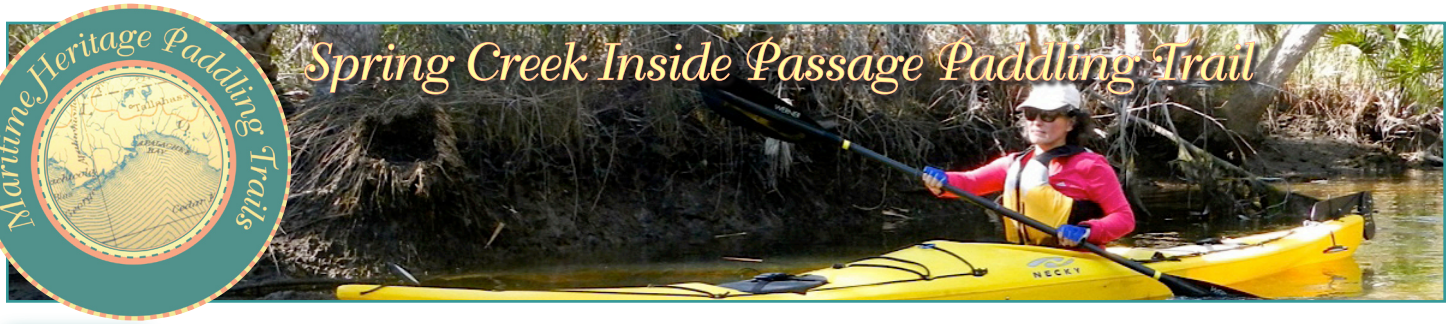
Spring Creek Inside Passage Paddling Trail



Overview:
Begin at Bottoms Road Boat Ramp. Paddle north, along the shoreline of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Stop at Skipper Bay to rest or for a picnic. Continue into Oyster Bay toward the town of Spring Creek. Time permitting, paddle up Spring Creek and explore the upwelling springs around town. End at RV Park Boat Landing.

Considerations:
Paddle near shore in shallow water. Watch for exposed oyster bars. Route is susceptible to wind and currents. Best traveled on an incoming high tide with little wind.

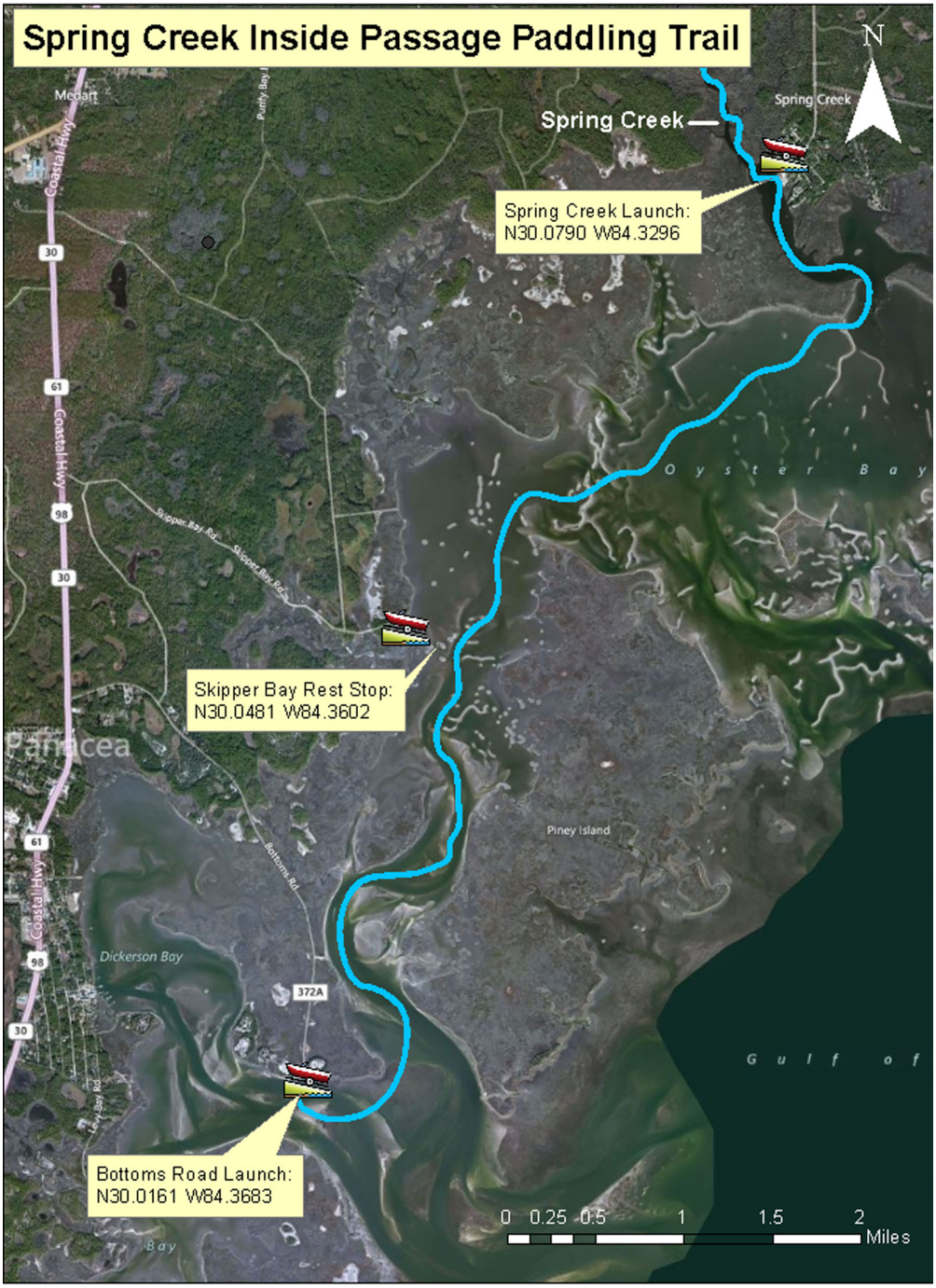
Focus:
Photography and wildlife watching are reasons to take this trip.

Distance:
8 miles, 4 hours. It is 2.8 miles to the tip of island entering Spring Creek.

Put In:
Take US 98 south past Medart. Before entering Panacea, turn left (east) onto Bottoms Road, indicated by a Byway and Great Florida Birding Trail sign with arrow. This dike road passes through Dickerson Bay in the Panacea Unit of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. There is ample parking at the launch point at road's end.

Take Out:
Spring Creek boat landing adjacent to the RV Park. From Bottoms Road, take US Highway 98 north for 4.3 miles. Before the intersection with US Hwy 319 in Medart, turn right onto Jack Crum Drive for 3.7 miles to CR 365. Turn right on CR 365 for 2 miles to Spring Creek. Turn left into the RV Park at road's end. Launch next to ramp, parking is available.

Expertise:
Intermediate and up.



Paddling trail information at **VisitWakulla.com**

Seineyards

A seine is a fishing net. It is rumored that Apalachee Indians taught the black Spaniards how to fish in the 18th and 19th centuries. Seine fisheries supplied locals and tourists with striped mullet and roe. Operated in the spring and fall to coincide with spawning or "run" seasons along shores. Using hand-drawn seine nets, locals caught and split the mullet, then packed them in barrels with salt brine. Mullet runs at area seineyards were impressive in size. One eyewitness at Shell Point reported that "40 barrels of mullet were brought in with one pull of the seine." Families packed picnics, camping gear, and produce into wagons and came south to the Apalachee Bay from as far away as Georgia. Meal, grain, syrup, sweet potatoes, and other kinds of farm produce were exchanged for barrels of mullet. Some 19 seineyards once operated along Apalachee Bay at points such as Mashes Sands, Bottoms Road, Skipper Bay, Spring Creek, Shell Point, and Goose Creek. The culture of the seineyards virtually came to an end after 1993 for a variety of reasons. Only Bottoms Road Seineyard near Panacea remains in operation seasonally.

Spring Creek

Spring Creek gets its name from a first magnitude spring and the creek that flows into Oyster Bay, a small fishing hamlet once favored by Georgians who came to rent boats at two now-closed fish camps. The name comes from a series of first magnitude springs that upwell just off shore. Facilities include a campground and boat launch and a renowned seafood restaurant.

Fresh Water Spring "Boils"

Starting from the Florida-Georgia state line and extending south to Apalachee Bay, the St. Marks Watershed is a major geographic, hydrological, and environmental feature of the Scenic Byway corridor. Covering 1,170 square miles, the Watershed serves as a drainage basin from north of Tallahassee to the St. Marks River and ultimately to Apalachee Bay. Within the watershed lies the Woodville Karst Plain, a limestone-based topographic feature. This underground cavernous formation allows fresh water that is part of the Floridan Aquifer to move south to the bay. Prominent Karst Topography features, created over millions of years, include sinkholes, sinkhole lakes, springs, disappearing rivers, and underground caverns. There are a number of first and second magnitude springs that upwell just off shore along the paddling trails, most notably near Spring Creek, and are connected to the Wakulla Springs.

Oyster Bars

Oyster bars (colonies of oysters) thrive where the salinity is between 15 and 30 parts per thousand. They can't survive in fresh water and, in saltier water, they are attacked by predators and diseases. Oyster bars provide a habitat for a multitude of invertebrates and fish. At low tide, shorebirds, wading birds, raccoons, and even bears help themselves. Oyster bars tend to be intertidal reefs accessible only during parts of each day. The Bay provides ecosystem services of great benefit to the area, including water filtration and oyster harvesting.