

SANTA ROSA COUNTY NATURE TRAILS

Whether tourists want to hike, bike, roller-skate, or horseback ride, Santa Rosa County destinations offer many outdoor alternatives to actively connect with nature. The scenic terrain ranges from sugar white sand dunes and emerald waters to lush forests and meandering rivers to small towns and historic districts.

While Navarre offers miles of protected beach great for picnics, bike tours, and camping, Blackwater River State Forest and its surrounding area – dubbed the “Canoe Capital of Florida” – boasts more than one million acres of Floridian wilderness, attracting hikers, bird watchers, and campers from both near and far.

Trails in Blackwater River State Forest: Although this rolling forest is best known for its beautiful streams, it also has enough trails to keep hikers and mountain bikers moving. Outdoor enthusiasts can explore the “real Florida” on trails ranging from 2–mile hiking trails to 40–mile canoe to equestrian trail systems. Along the way, they might spot endangered animals such as bald eagles, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and gopher tortoises.

The State Forest is home to the following trails: Jackson Red Ground Trail, Sweetwater Trail, Wiregrass Trail, Juniper Trail, Bear Lake Hiking Trail, Bear Lake Biking Trail, Sweetwater Creek/Juniper Creek Canoe Trail, Blackwater River Canoe Trail, Coldwater Creek Canoe Trail, Coldwater Creek Equestrian Trail System, and Old Spanish Trail.

Blackwater Heritage Trail: Located in historic Milton, Blackwater Heritage Trail is an 8.5–mile paved trail excellent for biking, running, walking and roller-skating. The first seven miles of the trail are on the original bed of the historic Florida and Alabama Railroad, built in the early 1900s. Wildlife species to watch out for include the American alligator, Florida pine snake, osprey, southeastern kestrel, northern harrier, river otter, and bobcat.

Florida Trail: Designated as one of eight National Scenic Trails in 1983, this 1,300–mile Florida Trail meanders from the Gulf Islands National Seashore near Pensacola to Big Cypress National Preserve near Miami. The trail enters Santa Rosa County at the National Seashore in Navarre Beach, winds northward through Holley, and finally into Blackwater River State Forest, where visitors can either take a hiking or canoeing route to continue the trip. The Florida Trail is the perfect way to discover Northwest Florida’s rivers, deep woods, and unsurpassed scenery.

Seashore Bicycle Trail: Gulf Islands National Seashore, showcasing miles of protected beaches along the Gulf of Mexico, is a place of myriad riches. The South Santa Rosa Loop Trail begins at the Navarre Beach Nature Walk, traverses through the Seashore, along several shaded picnic areas, crosses the Pensacola Beach Bridge, and returns along the Naval Live Oaks of Gulf Breeze back to Navarre. Created for joggers, cyclists, inline skaters, and hikers, this multi- use trail encompasses the beauty of the area, with gigantic sand dunes, oak forests, and expansive views of the Gulf of Mexico.