

# Jacksonville

## NASSAU RIVER-THOMAS CREEK

### Paddling Guide



"Keep close to Nature's heart... and break clear away, once in a while, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean."

— John Muir



Wood Stork

Recreational development is a job not of building roads into the lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind.

— Aldo Leopold



Dune Sun Flowers

"There is no better high than discovery."

— E. O. Wilson



Roseate Spoonbill

"Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after."

— Henry David Thoreau



Peregrine Falcon

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson



Hibiscus

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

— Albert Einstein



Least tern

"Sometimes I do get to places just when God's ready to have somebody click the shutter."

— Ansel Adams



Deer

"A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children."

— John James Audubon



Raccoon

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Woodstorks, coasting on thermals, soaring high above you. The distinctive calls of salt water marsh hens burst from the shimmering spartina cordgrass. Orange-beaked oystercatchers wait expectantly as the tide recedes. A flock of white pelicans gathers to reap the bounty of mullet skipping across the flats. Welcome to the waters of the Thomas Creek/Nassau River Paddling Guide.



Brian Burket

This guide covers a portion of the Nassau River-St. Johns River Marshes Aquatic Preserve which was designated to protect the Nassau Sound area marshes and associated waters. PFDs and a whistle are required while paddling in this area. It is recommended that paddlers also bring bug repellent and plenty of water.

You can let everything go and just unwind here when paddling across these panoramic landscapes. Thomas Creek is a peaceful, tidal black creek system that meanders into the Nassau River. The Nassau River is a deep, winding waterway that runs from a few miles west of Interstate 95 and flows all the way to the Atlantic Ocean at the south end of Amelia Island.

#### Thomas Creek/Nassau River History

The earliest human occupation of this area dates back to around 3500 BC. The earliest inhabitants were the Timucuan people, Native Americans whose territory stretched from southeast Georgia to northeast Florida. The marshes, offshore waters, numerous inlets and natural ports provided abundant resources that attracted the Timucuan to this area. Historians believe there were once as many as 200,000 Timucuan in the area.



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Following several expeditions of La Florida in the 16th and 17th century, Spain ruled Florida until 1763 when it was traded to the British in exchange for Cuba. That year the last 89 full-blooded Timucuan men, women and children sailed with the Spanish to Cuba.

In 1777, 400 soldiers from the Continental Army and 165 Georgia militia organized for

an expedition into British East Florida in retaliation for raids by British Loyalists. On May 17, a small force of Georgia militia was ambushed by a mixed force of British Army, Loyalist militia and Native Americans near the mouth of Thomas Creek. The encounter was the only major engagement in the three failed attempts by American forces to invade British East Florida. The Battle of Thomas Creek is considered the southernmost battle of the American Revolutionary War.

Many of the parks, preserves and paddling launches that provide access to Thomas Creek and Nassau River were acquired starting in 1999 with the establishment of the Preservation Project Jacksonville. The project's primary goal was to identify and acquire Duval County's most vulnerable, environmentally sensitive lands in order to protect and preserve these lands as development began stretching into the rural areas of Jacksonville. This program resulted in the City of Jacksonville's park system, including many of the parks/preserves described below, becoming the largest urban park system in the country.

#### Preserves, Parks, and Launch Points of Interest

**Seaton Creek Historic Preserve** is a pristine 847-acre park. Historical accounts link the Preserve to the Battle of Thomas Creek. It offers picnic tables, trail benches, and five miles of multi-use trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding that connect to the kayak landing on Houston Creek. Future park plans include developing an access road to allow visitors to launch kayaks and canoes from the current landing area.

**Betz-Tiger Point Preserve** is surrounded by broad expanses of saltwater marsh. Visitors can enjoy miles of nature trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding. There is a new kayak launch and fishing pier at the north end of the Preserve that provides access to Pumpkin Hill Creek and Edwards Creek. There is another launch immediately south of the property within Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park.

**Half Moon Island Preserve** is a 267-acre preserve off North Main Street along the Nassau River that offers a new boat ramp, fishing platform, picnic shelters and a restroom.

**Four Creeks State Forest** has approximately 25 miles of paddle-able waterways. Paddling from Boggy Creek Landing or Saul's Landing, you begin in a mostly closed canopy, dense swampy area and then emerge into a marshy area with sweeping views as you near Hobb's Landing and beyond. Primitive camping currently offered at Saul's Landing and is planned for other landings in Four Creeks in the future.

**Thomas Creek Fish Camp** includes a boat ramp, kayak launch and fishing. This is a good place to launch to paddle upstream on scenic Thomas Creek.



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#### POPULAR SPORT FISH

**HABITAT:** Channel edges on sandy bottoms near tidal passes and docks.

**FISHING TIPS:** Use live shrimp, sand fleas, sardines, pinfish or jigs bounced slowly along the bottom as you drift.

**SEASON:** All year.

**SIZE:** Minimum 12", 10 fish per person per day allowed.

#### FLOUNDER



**HABITAT:** Near docks and pilings, deeper holes in seagrass beds, oyster beds and channels during the warmest and coolest months.

**FISHING TIPS:** Use live shrimp fished on bottom or free-lined, soft-bodied jigs bounced slowly along bottom, or small gold spoons.

**SEASON:** All year.

**SIZE:** Not less than 18" or more than 27", 2 fish per person per day.

#### REDFISH (RED DRUM)



**HABITAT:** Near bridges, docks, seawalls, pilings or any underwater structure.

**FISHING TIPS:** Use live shrimp, sand fleas, or small crabs on small hook.

**TIPS:** Fish just off the bottom and on first tug, strike hard.

**SEASON:** All year.

**SIZE:** Minimum 12", 8 fish per person per day.

#### SHEEPHEAD



**HABITAT:** Canals, tidal creeks, and other deep, warm waters in cool months; near tidal passes, mangrove fringe and along the beaches in warmer weather.

**FISHING TIPS:** Use live shrimp, small mullet, live pigfish, sardines, jigs or minnow-like lures, either free-lined or on a bobber.

**SEASON:** Closed December 15 – January 31 and June 1 – August 31.

**SIZE:** Not less than 28" or more than 33", 1 fish per person per day.

#### SNOOK



**HABITAT:** Seagrass beds during moderate water temperatures, deeper waters during warmer and cooler months.

**FISHING TIPS:** Use live shrimp, pigfish, soft-bodied jigs or minnow-like lures, either free-lined or on a bobber.

**SEASON:** All year.

**SIZE:** More than 15" and less than 19", only 5 per person per day, only 1 fish over 19" per vessel.

#### SPOTTED SEATROUT



Fish Illustrations by Diane Rome Peebles. Provided by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission

Please note that fishing regulations change frequently; check with authorities for current size limits and closed seasons by visiting [www.myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/](http://www.myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/)

This paddling guide is brought to you by the City of Jacksonville in partnership with Visit Jacksonville, the Public Trust Environmental Legal Institute of Florida, the Timucuan Parks Foundation, with input from Florida Forest Service, Florida State Parks, Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, Nassau County, Adventure Kayak Florida, Kayak Amelia, and Adventures Up the Creek. More information about this guide as well as the printable version can be found at:

[www.nassauriver-thomascreekpaddling.org](http://www.nassauriver-thomascreekpaddling.org)

Copies of the guide may be requested from the City of Jacksonville's Parks Department or can be found at many of the local outdoor recreation stores and kayak concessionaires.

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THIS RULER IS TO SCALE. PLEASE CHECK LENGTH OF YOUR CATCH.

