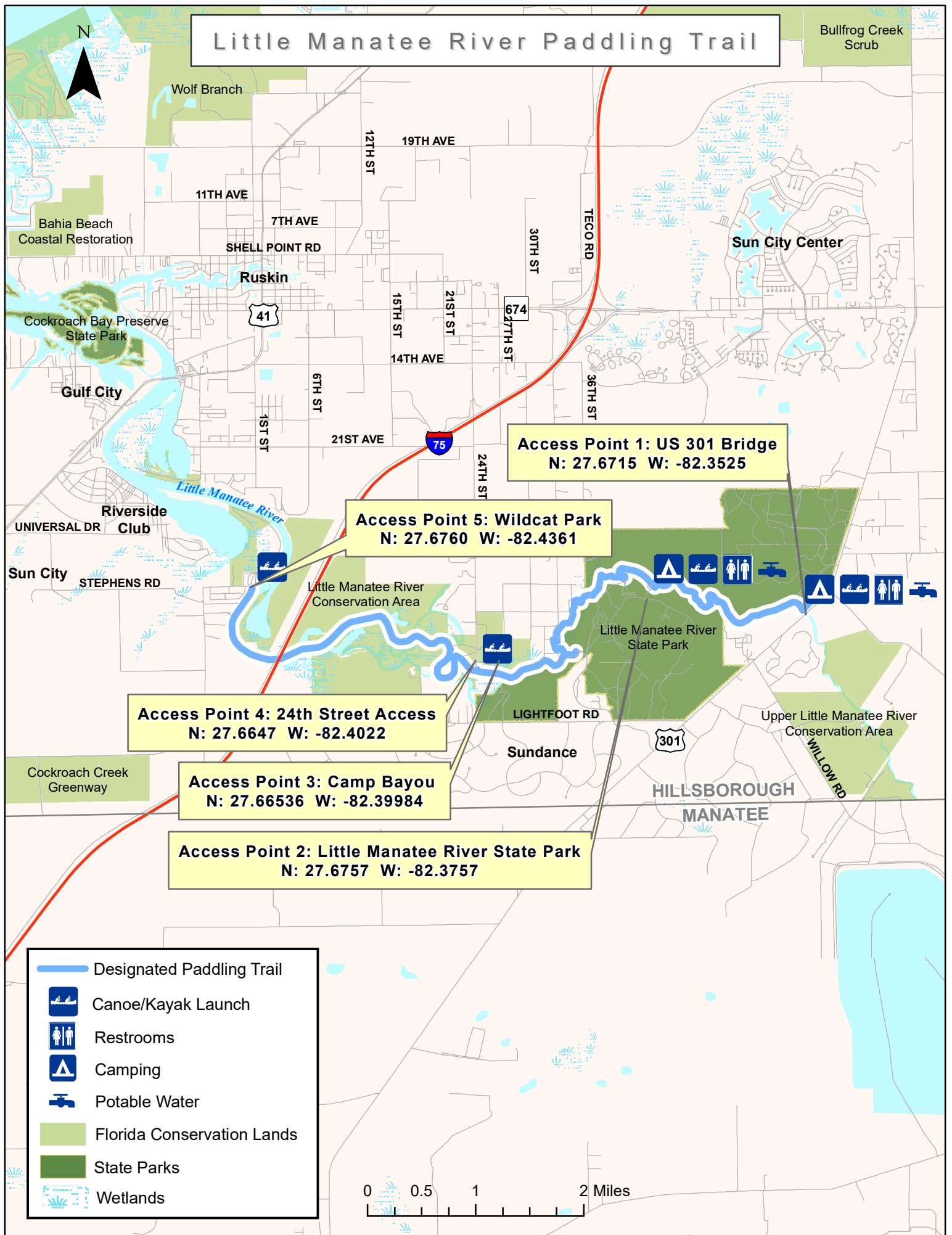


Little Manatee River Paddling Trail





Paddling Trail Guide

The Waterway

Only 25 miles from Tampa, the Little Manatee River is a classic tannin-stained Central Florida stream that begins in a swampy area near Fort Lonesome and flows almost 40 miles before emptying into Tampa Bay. The river has been designated an Outstanding Florida Water and is part of the [Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve](#). In a day's paddle, it transitions from a 10 to 20-foot wide creek meandering through ash and oak dominated floodplain forest to a 300-foot wide tide-influenced river fanning through tidal marsh that empties into Tampa Bay.

The Paddling Experience

This easy 10-mile trip is suitable for beginners and multiple access points allow paddlers to create a trip of different lengths. The sandy river bottom and gently sloping banks create a number of inviting spots to stop and stretch or picnic. The designated trail begins branching just south of the Little Manatee River State Park. It is not uncommon for paddlers to get disoriented here. Paddlers are advised to carry a good map, compass, and a GPS. As a rule of thumb, stay left at decision points, and know that direction of travel is also the direction of flow of the river. Paddlers can continue beyond the end of the designated paddling trail.

The river empties just north of Cockroach Bay and south of E.G. Simmons Park. Both locations are very popular paddling spots. However, boat traffic increases considerably as one paddles closer to the Gulf. Most people do not paddle below 24th Street since the river widens considerably below this point. The [Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center](#) on 24th Street is open Thursday – Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Outfitters also offer trips through undeveloped sections of the upper Little Manatee River above the designated trail, launching at Leonard Lee Road or CR 579. This section of the river is more narrow and wild, with tight turns, faster water and a more extensive canopy. It offers several hours of enjoyable paddling, but it is considered more challenging. An old railroad bridge in this upper section marks the spot where the famous "Orange Blossom Special" once crossed the river. It is about 6 river miles to Highway 301 from the CR 579 Bridge and about 10 miles from the Leonard Lee Road Bridge. Contact outfitters for more information about this upper section.

Access Points

#1, Start of the Trail, Canoe Outpost, US 301 Bridge

You can park at the bridge or pay a small fee and park and launch more securely at the nearby [Canoe Outpost-Little Manatee](#). *From I-75, exit #240 at SR 674 and go east about 3 miles to US 301. Turn right (south) onto 301 and follow about 3 miles to bridge and cross to the southwest side.*

#2, Mile 3.0, [Little Manatee River State Park](#),

Check with the staff at the entrance gate for information about access to the river. *Directions: From I-75, exit at SR 674 (College Ave). Follow 674 east 3 miles to US 301. Turn right (south) onto 301. After 4 miles, turn right onto Lightfoot Rd. The park entrance is on the right.*



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#3, Mile 6.3 Camp Bayou. A universally accessible launch and safer parking is located next to [Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center](#). Parking is limited and turnarounds can be challenging. Note that the center is open Thursday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. *From I-75, exit at SR 674 (College Ave.) and head west. Drive 1 mile and turn left (south) onto 24th Street. There is no traffic light at this intersection. Drive 2.5 miles to the river access.*

#4, Mile 6.5, 24th Street Access. This launch is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day of the week, but the parking area is not monitored.

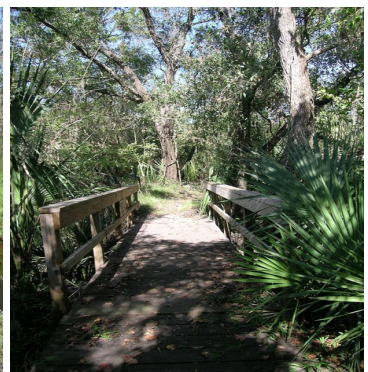
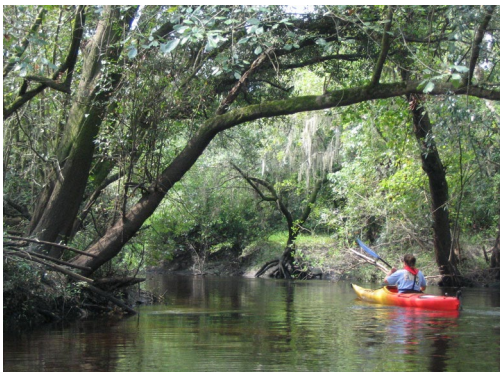
#5, Mile 10.0 End of the trail, Wildcat Park, The Park is on the west bank with a boat launch; plenty of parking but no toilets. *From US 41 in Ruskin, turn east onto Universal Drive. Travel 0.5 miles and take a right onto Stephens Road. Follow Stephens Road about 2.5 miles as it winds around a number of sharp turns and ends at Wildcat Park.*

Outfitters and Shuttle Service

[Canoe Outpost Little Manatee.](#) 813-634-2228

Base Camp

Nature enthusiasts will appreciate the rare ecosystems found within [Little Manatee River State Park](#), including sand pine and oak scrub and oxbow wetlands. The park makes a great base camp for exploring the area and can be enjoyed while hiking, biking, paddling, and horseback riding. Within the park, the Little Manatee River flows for 4.5 miles through eleven unique natural communities. One of the premier hiking trails of Southwest Florida, a 6.5-mile stacked loop is located in the wilderness area in the north half of the park. The Oxbow Nature Trail, accessible from the main picnic area in the southern half of the park, makes a one-mile loop along scrub ridges that skirt the main river and an oxbow wetland. In addition, over 15 miles of equestrian and multi-use trails meander through the southern half of the park. Come picnic in one of the riverside pavilions or stay for the night in the full facility campground. Little Manatee River State Park is one of the best kept secrets of Hillsborough County and has a little something for everyone



Photos: FWC