

## **FACTS ABOUT THE APALACHICOLA RIVER ECOSYSTEM**

- The Apalachicola River basin has been described as one of six “biodiversity hotspots” in the United States.
- The United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“UNESCO”) recognizes the Apalachicola ecosystem as an International Biosphere Reserve.
- Florida has designated Apalachicola Bay as a Florida Aquatic Preserve, one of the most ecologically important natural areas in the state. The U.S. Congress and the State of Florida established the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve.
- The vitality of this exceptional ecosystem depends on adequate freshwater flows from the upstream Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers reaching the downstream Apalachicola River at the right times.
- The Apalachicola River nourishes a 144,000-acre floodplain as it flows more than 100 miles down the Florida panhandle into Apalachicola Bay and the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. The River’s floodplain supports one of the last unbroken bottomland hardwood forests in the United States.
- Apalachicola Bay historically provided 90 percent of Florida’s oysters and more than 10 percent of the total oyster production in the United States. The Bay is also a major nursery for shrimp, blue crab, and many fish, including striped bass, sturgeon, grouper, snapper, red fish, speckled trout, and flounder.
- More than 131 species of fresh and estuarine fish live in the Apalachicola River, more varieties than in any other river in Florida. More than 140 species of fish are found in the Bay.
- More than 50 species of mammals, including the Florida black bear and the threatened West Indian Manatee, are found in the Apalachicola drainage basin. As of 2012, more than 30 federally threatened or endangered animal species inhabited the Apalachicola River Basin.
- More than 40 species of amphibians and 80 species of reptiles live in the Apalachicola River basin. This rich and varied assemblage constitutes the highest diversity of amphibians and reptiles in all of the United States and Canada.
- More than 282 avian species, including 164 migratory bird species, reside for at least part of the year in the Apalachicola floodplain and bay.
- More than 1,300 species of plants, including 103 that are threatened or endangered, are found in the Apalachicola drainage basin.