



Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park

Real Florida Guide

Note: Colored numbers correspond with numbers on the map. GPS coordinates are in decimal-degrees. **Red** = Introduction, **Green** = Day 1, **Blue** = Day 2



[Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park \(1\)](#) covers more than 43,000 acres in northeast Charlotte and Lee Counties. The state park consists several noncontiguous parcels that protect five aquatic preserves: Pine Island Sound, Matlacha Pass Gasparilla Sound-Charlotte Harbor, Cape Haze, and Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserves. It is the third largest Florida State Park and serves to protect

water quality and creates continuity of wildlife habitat. Visitors can take advantage of opportunities to hike, fish and paddle to observe wildlife in the park's many natural communities, including mangrove forests, marshes, tidal creeks, scrub habitats and pine flatwoods. The administrative, resource management and facilities maintenance offices are located at the Punta Gorda parcel. Other upland area access points for mountain bikers, hikers and bird-watchers are available in Port Charlotte, Cape Haze, Cape Coral and Pine Island.

There are a great variety of events and activities to choose from both in the park and in the region. Some of the best are provided by two organizations. The [Friends of the Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves](#) is the citizen support organization for the five aquatic preserves and the state park, and holds frequent educational events such as



snorkeling eco-ventures and volunteer [events](#).

Visitors can also enjoy two Environmental Centers operated by another volunteer not-for-profit organization, [Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, Inc.](#) (CHEC). The organization promotes environmental conservation of the greater Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay region. The CHEC provides hands-on programs in-water and on-land, including guided hikes, pontoon boat excursions, sea-grass adventures and more. Check their website for upcoming [events](#) available at both locations.

Day 1, Environmental Center



The best place to start your explorations is the CHEC located at the [Alligator Creek Preserve \(2\)](#) near the City of Punta Gorda. Call 941-575-5435 for more information. The kids will love the interactive exhibits in the Caniff Building and the resources available here provide a great overview of the region and adjacent state park to the south. The CHEC Alligator Creek Preserve is the trailhead and parking area for [three loop trails](#) and includes an additional southern connector trail, offering almost five total miles of hiking and mountain biking possibilities.

This system is made up of the Eagle Point Trail which loops .9 miles round-trip north of the education center's main building through pine and scrubby flatwoods that harbors red-shouldered hawks and downy and red-bellied woodpeckers before circling a needlerush marsh and freshwater lake. This trail links south into the Flatwoods Trail, a 1.3-mile loop through pine flatwoods dotted with cypress domes. The third loop is the Three Lakes





Trail running .7-miles west of the Flatwoods Trail to the edge of several mangrove-lined lagoons. The Hidden Hammock Trail leaves south from the Flatwoods Trail to connect the 1.1-miles to the Old Datsun Trail.

The Old Datsun Trail (3) is a 1.7-mile loop and includes a trailhead and parking area. This location is also the state park's administrative office and maintenance facility. The trail is one of two in the state park that is designated as part of the [Great Florida Birding Trail](#) in the south region. The trail gives you the chance to find white-eyed vireos, screech-owls and great horned owls, and red-shouldered hawks in the uplands. American bald eagles and wood storks are also possibilities. The trail accesses two isolated wetlands and offers pine flatwoods mixed with oak/cabbage palm hammocks in an interesting example of habitat succession to wildlands from former 1905 agricultural fields.

Day 2, Hiking and Birdwatching

Also part of the Great Florida Birding Trail, on the state park's Cape Coral parcel is the North Cape Flats Trail (4), a 1.0-mile hike through predominately pine flatwoods that ends at Charlotte Harbor, where coastal berm and mudflats provide an end-of-hike treat. Plan your walk so that you arrive at low tide. The flatwoods give way to a harbor overlook, where you will see wading birds such as the American oystercatcher and white ibis, and possibly American bald eagle.



Choose



from these

additional options to plan more hiking and birding adventures on other Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park parcels. Public hiking trails are accessible on the Port Charlotte parcel's Tea Street Trail (5), accessible through the [Tippecanoe Environmental Park](#) managed by Charlotte County.



On the Cape Haze parcel, the Amberjack Scrub Trailhead (6) located at the end of York Street includes a .75 mile trail. Seven gates along Rotonda Boulevard and Rotonda Trace provide additional hiking access via walk-throughs including the Coral Creek Trailhead (7); The Catfish Creek Trailhead (8), a one-mile hiking trail is located off the east side of Hwy 771 approximately 1.5 miles north of the small coastal Town of Placida; and the Sargassum Trail (9)

located at gate #5.

On the Pine Island parcel of the state park the 2-mile Little Pine Island High Marsh Trail is accessible from the north side of Pine Island Road (10).

Day 3, Canoeing and Kayaking

The park's more than 80 miles of shoreline, mostly shallow water fringed by mangroves, is best accessed by kayak or canoe. These areas provide the best opportunities to meander through the coastal waters and inland tributaries to view wading and shore birds, manatees, dolphins and crustaceans. Portions of two paddle trail systems wind through the state park. To identify suitable paddling opportunities, peruse the website for the [Great Calusa Blueway](#), 190-miles of marked canoe and





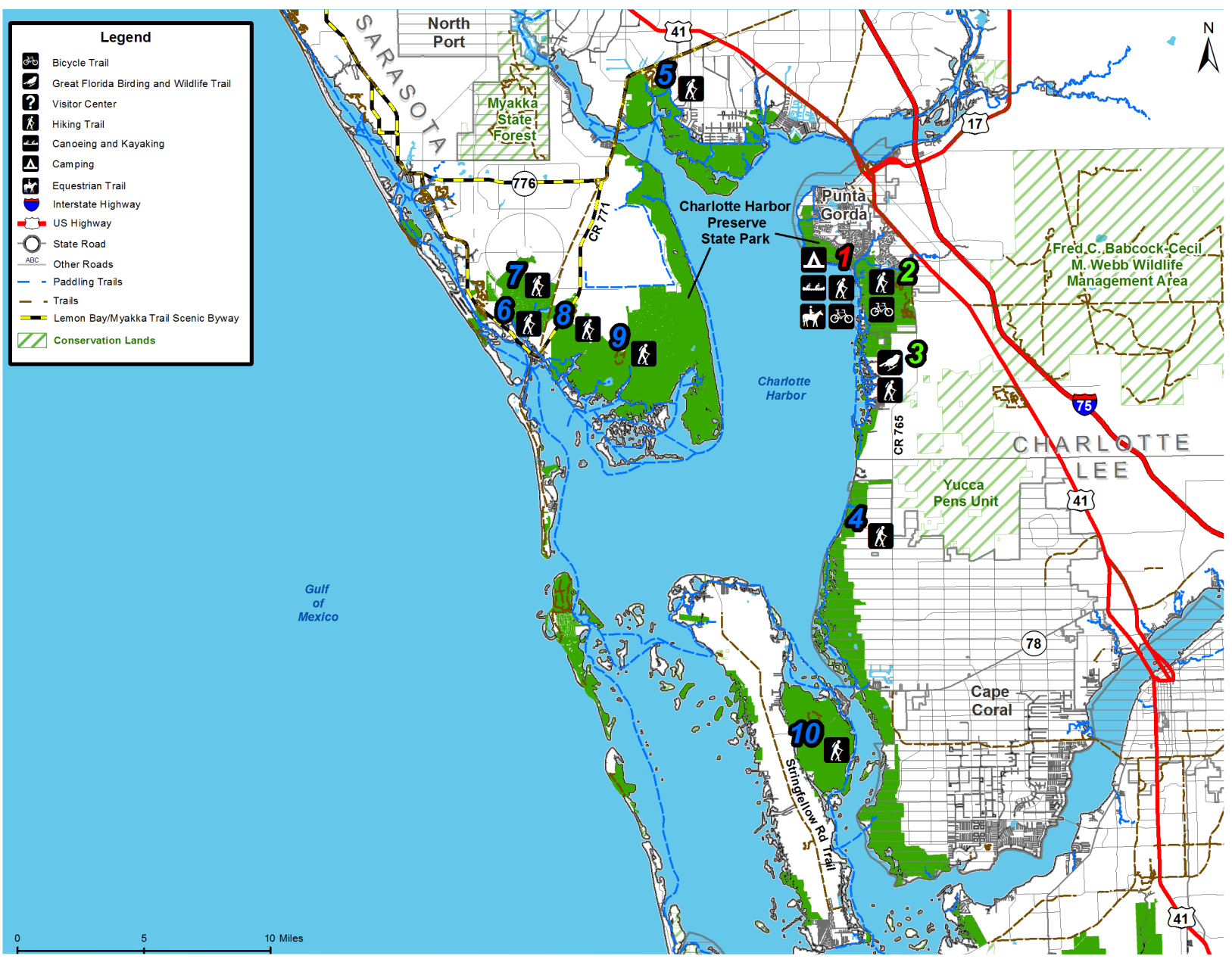
kayak trails in Lee County. The [Charlotte County Blueway Guide](#) covers the paddling trails of Charlotte County. Both websites provide paddling friendly resources such as options for boat rentals, launch sites, guided tours and lodging.

Additionally, the [Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail](#) is divided statewide into 26 segments. Three segments of the Circumnavigational Trail follow the coastline of Lemon Bay, Charlotte Harbor and Pine Island Sound. Segment 10 runs from the New Pass in Sarasota through Little Sarasota and Lemon Bays to Stump Pass Beach State Park; Segment 11 runs from Stump Pass Beach State Park and Don Pedro Island State Parks through Lemon Bay, Gasparilla Sound, and Boca Grande Pass to Cayo Costa State Park; and Segment 12 starts at Cayo Costa State Park and runs to Estero Bay via Matlacha Pass, ending at Lover's Key State Park.

Other Activities

Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park is an important link to several regional conservation lands with many outdoor recreational opportunities. Explore the options that include Lee County [Conservation 20/20](#) lands; Charlotte County [Environmental Lands](#); [Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed](#) lands; [Calusa Land Trust](#) conservation lands; [Cayo Costa State Park](#), [Don Pedro Island State Park](#), [Gasparilla Island State Park](#), [Mound Key Archaeological State Park](#), [Koreshan State Historic Site State Park](#), and [Estero Bay Preserve State Park](#); [Fred C Babcock / Cecil M. Webb Wildlife Management Area](#) and [Yucca Pens Unit Wildlife Management Area](#); [Myakka State Forest](#); [J.N. Ding Darling](#), [Matlacha Pass](#), [Pine Island](#) and [Island Bay](#) National Wildlife Refuges, and [Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation](#) lands.





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