

Questions and Answers

What You Need to Know about Visiting Stormwater Treatment Areas

Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) are constructed wetlands that remove and store nutrients through plant growth and the accumulation of dead plant material that is slowly converted to a layer of peat soil. The key purpose of STAs is to remove phosphorus from urban and agricultural runoff flowing into the Everglades. Too much of the nutrient phosphorus promotes an overgrowth of plant life and alters the habitat that Florida's native plants and animals need to thrive.

Nature-based public use including bicycling, hiking, nature photography and bird-watching is allowed at several STAs. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) allows limited alligator and waterfowl hunting at some STAs. Fishing is allowed in the perimeter canals and treatment cells of some STAs. Look for marked "No Fishing" signs.

The future enjoyment and success of public access to STAs is dependent upon good stewardship of the land. Please take a few moments to familiarize yourself with some STA basics.

How does an STA work?

Stormwater treatment areas remove excess phosphorus from runoff water by channeling it through shallow marshes filled with aquatic plants like cattail, southern naiad, hydrilla and algae. These plants take up or absorb phosphorus from water traveling through, reducing to very low levels the amount of the nutrients reaching the Everglades. Plants in the stormwater treatment area keep working even after they die. Cattail plants remove phosphorus from decomposing leaves that become wetland sediments. Finally, the limestone layer beneath the sediment absorbs and holds phosphorus, providing decades of phosphorus storage. Visit [Water Quality Improvement: Stormwater Treatment Areas](#) for an in-depth look at how this "green technology" works.

Where are the STAs?

At present, 57,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee have been converted to effective treatment wetlands. North and east of Lake Okeechobee, STAs are also used to remove phosphorus from water flowing into the Lake, St. Lucie estuary and Indian River Lagoon.

Are STAs open to the public?

Public recreation areas can be found at STA-1E, STA-1W and STA-3/4 in Palm Beach County, STA-5/6 in Hendry County and Taylor Creek STA in Okeechobee County. Public access sites to the STAs are generally open Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The boat ramp at STA-3/4 and the public access area at Taylor Creek STA are open during daylight hours 7 days a week. Please enter an STA through the designated public access. Parking is provided along with a dry vault toilet and a shade shelter. Drinking water is not provided. The STAs are natural areas and information kiosks provide an overview of what you might see, including maps that show which levees are open for public use.

What can I see if I visit an STA?

STAs are built specifically for improving Everglades water quality. However, their vast, shallow waters and rich plant life also make them outstanding habitat for Florida Wildlife. Birds and waterfowl found in STAs include roseate spoonbills, whistling ducks, wood storks, little blue herons, eagles and hawks. You can also see alligators, several species of snakes, turtles and frogs; and mammals such as wild hogs, deer, bobcats, raccoons and foxes.

Are boats allowed in STAs?

To prevent bank erosion and minimize damage to plants that remove phosphorus from STAs, motorized and non-motorized boats are not permitted in constructed wetlands unless specifically authorized by the South Florida Water Management District. On established waterfowl hunt days, canoes and kayaks can be used in STA-1W, STA-2, STA-3/4 and STA-5/6 by hunters in possession of an STA Waterfowl Permit. Personal watercraft and airboats are prohibited in all STAs. Because STAs have a specialized cleansing function, public recreation is limited to activities that do not disturb the water and soils. Keeping treatment wetlands healthy and undisturbed is vital for Everglades restoration.

Can I launch my boat into the perimeter canals of STAs?

Motorized and non-motorized boats can be launched into the STA-3/4 perimeter canal from a dual-lane public boat ramp at the Harold A. Campbell Public Use Facility. Non-motorized boats such as canoes and kayaks can be launched into the STA-1W perimeter canal.

Can I fish in STAs?

Yes, bank fishing is allowed from the levees that are open to public use in STA-1W, STA-1E and STA 3/4 except if posted otherwise. Fishing is also allowed by boat in the perimeter canals of STA-1W and STA-3/4. At STA-2, bank fishing is allowed in the exterior canal on the levees that lead to the western entrance of Water Conservation Area 2. Fishing is not allowed at Taylor Creek STA in Okeechobee County, Lakeside Ranch STA in Martin County and STA-5/6 in Hendry County. You may need a valid Florida fishing license. For more information, visit the [FWC licenses and permits](#) webpage.

Can I hunt in STAs?

Public hunting on District lands, including STAs, is regulated, administered and enforced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Holders of valid permits from the FWC can hunt waterfowl and alligators during designated weekends at STA-1W, STA-2, STA-3/4 and STA-5/6. For information, visit the [FWC hunting](#) webpage.

Can I take a guided tour of an STA?

Through partnerships with the District, scheduled bird-watching tours are offered by local Audubon chapters at three stormwater treatment areas: STA-1E (*Audubon Society of the Everglades*); STA 5/6 (*Hendry-Glades Audubon Society chapter*); and Lakeside Ranch STA (*Martin County Audubon chapter*). More information is available on the District's recreation website, or by contacting the Audubon chapters directly.

What else do I need to know about visiting an STA?

When leaving, please take with you anything that you carried into the STA. This includes trash, drink containers, shell casings, bait containers and fishing line.