

THE P • A • R • K • S

Featuring the fine stalking and camera skills of our own Becky Hinson on her visits to local wildlife preserves and parks

If you enjoy being outdoors Clay County is a great place to live. Magnolia Point is just minutes from multiple outdoor adventures. Whether you enjoy a leisurely walk through the park, a bike ride, a run, or even a kayak trip, there's a place for you within a short driving distance.

Spring Park, located behind City Hall in Green Cove Springs (for those of you new to the neighborhood) is one of my favorite places to visit. The spring surges from below the surface at a rate of 1,346 gallons a minute and is a constant temperature of 77 degrees. Sulfur water flows out of the spring into a community swimming pool, through a man-made waterfall, into the Spring Run which empties into the St. Johns River approximately 200 feet away.

There's something to do at Spring Park for every age. You can sit in a swing and enjoy the river view. There's a playground for the little ones, with wheelchair accessible equipment included. Find a bench under the beautiful oak trees, dripping with Spanish moss, and feed the birds and squirrels. Rent a pavilion, have a picnic, launch your kayak or fish from the public pier. Dogs are welcome as long as they are leashed and no more than one dog per person.

Spring Park hosts City activities throughout the year. The scenery provides a great place for photos, whether you prefer a professional sitting or just a snapshot. You're just a block or two away from a great cup of coffee, ice cream cone, Italian meal, country cooking or a burger.

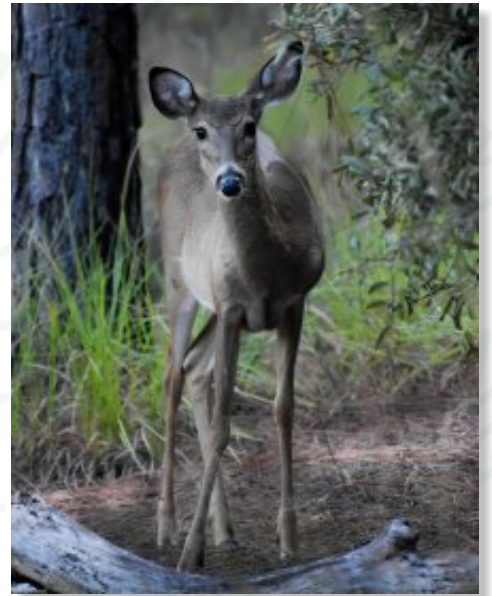
Don't forget Food Truck Fridays on the first Friday of the month which runs from March through November. Last, but not least, make sure you visit the 3rd Saturday Market in the Park and help support our local small businesses. Check out greencovesprings.com for a complete list of all Spring Park events.

The Black Creek Park and Trail is another favorite located at 7890 Highway 17 by Black Creek. Their hours are 7am until 7pm. It's one of Clay County's most popular trails and is located just 2.7 miles from Magnolia Point. The path is 8 miles long and great for cyclists, walking your dog or going for a hike. The trail includes restrooms, bike and nature trails and a covered pavilion. It's a great place to find wildlife or just to get those steps in! There's no cost to use this park. A trail map can be found at claycountygov.com.

If camping is your thing, check out Camp Chowenwaw, Also located off Highway 17 (1517 Ball Road) by Black Creek, a mere 2 miles away. Park hours are 8 am to sunset. The Camp was created in 1932 and is an important part of Clay County history. It provided a place for many young women to master their skills and talents as Girl Scouts.

At Chowenwaw you can camp, hike, fish, paddleboard, picnic, swim or play volleyball. They periodically host nature hikes and history walks. Dogs are allowed during the day but must be leashed and cleaned up after.

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By far, my favorite park , Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park, dedicated on April 15,1939, is a little more of a drive. Located at 6239 State Road 21 in Keystone Heights, it's about a 34 minute drive. It's open from 8am until sundown 365 days a year. Admission for a car with two to eight people is \$5 for a day pass.

This area became one of Florida's first state parks in 1935 and was donated by J. Mike Roess (pronounced 'Race'). Twenty five craftsmen from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and hundreds of CCC youths planted trees, cleared areas for campsites, built roads and constructed buildings, many of which are still in use today.

Gold Head offers camping, cabin rentals, picnic pavilions, a recreation building and canoe rentals. Pricing can be found at the website floridastateparks.org. If you like to photograph wildlife,

Gold Head is a great place to start. There are trails and a ravine with a boardwalk. The scenery is beautiful and if you visit early in the day or late in the afternoon you have an excellent chance of photographing deer.

Now, put on those walking shoes and get some fresh air!

- BECKY HINSON

Photos by Becky



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