of red and black mangroves and can be distinguished by their rounded, bright-green leaves. Buttonwood trees inhabit areas landward of the other mangroves, well above high tide and often in uplands. A variety of this tree, silver buttonwood, is a common specimen tree or hedge and has silvery, soft leaves.

Mangrove forests are very high in ecological value, and contribute much to the health of our waterways and local economy. Their root systems stabilize shoreline areas, buffer storm surge, and help to prevent erosion. They provide nesting sites for shorebirds, and habitat and nursery grounds for many species of fish and invertebrates. Mangrove forests are the primary habitat found throughout the West, Mid, and East County blueway trails. The mangrove forests provide home to a wide variety of wading bird species, native reptiles and great fishing locations.

As with our other significant coastal habitats, the importance and beauty of mangroves have not always been recognized. Although now protected by State law, vast areas of mangrove forests have been lost over the last 50 years due to development, and trimmed or severely altered for creation of waterway views.

History of the Area

The archeological record of Charlotte Harbor dates back some 3,000 years. The area's first inhabitants were mound builders, who constructed numerous shell mounds and established camps along the harbor. The first European to visit the area was probably Ponce de Leon in the early 1500s. Hernando de Soto is believed by some historians to have ventured here in 1539, followed by Pedro Menendez D'Aviles in 1556. In 1774, English explorer Bernard Romans surveyed the area and named it Charlotte Harbor in honor of Queen Charlotte Sophia, wife of King George III. The United States took possession of Florida in 1819.

In 1862, rangers Joel and Jesse Knight constructed a cattle dock on the northern shore of Charlotte Harbor. The dock was used by local cattlemen to load their shipments, sold primarily to the Confederate Army. A holding pen, general store, and homes were constructed in the area surrounding the dock. This first settlement, which predated Punta Gorda and Englewood, was known as Live Oak Point, Hickory Bluff and eventually, Charlotte Harbor. The Charlotte County Historical Center is appropriately located adjacent to the site of the old cattle dock at Bayshore Live Oak Park.

For more information on environmental parks and upcoming programs in Charlotte County contact:

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www.CharlotteCountyFL.com

It Starts
in Parks

The Charlotte County Blueway Trails system is incorporated into the extensive Statewide Florida Greenways and Trails system providing for connectivity through an inclusive interconnected network of greenways, trails and waterways. Come and experience the beauty of the barrier islands, tidal creeks, estuary bays, and course Charlotte Harbor. Explore the excitement of the wonders of the natural environment the Blueway Trails has to offer. Look for these signs along the trails as you enjoy your canoe and kayaking adventure!



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