

River Boardwalk Trail

A few hundred years ago, lush forests lined a rocky, rolling river. During the mid-1800s this land was converted for European-style farming. In the early 20th century, Morgan Falls Dam was constructed roughly three miles downstream and later Buford Dam was built about 30 miles upstream, creating Lake Lanier. These two dams not only decreased the temperature and flow of the water but also caused the river to flood its banks, creating a productive wetland habitat.

This is the longest (0.50 miles) and most diverse trail on the property. Some seasonal plants and migratory wildlife mentioned in this self-guided brochure may be scarce from December through February.



We certainly hope that you enjoy your walk on River Boardwalk Trail. Please return this guide to the Admissions Desk.

We look forward to your next visit!
www.chattnaturecenter.org
(770) 992-2055

6. Invaders

Privet (a bush with small, semi-evergreen leaves) and Japanese honeysuckle (a vine with small, deciduous leaves) are both non-native plants brought to the U.S. for ornamental purposes. These plants flourished here and escaped to wild areas, often spread by birds who disperse seeds. These invasive species out-compete native shrubs, trees and other plants, robbing many animals of traditional food and homes.



Privet
Ligustrum ovalifolium

7. Osprey Platform

The green platform was constructed to encourage osprey nesting. Although mostly found near the coast, osprey are being found more and more in freshwater ecosystems.



Osprey
Pandion haliaetus

Osprey are migratory birds that nest along the Chattahoochee River. Osprey are raptors that usually prey on fish. Unlike other raptors, they have an adaptation to catch fish: the pads of their feet are covered with spicules. These hooked bumps help osprey pull slippery, slimy fish from the water.

8. Marshland Medicines

The river birch was one of many plants used for medicinal purposes by the Native Americans living along the River. The Cherokee people chewed the leaves as an anti-diarrhea treatment. Also, an infusion of the leaves was taken to treat colds. The bark of the tree, if infused, will ease stomach pain.



River Boardwalk Trail

a self-guided tour

Please respect nature as you hike through the River Boardwalk Trail; take only pictures and leave only footprints.

To enjoy this trail, please follow the **purple blazes** (a spot/mark on a tree) that can be found along the trail. Numbers are marked with red paint on stones.



Great Blue Heron
Ardea herodias

1. The Smell of the Wild

You are now standing between two different wetland habitats. Beside Willeo Road stands the marsh. Marshes are shallow bodies of water with lots of grasses and herbs. Look for plants like cattails, reeds, rushes, and sedges but notice there are no trees!

On the other side of the boardwalk you find the swamp. How is this area different? Did you notice the birches, ashes, tag alders, and willows that live here? These trees are adapted to live in soggy, or hydric soil. Unlike marshes, the amount of water in a swamp may change a lot throughout the year, which is why the trees can live here.

You might also notice a strong odor coming from the swamp. This is the smell of decomposing vegetation common to swamps when water gets low.

Keep your eyes open for a variety of species that call this area home. Plants and animals you may find here include:



Green-headed
Coneflower
Rudbeckia lacinata

Osprey
Pandion hali-

Virginia Dayflower
Commelina communis

2. Marsh on a Mission

The marsh here is slowly filling in to become a swamp. How can you tell? As the soil changes, woody shrubs such as button bush can begin to move in.

These successional marshes are important habitats for migrating animals and are more populated in the spring and fall. Look closely and you may see a wood duck. Wood ducks inhabit wooded ponds and marshes. They nest in tree cavities or in boxes like the one here.



Wood Duck
Aix sponsa

3. Marsh Platform

This platform is a wonderful spot to observe Canada Geese, Mallards, Wood Ducks, Great Blue Herons and Red-Winged Blackbirds.

Stand near the edge of the platform; look down and look closely. You might see a graceful fishing spider or two-inch-long mosquitofish searching for dinner. The water below you is probably murky and covered by a thin coating of oil. This naturally occurring oil is released from detritus (organic matter) as it decays. Natural oils, silt, and pollutants are filtered by the roots of cattails and scented water lilies.



Mosquitofish
Gambusia affinis



Cattail
Typha latifolia

Cattails are important to wetland wildlife. Cattail roots provide food for geese, ducks, and muskrats.

The seed pods of cattails provide shelter for insects. In the summer, the stems become a feast for muskrats and beavers and a home for red-winged blackbirds.

4. Native Peoples

Take a moment and imagine the river before roads, buildings or even boardwalks dotted the shores. What would you see?



Black Walnut
Juglans nigra

Long ago this river once marked a boundary of the Creek and Cherokee Nations. The river provided food, transportation and building materials. The black walnut tree here was particularly useful. Native people made a black stain from the walnut shell. This stain could then be used to dye clothing and baskets. What other things would you imagine these people could use?

5. Bull Sluice Lake

Notice how wide the Chattahoochee



River is at this point. You are actually looking at Bull Sluice Lake. Prior to the construction of Morgan Falls Dam in 1904, the

river flowed at a very rapid pace. The dam slows the river and allows the water to back up and spread out. The slower water aids in the creation of this new wetland habitat.

However, slower water also changes the river habitat. Sediments that once washed downstream collect here and settle to the bottom of the river. The natural stream bed that was once very rocky is now covered in squishy soil. This new substrate is unsuitable for many aquatic organisms that traditionally are found here.