

Caloosahatchee

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: Steve Alvarez



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photo: J. Chas. McCullough



photo: Charitie Heidecker ©

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1920.
- Acres: 40.
- Location: the refuge is located adjacent to interstate 75 on the Caloosahatchee River in Lee County within the city of Ft. Myers, FL.
- Administered as part of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Natural History

- The refuge consists of several mangrove islands covered with a variety of fresh and brackish water vegetation. Upland vegetation includes cabbage palms, sea grapes, and an assortment of other subtropical plants. Wetland habitat consists primarily of mangrove forest-red, black and white mangroves.
- Mangroves act as fish nurseries that attract foraging water birds. Mangroves also provide feeding, loafing, and roosting habitat for shorebirds, gulls, terns, pelicans, cormorants, and other water birds.
- The refuge is located adjacent to the Florida Power and Light Company's Orange River Power Plant. The warm water out-flow from the power plant is a major wintering area for the endangered West Indian manatee.

Refuge Objectives

- To protect and provide suitable habitat for endangered and threatened species including the West Indian manatee, wood stork, eastern indigo snake, American crocodile, and bald eagle.

- To implement sound wildlife management techniques to provide feeding, nesting, and roosting habitat for a wide diversity of shore birds, wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, and neo-tropical migratory species.
- To provide wildlife oriented recreation compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

Management Tools

- Law enforcement.
- Wildlife population surveys.
- Partnerships.
- Education/interpretation.
- Chemical and mechanical control of invasive exotic plants.

Public Use Opportunities

- Fresh and salt water fishing.
- Wildlife photography.
- Canoeing and kayaking.
- Manatee viewing area adjacent to the refuge. (Partnership with Lee County Manatee Park).
- Boat access only.

Questions and Answers

Where is Caloosahatchee NWR?
Caloosahatchee National Wildlife Refuge is located in Fort Myers, beneath the I-75 Caloosahatchee Bridge. The refuge includes three islands and is 40 acres in size. The original refuge boundary has been lost due to channelization of the river and deposition of dredged spoil upon the islands. The nearest population center is the City of Fort Myers, located seven miles to the west.

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How do I get there?

Access to the islands that makeup the Caloosahatchee NWR is by boat only. Boaters should consult navigational charts and tide schedules before attempting to visit any of the refuge islands. Boaters should note that seasonal boat speed restriction zones are strictly enforced for the protection of the West Indian manatees that frequent the Caloosahatchee and Orange rivers.

Where is the refuge closed to public uses?

The Caloosahatchee NWR receives little public use. Access onto the refuge is difficult in the mangrove areas and there are no boat docking and mooring facilities. Occasionally, boaters visit one of the islands with uplands but mosquitoes are usually so numerous that visiting the islands are extremely uncomfortable.