

## Econfina Creek Water Management Area Group Area Permit Application

Any group wishing to use the Blue Spring, Rattlesnake Lake (North or South) or Sparkleberry Pond group campsites must possess an approved **Group Area Permit** from the Northwest Florida Water Management District. If the proposed use is inconsistent with the water management protection purposes for which the land was acquired, the permit will be denied.

- 1) There is **no fee** for the Group Area Permit. An applicant must be at least 18 years old and may have only one application or reservation on file at any given time. **\*\*PLEASE NOTE: A copy of an Official Photo ID that shows the applicants date of birth and address (Driver's License, State ID Card, Military ID, etc.) MUST BE submitted with the application.\*\***

Please submit this application to:

Lands Division  
Northwest Florida Water Management District  
Post Office Box 1010, Midway, Florida 32343

**NOTE:** These sites are usually reserved many weeks in advance. Please phone the District's Division of Land Management and Acquisition at (850) 539-5999 to check availability. Reservations will be made on a "first come, first served" basis upon receipt of an application. **All applications must be received by U.S. Mail and must be postmarked in the year for which the reservation is requested. Improperly submitted applications may be disposed of without notice to the applicant.**

Name of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Vehicle License No: \_\_\_\_\_

**Site Requested (check one, or insert numbers in boxes in preferred priority order):**

- Blue Spring (maximum of 25 people per visit)  
 Rattlesnake Lake North (maximum of 25 people per visit)  
 Rattlesnake Lake South (maximum of 25 people per visit)  
 Sparkleberry Pond (maximum of 50 people per visit)  
 Whitewater Lake (maximum of 10 people per visit. No more than 3 vehicles)

**Weekend Requested:** \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative Weekends (if preferred weekend is not available)

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

My most important preference is (check one)  Location (site)  Date

(Permit is valid from 2:00 p.m. Friday until 10:00 a.m. Monday Central time, except on major holidays when an additional day can be allowed.)

Estimated Number of: People: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Vehicles: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Use: \_\_\_\_\_

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I specifically agree to the permit conditions and to vacate the premises immediately if it is determined that I or any members of my party have violated any of the permit conditions and restrictions listed here. Furthermore, I agree that I or any members of my party can be denied use of District group sites if found in violation of the permit conditions and restrictions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Applicant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**\*\*DO NOT FORGET TO ENCLOSE A COPY OF YOUR PHOTO ID\*\***

Permit Conditions:

1. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs), personal watercraft (jet skis, wave runners, etc.) and unlicensed off-road motorcycles are prohibited from all group sites. Water skiing is not allowed at Rattlesnake Lake.
2. No animals are allowed except guide dogs for sight- and/or hearing-impaired individuals. Stray dogs or cats may be observed at these sites. Please do not touch or feed these animals and report their sightings to the District for control efforts.
3. Possession or consumption of alcohol is prohibited.
4. Only tents, pickup trucks with mounted campers and pop-up campers are allowed. Travel trailers and motorized recreational vehicles (motor homes) are prohibited. Exceptions will be considered for mobility-impaired individuals or groups when acceptable proof of impairment or illnesses submitted with application.
5. Electric generators are prohibited. Exceptions will be considered for documented medical reasons but are at the discretion of the District and must be approved in advance. Documented medical reasons must be submitted with the application.
6. Hunting in any form is prohibited at all group sites and within the District's designated "No Hunting" areas as posted and as delineated on the Econfina Creek Wildlife Management Area map or any subsequent brochures or maps.
7. The taking or harming of endangered, rare, threatened or species of special concern (plant or animal) is prohibited.
8. The harming or possession of any terrestrial or aquatic turtles, especially gopher tortoises, alligator snapping and soft-shell turtles, is prohibited.
9. Do not injure, damage or destroy trees by cutting, chopping, driving nails or hanging lanterns, etc. Collect only downed wood for fires or bring your own.
10. Vehicles are allowed on designated access roads only. No vehicular travel after 10:00 p.m.
11. No littering. Trash receptacles are provided for your use.
12. Quiet time will be observed after 10:00 p.m.
13. The individual granted this permit will be responsible for any and all damages to District property, facilities and furnishings as a result of use of these facilities.

**Note:** Law enforcement/security services and/or District personnel will periodically inspect the group camping sites. They will possess a copy of all permits to ensure compliance with the District permit conditions listed above. Violation of any of the permit conditions may, at the Officer's and/or District representative's discretion, be grounds for you and your guests to immediately vacate the site. **In the**

**event of flooding, hurricanes, severe weather, fire danger or impassable roads, 24 – 36 hour notice will be given, when possible, of the closing of these sites.**

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Econfina Creek and the neighboring sandhills create one of the most unique and special habitat areas in Florida. Econfina Creek is largely spring-fed and is well known for its cold clear water, superb natural vegetation, bird life and many geologic and hydrologic features. It is said to be the most exciting canoe trail in the state, featuring numerous rapids, springs and rock outcrops along the route.

The Water Management District began buying property along Econfina Creek in 1992 specifically to protect water resources and the primary source of drinking water for Panama City and neighboring communities. During drought conditions, some 80 percent of the water flowing into the Deer Point Lake reservoir comes from the many springs along Econfina Creek.

The sandhills portion of the property includes mile after mile of rolling hills comprised of loose sands that are often hundreds of feet deep. Intermixed are dozens of shallow, sand-bottomed lakes that commonly have extremely clear water. A few examples of the native longleaf pine/wiregrass vegetation still can be found in the uplands, but most of the area is planted to sand pine that gradually will be harvested and restored with natural species and communities. Many of the lakes contain plant species found nowhere else in the world, such as the imperiled smooth-barked St. John's wort. Preservation or restoration of the native plant communities is a major consideration in the management of this tract, and sometimes require that portions of the property be closed so the young vegetation can get established.

Important portions of these high sandhills were also acquired by the District specifically because they are the "recharge" area for the springs. Almost all the rainfall occurring in this zone sinks into the sands and moves rapidly toward the creek where it boils up as pure and clean spring water. Public ownership has been shown to be the most effective and cost efficient way to protect a water supply watershed like this one.

**Econfina Creek is a public water supply stream that residents of the Panama City area depend upon for drinking water. Please do your part to keep it clean and clear.**

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**Permit Requirements:** No permits or licenses are required for passive recreation uses such as hiking, picnicking, bird watching, swimming, canoeing, horseback riding, nature appreciation, or camping in the first-come-first-served primitive campsites.

A **Group Area Permit** is required for those wishing to reserve Blue Spring, Rattlesnake Lake North, Rattlesnake Lake South, or Sparkleberry Pond group campsites on weekends. Blue Spring and Sparkleberry Pond group sites are closed on weekdays. Rattlesnake Lake North and South are open Tuesday through Thursday for day use only (no camping), except when holidays fall on a Friday or Monday, in which case the weekday day use schedule may be reduced from three days to two.

A Florida **hunting license** and a wildlife management area permit are required\* to hunt on the property in accordance with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regulations

A Florida **freshwater fishing license** is required\* to fish.

\*Hunting and fishing license and permit exemptions may be available for persons under the age of 16, over the age of 64, certain members of the Armed Forces, and others (see MyFWC.com for more information). All exemptions must be in accordance with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regulations.

**Hunting:** The Econfina Creek corridor and surrounding lands are managed as the “Econfina Creek Wildlife Management Area”. Separate hunting maps and quota hunt permits are available each year from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. “No Hunting” zones have been established over portions of the property, and a special “Mobility Impaired” hunt area has been created in the area south of Highway 388.

**Canoeing:** There is a 22-mile-long canoe trail along this unusually beautiful, swift-flowing and remote creek. The upper portion, from Scott Road downstream to Walsingham Bridge, is a particularly strenuous 10- to 12-hour journey with many rapids and “chutes” that should be attempted only by experienced canoeists. A private canoe livery is operating near the Highway 20 section of the creek. Free public canoe put-in and take-out facilities are provided at Scott Road, Walsingham Park, Highway 20 and Highway 388. A separate “Econfina Creek Canoe Trail” brochure is available upon request.

**Hiking:** An 18-mile long section of the Florida Trail passes through the Econfina Creek WMA between trailheads at Scott Road and Highway 20. This hiking trail is a section of the 1,400-mile long Florida National Scenic Trail, a primitive footpath that traverses the length of Florida from the Everglades to the Gulf Islands National Seashore in the western panhandle. In partnership with the District and the USDA Forest Service, the volunteers of the Florida Trail Association have built and maintain this orange-blazed hiking trail. For more information on hiking the trail or how you can help, contact the Florida Trail Association at [www.floridatrail.org](http://www.floridatrail.org) or call 877-HIKE-FLA.

**Horseback Riding:** Various saddle clubs have developed a number of very attractive equestrian trails for public use and the District developed the Pine Ridge Equestrian Campground specifically for equestrian use. Riders are required to stay on the designated trails (marked with yellow or blue paint) and are cautioned to keep horses out of the lakes and streams. More information about the equestrian trail system is available on the District’s website (<http://www.nwfwmd.state.fl.us>), or by calling the District’s Division of Land Management and Acquisition at (850) 539-5999.

**Camping:** Primitive campsites have been established at sites near and along the creek (Devils Hole, Sea Shell, Walsingham and Walsingham Bridge), at Porter Lake, (White Oak and Tom Johns landings) and at the Pine Ridge Equestrian Campground. No reservations, permits, or licenses are needed to camp at these first-come-first-served locations. **Group Camping** is available at Blue Spring (the old Boy Scout camp), Rattlesnake Lake North, Rattlesnake Lake South and at Sparkleberry Pond. A pavilion, portable toilets, fire rings, grills and picnic tables are provided. A Group Area Permit is required (see application form on this brochure).

**Bicycling:** Bicycling is allowed only on existing roads.

**In case of emergency, call 911 or:**

Washington County Sheriff’s Office 850-638-6111 (all designated campsites are in Washington County)

Bay County Sheriff’s Office 850-747-4700

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 850-245-7710 or 888-404-3922