

The area known as Becks Lake, and the Escambia River, are ecological treasures, especially the part of the River that lies between the Old Monsanto docks and Molino. This part of Escambia County is not well known to the general public who generally have no idea of the beauty and ecological diversity that is present in our their backyard.

The Escambia River, all of it, is the 4th largest River in Florida and is very diverse. Industrial in the south, and small creeks and streams in the far north almost to Montgomery and Tallassee, AL. It is a huge watershed and is known as one of the best fishing rivers in the Southeast.

I was contacted by Susie Gathurst who had "discovered" Becks Lake and the nearby Escambia River and wanted to write about it so others could learn about Escambia County's major freshwater eco-asset. Her article follows..... W Ted Brown - Owner of Becks Fish Camp.

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### **The Lower Middle Escambia River – A Recreational and Ecological Treasure**

Becks Lake isn't, in fact, a lake. It is a large deep bayou of the Escambia River a single 258-mile-long river that straddles the states of both Florida and Alabama. The lower middle Escambia River, specifically the area surrounding the Becks lake resort, is some of the most beautiful, famed for its relative ease of access, lush wildlife refuge, and the natural eco-systems it has created. The Escambia is the fourth largest river in Florida and harbors the richest assemblage of native North American freshwater fish of any Florida river with 85 native freshwater species [1], making it the perfect destination for fishers, but the location also offers so much more. Becks Lake is the only public freshwater fishing, boating, hiking and camping area close to Pensacola on the Escambia River. It is as popular with adventurers looking to spend the day on a kayak as it is with fishermen looking for their next big catch.

#### **A Diverse Eco System**

The Escambia river, particularly the lower middle section surrounding Becks Lake, is ecologically diverse. The diverse habitats in the watershed support nearly 140 rare, imperiled, or threatened plant and animal species, including the Gulf sturgeon [2] and at least 68 rare, imperiled, or threatened plant species. A number of these species are endemic. Conservation and recreational lands make up a substantial part of the watershed of this section of the Escambia River and the fragility of the local eco system is constantly being monitored and maintained. That makes an awareness of the ecological impact you are having on your surroundings essential when you visit the area. The 420 acres of Becks Lake are like a natural playground for children and adults alike, but it's important that you remove any impact you make (such as taking home any picnic packaging for example) when you leave.

#### **An Ideal Vacation Destination**

The waters of Florida are famous around the world for their outstanding natural beauty and incredible array of wildlife. If you ignore the obvious draws of Walt Disney World

and Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida is in fact an incredibly popular vacation destination for those looking an environmentally sustainable outdoor adventure. Tourists come to snorkel through preserved areas of the Florida Keys,[3] join one of the luxury eco cruises that regularly pass by the Floridian coast line [4] and, of course, fish on the country's finest rivers such as the Escambia. A dramatic increase in natural eco-tourism in Florida , beginning in the 1980s, has led to the rapid development of previously pristine wilderness beaches and fishing areas in the local area. Certain beaches, such as those found in Pensacola, have suffered as a result of this unprecedented attention, with demand far outstripping the rejuvenation of the natural resources. However at Becks Lake the area retains both its original outstanding beauty and its original charm. It provides an unexploited spot of serenity, and the chance to get back to nature as authentically as possible.

### **Recreational Activities Available**

According to the CEO of Visit Florida, More than 65 percent of Florida's visitors participate in either culture or nature-based activities while they're in the Sunshine State. [5]Tourists are looking to experience as many outdoor pursuits as possible when they're enjoying Florida. Travellers visiting Becks Lake don't just come for the exceptional fishing opportunities [6]either: they're also looking to enjoy other exceptional activities, and they're certainly not disappointed. Visitors to the site also enjoy taking to the river on boats and kayaks (a wonderful way to see the delicate eco system of the river first hand), take a mountain bike ride through cottage hill, to the north of the property, take a guided waterfront horseback tour or, for a small nominal fee, you can even bring your own horse and take a ride through the area too.

1 "Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties", Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, <http://myfwc.com/fishing/freshwater/sites-forecast/nw/escambia-river/>

2 "Learn about your watershed", Protecting Our Water, <http://www.protectingourwater.org/watersheds/map/pensacola/>

3 "Eco Tourism in the Florida Keys", Florida Keys and KeyWest, <http://www.flakeys.com/ecotourism/>

4 "How green is cruising?", Iglu Cruise, <http://www.iglu-cruise.com/blog/2012/12/20/how-green-is-cruising>

5 "New online magazine for those who love Florida's outdoors and cultural lifestyle", The International Eco Tourism Society, <https://www.ecotourism.org/news/new-online-magazine-those-who-love-floridas-cultural-and-outdoor-lifestyle>

6 "Escambia River Report", World Fishing Network, <http://www.worldfishingnetwork.com/florida-fishing-guide/post/escambia-river-report>

- Susie Gathurst