What You Can Do Here
Indulge your passion for adventure at Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Rare sandhill and scrub plant communities and the largest coastal hardwood swamp south of the Suwannee River create a scenic backdrop for a range of outdoor pursuits. Everyone, from hunters to hikers to birders, values Chassahowitzka’s habitats and wildlife. Come explore!

Planning Your Visit
There are recreational opportunities available yearround at Chassahowitzka, from turkey hunting in spring to a fall display of colorful wildflowers. With the WMA’s roads and trails, find the information you need to plan your trip by visiting MyFWC.com/Chassahowitzka. Note that hunts occur on scheduled days, in specific areas. Wear bright orange clothing if you use trails during a hunt. Planning a picnic? Share your snacks with friends, not wildlife — for your safety and theirs.

Wildlife Viewing
The diversity of native plant communities on Chassahowitzka creates habitats where you are likely to encounter a wide range of native birds and other animals on your visit. Roads and trails are located along the high sandhill ridges on the eastern border of Chassahowitzka Swamp. These edges between different types of habitats are often great for wildlife viewing. Walk or bike along Indigo Lane, and you may catch a glimpse of anything from an otter or bobcat to a Florida black bear, especially early in the morning and in the evening. Watch for shortheaded hawks and barred owls, as well as pileducks and other woodpeckers, and a whole suite of resident and migratory woodland songbirds.

East of Indigo Lane you will find the Cypress Circle trail, where you can walk the perimeter of a key Florida landscape feature: the cypress dome. In spring and summer, look overhead for swallow-tailed kites. During spring and fall migrations, any number of warblers, thrushes, vireos, orioles and other birds use this favored habitat to rest and refuel. In the fall, you will see an assortment of butterflies nectaring on asters, blazing star and other native flowers.

On Wild Turkey Trace trail, west of Indigo Lane, keep your eyes open for the gopher tortoises that roam these open woodlands. More than 350 animal and insect species use gopher tortoise burrows for refuge from predators and the hot sun. Wild turkeys, white-tailed deer and fox squirrels are other woodland residents you might see.

Bicycling
Break out your offroad bikes and explore Chassahowitzka’s beauty. Miles of roads offer the adventurous cyclist the opportunity to explore subtle changes in forested wetlands. Some roads may be seasonally closed to bicycling. For more information see the WMA regulations brochure at MyFWC.com/Hunting.

Sandhill Restoration
In 1932, the Centralia sawmill received this huge Cypress log that stilled 5,478,000 board feet of wood and amounted to $59,387. The tree was displayed on a railroad flatcar.

Between 1910 and 1917, Centralia Cypress Company operated a lumber mill at Centralia, a town of 1,500 laborers and their families. Centralia Mills, one of the largest in the state, could produce 100,000 board feet of lumber each day during peak periods. But by 1917, after loggers had stripped the swamp of its best timber, the mill ceased operation. Centralia became a ghost town.

In 1985, the land that would become Chassahowitzka WMA was purchased through the State of Florida’s Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) program. Smaller tracts have been added since. The large and wild area is being restored to support a variety and abundance of wildlife.

A Recovering Landscape
Found in one of the fastest growing regions in Florida, Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a key piece of a nearly unbroken stretch of protected public lands reaching 200 miles from Pasco County to the Apalachicola River.

Here you can hunt deer and waterfowl, or hike trails around a cypress dome and through rare sandhill and scrub plant communities. You may come across a gopher tortoise or a family of wild turkeys, or even catch a glimpse of an elusive Florida black bear.

Thousands of years before Europeans arrived, Native Americans hunted, fished and gathered wild plants along Florida’s Gulf Coast. Evidence of several Native American communities has been found within the WMA on the high and dry sand ridges bordering the eastern edge of the Chassahowitzka Swamp.

Although no encampments or other sites have been found, the Seminole Indians were known to have been in the area during the Second Seminole War (1835-42). They named the region Chassahowitzka, meaning “pumpkin hanging place.” The small, climbing variety of pumpkin this name referred to is now rare and perhaps even extinct.

In the early 1900s, the swamp’s ancient stands of huge bald cypress trees were logged, radically altering the face of this landscape. After the marketable cypress were removed, loggers cut red cedar trees, which were manufactured into pencils and cigar boxes. A system of elevated trams was constructed for mules to haul timber from the swamp to a railroad in Homosassa. Many of these trams remain today.

Diving Safety
Management activities at Chassahowitzka WMA protect resources below the surface, too. The network of underwater caves under your feet provides a habitat for rare species such as the coastal lowland cave crayfish. The caves also serve as a setting for one of the world’s most deadly sports: cave diving.

Buford Spring, a 167-foot descent, and Eagle’s Nest Sink, regarded as the “Mount Everest of cave diving,” contain otherworldly passages. Both caves have claimed lives.

Several factors make diving in Buford Spring and Eagle’s Nest Sink dangerous: the need for specialized equipment, the distance from the surface, and the lack of maze-like passages all contribute to hazardous conditions. Even experienced cave divers have perished here. Underwater caves, beautiful as they are, do not forgive mistakes.

A Chassahowitzka WMA SCUBA Diving Registration is required and must be on file with FWC prior to SCUBA diving at Eagles Nest Sink or Buford Spring.

A Daily Use Permit or Management Area Permit is required to enter this area. For information on entry fees, visit the Planning Your Visit page located at MyFWC.com/Chassahowitzka.

To hunt or fish you must possess the appropriate licenses and permits.

Find the information you need to plan your trip by visiting MyFWC.com/Hunting at

More interested in land travel? Check out the Florida’s Adventure Coast Visitors Bureau at (352) 754-4405 or 1-800-601-4580; FloridaAdventureCoast.com

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How to get to Chassahowitzka
From I-75, take Exit 301. Travel west on State Road 50 to U.S. Highway 19 in Weeki Wachee. Turn right (north) on U.S. 19, and drive about seven miles to the WMA entrance on the left (west) side of the road. The main entrance to the Anfruntigah Hammock Tract is on the north side of the Tract. If you are traveling northwest on U.S. Highway 58, the entrance will be on your left.

What it costs to visit
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Need a hunting or fishing license? Call toll-free (888) HUNT-FLORIDA (888-488-3556) or (888) FISH-FLORIDA (347-4356), or go to MyFWC.com/Licenses.

Area lodging, camping and restaurants
Contact the Florida’s Adventure Coast Visitors Bureau at (352) 754-4405 or 1-800-601-4580; FloridaAdventureCoast.com

In a natural fire regime, thick bark and a deep root system give young pines an advantage over oaks. Wingseed, the understory companion to the longleaf pine, is highly flammable and carries fires low across the landscape.

Because these natural communities went without fire for so long, land managers weren’t able to bring about the routine periodic burning. So many oaks were growing under the pines that dangerous wildfires would surely have resulted.

Managers broke the Restoration process into several steps, first thinning undesired oaks to reduce shading and make controlled burning safer. They then prescribed fires to stimulate growth, setting the stage for a diverse mix of shrubs, grasses and flowering plants to emerge.

Controlled burns also help various native animal species, including the rare gopher frog. These frogs spend most of their lives underground in the burrows of the similarly named gopher tortoise. Each year they return to the temporary ponds which soon dry up, forming new ponds. During the periodic fire to clear out shrubs and peat buildup, these wetlands begin to disappear, and gopher frog populations decline. Fortunately, due to FWC’s sandhill restoration, gopher frogs and other native species are beginning to increase in number at Chassahowitzka WMA, a good sign of the success of sandhill restoration.
Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area

PLANT COMMUNITIES

Agriculture/Disturbed
Dry Hammock
Forested Wetlands
Freshwater Marsh
Pinelands
Pineland Savannas
Sawgrass
Scrub
Wet Flatwoods
Wet hammocks
Private Property
Sandhill Restoration
Water

LEGEND

WMA Boundary
Major Road
WMA Road
Cheek Roads
Hiking Trail
Town
(All vehicle access)
Federal Highway
State Highway
County Road
Equine Parking
Interpretive Walks
Interpretive Trail
Parking
Plaza Area
Restrooms
WMA Office
Entrance
Hunter Check Station
Gate

0 1 2 3 Kilometers
0 1 2 Miles

Areas Inventory.

developed by the Florida Natural
from the natural area classifications
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Salt Marsh

Fringing the western border of the WMA are thousands
of acres of tidal salt marshes. This wildlife habitat
extends to the Gulf of Mexico and is under the management
of the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge.

Wet Hammock

These well-developed hardwood and cabbage
dry hammocks are a prominent feature at
Chassahowitzka. In wet hammocks, soils may be
saturated for long periods, but standing water is
seasonal, so cypress trees are sparse. Typical ground
features are limestone outcrops.

Barred owls inhabit
Chassahowitzka’s swamps
and hammocks. These owls
never build their own nests.
Instead, they take over the
nests of squirrels or hawks,
or nest in hollow trees or
cavities. Listen for this owl’s
distinctive call, “Who cooks for
you? Who cooks for you all?”
especially in the early winter
months as nesting begins.

Photographs (from left to right):
Forested Wetlands, David Moynahan;
Wet Hammock, FWC; Sandhill, Steve Brinkley;
Barred Owl, FWC; Salt Marsh, Joyce Allen/USFWS.

Forest of Mexican Oak

The heart of Chassahowitzka consists
of thousands of acres of hardwood
swamps and forests, punctuated by creeks,
marshes, scrub islands and springs. Huge
stumps remind us of the impressive bald
cypresses that once dominated the forest
before logging. Red maples, sweet gums,
elephants, magnolias, ashes and red oaks now
dominate the overstory in places.

Sandhill

Ideally, this natural community consists of longleaf pines and a variety
of oak species, with sawgrass, saw palmettos and flowering native
plants carpeting the ground. Many years of excessive timber harvesting and
fire suppression degraded Chassahowitzka’s sandhills, but area managers
are working to restore them. Currently, the WMA is a great place to see sandhill
habitat in various stages of restoration.