

Florida State Parks on the Air

Thanks for your interest in the Florida State Parks on the Air program! This event was started by a group of amateur radio operators from central Florida who love to get out and operate portable in our beautiful home state, with the intent to:

- Promote public awareness of ham radio and Florida's state parks system
- Contribute to the recognition and appreciation of Florida's diverse ecology
- Encourage camaraderie and sportsmanship among Florida's Amateur Radio Operators, and
- Provide a venue for Florida amateurs to get out and enjoy operating in the great outdoors



What is ham radio?

Ham Radio is a popular hobby and radio service that many people enjoy in the U.S. and worldwide. Amateur Radio operators (Hams) around the world use a variety of radio equipment to communicate with one another using many different methods including shortwave (radio signals bounced off earth's ionosphere), computerized digital transmission modes, laser light transmission, Morse Code, even amateur satellites in orbit around the earth! Aside from the fun of building, maintaining, and communicating using radio equipment, one of Amateur Radio's biggest roles is providing emergency communications support during natural disasters. Because Amateur Radio doesn't depend on the internet, phone systems, or even (in many cases) commercial power, Hams are ideally suited to provide communications services in disaster areas; health and welfare messages, emergency shelter communications links, and weather spotting are all services that amateur radio operators provide in events like hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and other natural and manmade disasters. Portable operating events like Florida State Parks on the Air are popular with many hams for just this reason. Not only do they get to enjoy the outdoors, and learn more about their environment - portable operation is also a great way to practice for emergency events where Hams may be called upon to use their equipment for public service in less than ideal circumstances - using battery power, portable/temporary antennas, all while being self-sufficient with food and water to last the duration of the event.



N4KWR, Kevin's station at Little Manatee State Park

So what can you expect from FLSPOTA operators?



George, KI4NBE at Katie's Landing State Park

Participants in the Florida State Parks on the Air program are encouraged to engage with the park staff, to determine an appropriate operating location. We understand that there are parks and site conditions that might not be favorable for certain types of amateur radio activities, so flexibility on the part of the operators is key. Our goal is to allow amateur radio operators to enjoy the parks while engaging in a fun activity, while at the same time not disrupting the park experience for other visitors. If you, the park staff, have a location where you would prefer the operators to set up their portable stations, please let them know!

Many stations will be self-contained within the operator's vehicle (bumper mounted antennas, etc.), therefore will not require any more room than a parking space. Others may be using tripod mounted antennas, verticals, and other types which would be more suited for picnic/camping sites or other similar locations. Operators are advised that attaching antennas to trees is **STRONGLY** discouraged, and may be explicitly disallowed at many or most State Park sites.



Typical vehicle-mounted antenna, self contained amateur radio station



Event Details

There are two types of operation that participants in the FLSPOTA program may be engaged in.

1) Participating in a yearly contest to be held on the first Saturday of every April. The goal of this contest is to communicate with (“contact”) as many other amateur radio operators as possible, in other State Parks, and also other locations in Florida, the U.S., and around the world. At the same time, the stations located elsewhere (not inside a Florida State Park) will be attempting to collect contacts with as many ham radio operators who are located within Florida State Parks as possible. Points and prizes will be awarded to those with the highest scores in several different categories. On the part of the sponsors of this event, the goal is to bring attention to the Florida State Park system: to get ham radio operators outdoors exploring the parks, while at the same time engaging in an activity they enjoy – radiosport, or radio contesting.

2) The other part of the FLSPOTA event can occur at any time during the year. Operators are encourage to “activate” as many parks as possible over any time period, by operating and making contacts from within those parks. This DOES NOT have to be done during the contest described above, or even during a specific timeframe. This part of the FLSPOTA program is designed to encourage ham radio operators to come out and visit the State Parks, not just during the contest in April, but all year long, and for many years to come.

