

Florida Trail, Three Lakes WMA



North Loop (5.5 miles), South Loop (5.6 miles), both loops (11.1 miles total)

The North Loop provides access to an observation tower over Lake Jackson, with some of the region's best birding.

When the Florida Trail was first being built through Central Florida, attention fell on a brand new state park called Prairie Lakes State Preserve. Where better to showcase trail building skills than a landscape that had such outstanding scenic beauty? Prairie Lakes falls between two major lakes - Lake Jackson and Lake Marian - in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. Although it is no longer a state park, having been transferred to Florida Fish & Wildlife management more than fifteen years ago, it remains a compelling destination for hikers and birders, who are now joined by anglers and hunters.

Intentionally crafted as a backpacking destination, the trail system offers a Figure-8 loop on which the thru-trail, blazed orange, follows the west side of the South Loop and the east side of the North Loop. The opposite sides of the loops are blazed white.

From the Prairie Lakes trailhead, day hikers and backpackers have several options.

Heading north, it's 9.4 miles to where the Florida Trail emerges onto US 441 (no parking available at this end) and quite a beautiful hike through open pine savannas and cypress domes. You can do a portion of this segment as a round-trip, utilizing the Three Lakes campsite (5.5 miles north) for an overnight stay.

Heading south, it's 17.5 miles along the Florida Trail to a hunt camp check station just off SR 60. On this southerly route, the Florida Trail follows the west side of the South Loop and the east side of the North Loop (with good signage at trail junctions).

You can hike just the North Loop (5.5 miles) or South Loop (5.6 miles) as a day hike, or combine the two loops (11.1 miles total) for a long day hike or overnight backpacking trip.

Directions: SR 60 access: 5.1 miles east of the Kissimmee River along SR 60. The entrance is on the north side of the highway.