



Scan the code to answer a few questions about your hike today and be entered into a drawing for a Water Champions t-shirt.



STLUCIEWATERCHAMPIONS.COM

Learn more about protecting the health of our drinking water and waterways.

RULES OF THE FOREST

- **DO NOT LITTER!** This includes cigarettes and doggie waste bags.
- **Dogs must be kept on leashes and cleaned up after** — it's the law.
- **Remain on established trails and bring a trail map for safety.**
- **Do not touch, feed, harass, release or kill wildlife.**
- **Do not collect plants, flowers, fruit or seeds.**
- **Bicycles or motorized vehicles are not permitted on Oxbow Preserve trails.**

SELF-GUIDED WATERSHED HIKE



A St. Lucie County Environmental Learning Center

OXBOW PRESERVE WATERSHED HIKE

Stars on map mark stops. ★

“What’s a watershed?”

A watershed is an area of land from which the water drains into a common body of water. At the Oxbow Preserve, you'll experience a watershed where water from the land drains into the north fork of the St. Lucie River. The preserve is a piece of original Florida. It offers examples of both natural and man-made features and reveals how water moves across the land. Watersheds teach us that everything that starts upstream travels downstream; we all play a part in the health of these waters.

STOP 1 Pine Flatwoods

“So where’s the water?”

Right now, you are passing through a typical south Florida pine forest, which is a dry habitat. Notice the flat land, sandy soil, tall pine trees and sharp-leaved palmettos. Rain that falls here is quickly absorbed into the sand, but after heavy rain, water will puddle and flow over the land. Be alert! Gopher tortoises often feed in these open, grassy trails, especially in sunny weather. They dig



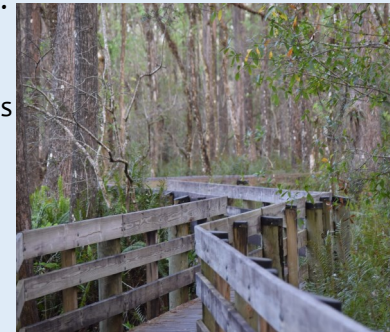
burrows up to 15 feet long, which many other forest animals depend on for shelter. Tortoises and their burrows are protected; it is illegal to touch, feed or harass them or approach their burrows.

STOP 2 Wetland Boardwalk

“This area looks so different!”

Water from the pine flatwoods, parking lots, and roadways follows the land downward, much like you followed the trail downward and ended up here.

You'll find plants that prefer wet soils and are much different from the plants of the dry pine forest.



Something to think about: the moving water carries natural sediments as well as any pollutants with it as it travels. The stream below the boardwalk flows to the north fork of the St. Lucie River for most of the year but may be waterless during the dry season, especially winter.

STOP 3 Man-Made Canal

“What a straight waterway!”

Canals like these are man-made, prevent flooding, and allow for development of the land.

Because canals exist for drainage, they often contain runoff from neighborhoods and roadways.

Remember: Whatever starts upstream travels downstream.

Be alert! You may spot several species of wading birds in or near the canal!



STOP 4 The Weir

"What's a weir?"

When water travels in a straight path as in the canal, it moves quickly. The concrete structure at this stop is a weir, a low dam built to slow water flow. This allows time for sediments in the water to settle and for plants to absorb excess nutrients, improving the quality of the water before flowing into the river.



STOP 5 St. Lucie River

"River of Light"

This dock is situated on a natural bend of the St. Lucie River, a tight curve known as an oxbow. St. Lucie's oxbows were dug out and straightened for easier navigation and speed more than 100 years ago. This caused the water to move quickly without time for sediments to settle, and the health of the river suffered.



Now, many of Florida's oxbows are being restored to allow the natural, slow flow of rivers to return, resulting in cleaner water downstream. Always remember, what we put on the land upstream travels downstream. It's up to all of us to keep our waterways healthy!

BONUS STOP! Sundew Platform



- ☒ PICK UP MY PET'S WASTE!
- ☒ PLANT MORE NATIVE PLANTS IN MY YARD!
- ☒ REDUCE / ELIMINATE FERTILIZER USE!
- ☒ KEEP YARD CLIPPINGS OUT OF THE ROAD AND AWAY FROM STORM DRAINS!

StLucieWaterChampions.com

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For programs, events, learning opportunities and to sign up for the Oxbow e-Newsletter, visit

OxbowEco.com

For guided hikes visit

SLChikes.org

Learn about St. Lucie's nature preserves

StLuciePreserves.com

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY
FLORIDA

