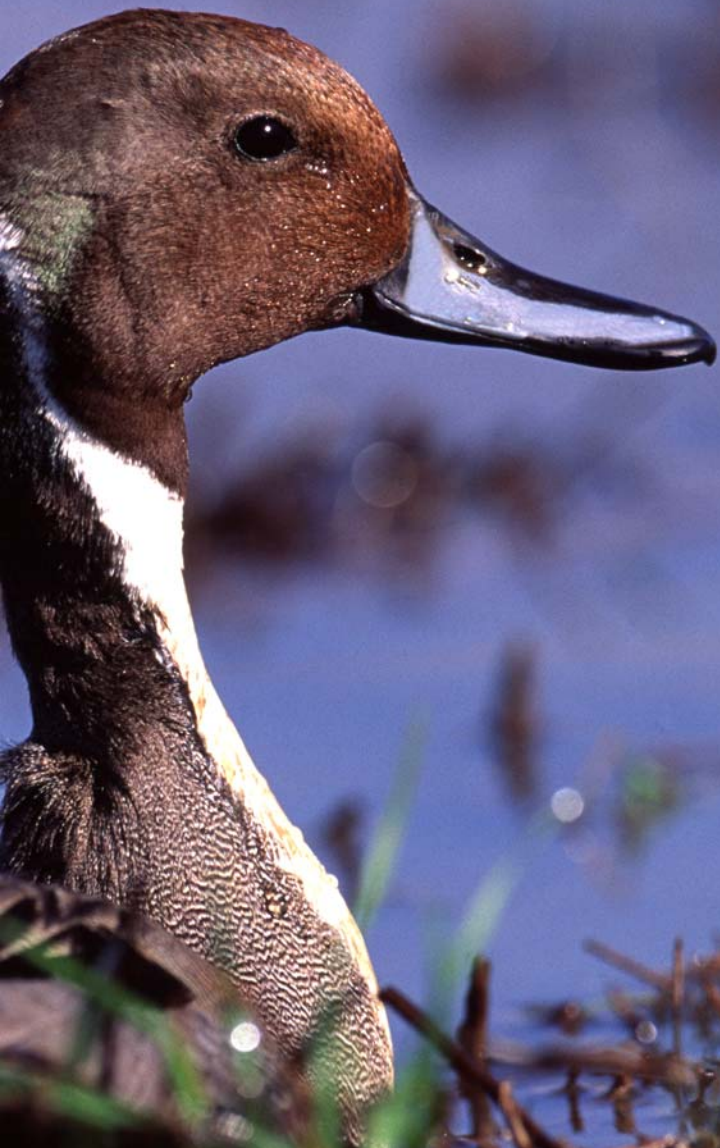


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Cameron Prairie

*National Wildlife Refuge*

Southwest Louisiana Refuges Complex



*Mission: Manage, protect, and perpetuate coastal marshes to provide high-quality food and habitat for wintering migratory waterfowl, and other migratory birds and native wildlife.*





*This blue goose, designed by “Ding” Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

## **Introduction**

This National Wildlife Refuge hosts more than 200 species of migrating, wintering, and resident birds annually. Bird species include snow, white-fronted and Canada geese, green-winged teal, ring-necked ducks, songbirds, northern bobwhite, mourning doves, and wading birds.

Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (Cameron Prairie NWR) was established in 1988 and was the first refuge established under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, a treaty among Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

The refuge is located 25 miles southeast of Lake Charles, Louisiana, in Cameron Parish. Cameron Prairie NWR staff manages two separate and distinct units (see map at center).

The Gibbstown Unit contains 9,621 acres of fresh marsh, coastal prairie, and moist soil units. It is managed to provide natural foods for wintering waterfowl and other water birds.

The East Cove Unit of nearby Sabine National Wildlife Refuge (Sabine NWR) consists of 14,927 acres of brackish and salt marsh. It is a nursery ground for brown and white shrimp, blue crab, and many fish species.

*Diane Borden-Billiot*



*Eastern meadowlark along Pintail Drive.*

*Left: Blue-winged teal in flight by monsourphotography.com*

*Typical East Cove marsh.*

*Mike Hoff*



## Wildlife

Cameron Prairie's marshes and moist prairies provide nesting and wintering habitat for many birds and other wildlife. The refuge is a winter

home to thousands of ducks and geese including green-winged teal, mallards, northern pintail, ring-necked ducks, white-fronted and snow geese. Ducks that regularly nest on the refuge include mottled and fulvous whistling

ducks. Wading birds including white and white-faced ibis, roseate spoonbills, and numerous species of herons and egrets abound on the refuge throughout the year.

Diane Borden-Billiot



*Little Blue Heron hunting for food.*

Mike Hoff



Mike Hoff

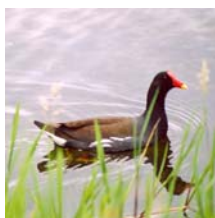


*Top: Northern Pintails feeding in a managed marsh.  
Below: Wintering white-fronted and snow geese behind the visitor center.*

Central and South America and cross the Gulf of Mexico en route to their North American nesting grounds. Cheniers and levees are often the first habitat migrants encounter where they can rest and feed before continuing on to nesting grounds.

Forested refuge levees and nearby remnant beach ridges called "cheniers" provide important stopover habitat for migratory birds such as painted and indigo buntings, rose-breasted grosbeaks and warblers. Over 250 species of birds winter in Mexico, and

Diane Borden-Billiot



## Habitat Management

Resource management programs on Cameron Prairie Refuge are directed at preserving and improving habitat for wildlife. In the past, approximately 1,230 acres of agricultural land in the Gibbstown Unit was farmed for rice. Now, this acreage is managed for moist soil plants that provide food for wildlife.

Ty Ivey



Refuge prairie lands are being restored by periodic burning, mowing, and discing. Native prairie grasses have a natural beauty, protect the soil, and supply food and cover for many kinds of wildlife.

Mike Hoff



Earthen levees have been repaired and water control structures installed to maximize water management in the marshes for waterfowl. Some of the marshes are drained or burned periodically in the fall to promote the growth of natural foods. In the early winter, these areas are flooded to benefit waterfowl, primarily ducks and other wetland birds.

Mike Hoff



*Top to bottom:  
Common Moorhen.  
Painted Bunting.  
Walter's millet is an abundant choice duck food. Flatsedge seeds are also a preferred duck food.*

The marshes of the East Cove Unit are being managed to preserve a delicate balance between salt and fresh water. The level of salt in the water is constantly being monitored and the water control structures located along a 19-mile levee on

Mike Hoff



Mike Hoff



*Top: Moist soil management- field preparation prior to vegetative growth.*

*Below: Moist soil management- same field after vegetative growth.*

Calcasieu Lake are managed in an effort to provide the best habitat for the wildlife that lives there. These efforts will do much to restore the historic marshes destroyed by saltwater intrusion.

The Cameron Creole Watershed Project, which includes the East Cove Unit, is a cooperative effort among local, State, and Federal agencies, as well as the private sector, to develop methods to restore 64,000 acres of marsh in Cameron Parish.

It is one of the largest marsh restoration projects in the United States. Constructing fences out of Christmas trees to reduce wave action and planting bulrush to help



*Wading birds including roseate spoonbills, great and snowy egrets, Louisiana and little blue herons, and white ibis congregate in tidal areas to feed. Nesting Great Egret.*

build up new land are only two of the ways in which the marsh is slowly being restored.

### **Visiting the Refuge**

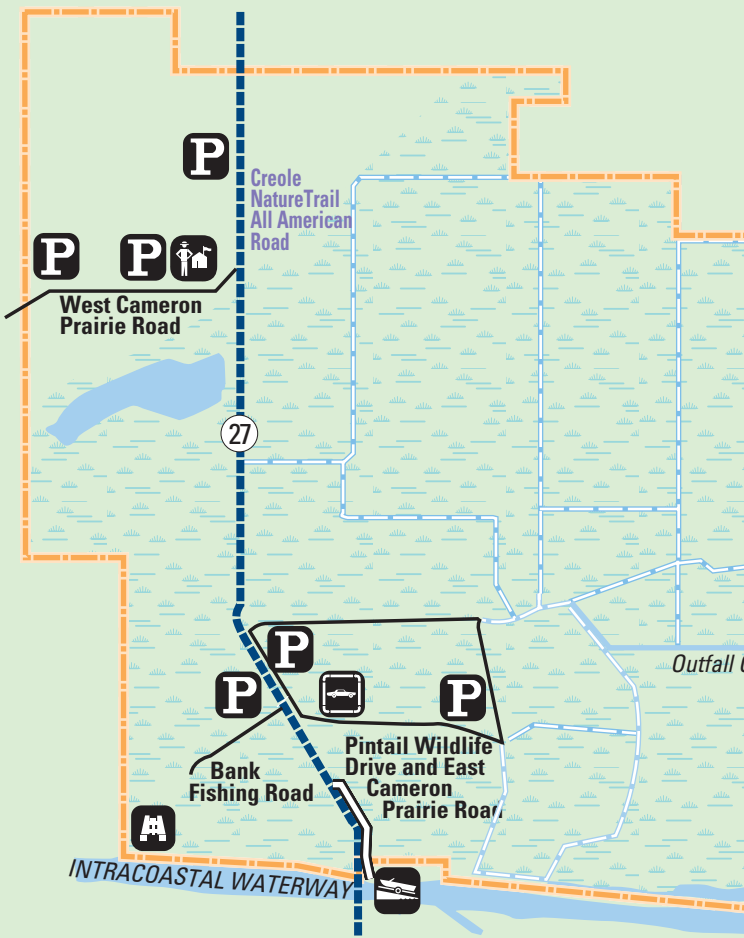
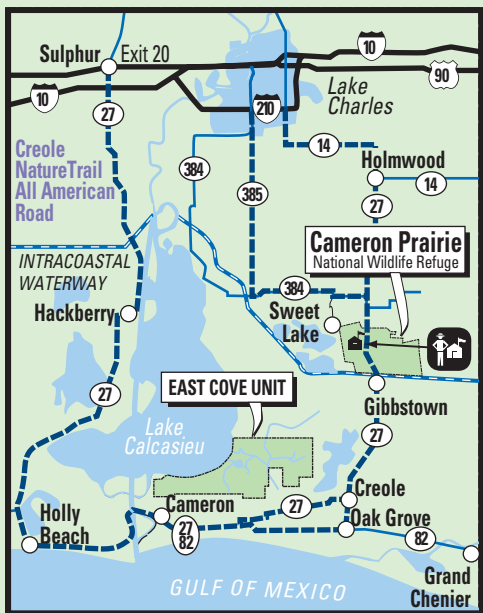
Cameron Prairie NWR offers a variety of wildlife-oriented recreation for the public to enjoy. Visitor opportunities include wildlife viewing, photography, bird watching, a visitor center and boardwalk with educational

displays, a wildlife drive trail, primitive hiking, fishing, boating, and hunting. All activities are permitted during daylight hours only.

The Refuge Visitor Center is open 7:30 am to 4:00 pm on Monday through Friday and 10:00 am to 4:00 pm on Saturday. It is located 25 miles southeast of Lake Charles, eleven miles south of Holmwood and 30 miles north of the Cameron ferry.

Cameron Prairie NWR is centrally located between Lacassine and Sabine National Wildlife Refuges on Highway 27. It is approximately a one hour drive west of Lacassine NWR and one and half hour drive east of Sabine NWR.

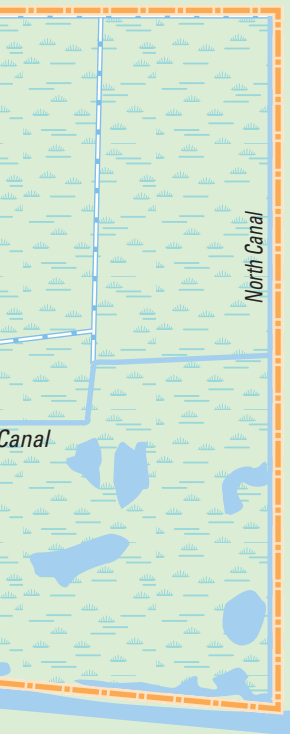
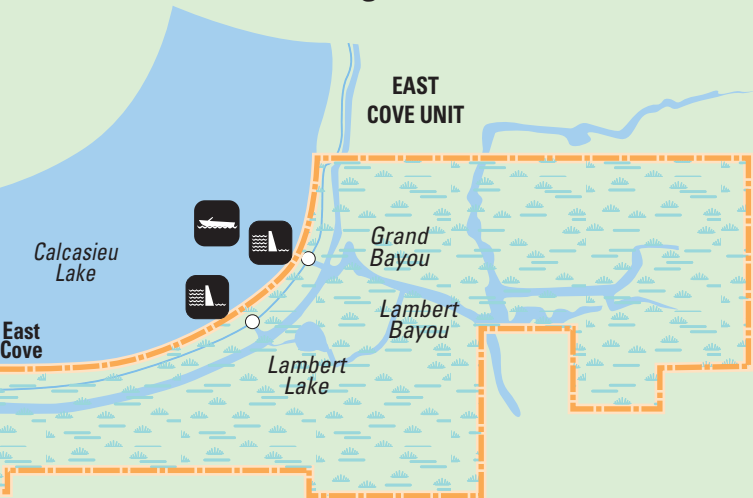
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# Ameron Prairie

## National Wildlife Refuge



-  Refuge Office and Visitor Center
-  Parking
-  Refuge Boundary
-  Paved Road
-  Unpaved Road
-  Creole Nature Trail  
All American Road
-  Canals
-  Levees
-  Boat Launching
-  Fishing
-  Pintail Wildlife Drive
-  Water Control Structure
-  Boat Access  
Grand Bayou Control Structure
-  Wildlife Observation
-  Marsh
-  Water



*Aerial view of refuge facilities and moist soil units.*

## **Safety**

Please do not feed any wildlife. It is unhealthy for them and dangerous for people. Keep yourself and your pets away from alligators. Alligators bite and they will eat pets. Watch where you step, be cautious of poisonous snakes such as the cottonmouth (water moccasin) and biting fire ants. Insect repellent and/or protective clothing are recommended to prevent mosquito and other insect bites. Protect yourself from heat disorders and sunburn by drinking plenty of water and using sun block regularly.



*Visitor center entranceway.*

Diane Borden-Billiot



Ray Matlack



Diane Borden-Billiot



*Top to bottom: Water moccasins are a common venomous snake. They are also referred to as cottonmouths due to their white mouth. Avoid fire ant mounds which look like piles of dirt in the grass.*

## **Wildlife Observation and Photography**

These activities are available year round throughout open areas of the refuge. The most favorable times of day to observe

wildlife are early morning and late afternoon. Some species are more likely to be seen during specific seasons of the year. Migrating songbirds, shorebirds, and sunning alligators are most easily observed during spring and fall. Wading birds are plentiful throughout the summer, while flocks of migrating ducks and geese can be seen throughout the fall and winter.

Excellent wildlife observation opportunities are available along Pintail Wildlife Drive, located approximately two miles south of the visitor center. During the fall and winter, flocks of ducks and geese can be seen feeding in the fields along the drive. Throughout the year, Pintail Wildlife Drive is an excellent place to view and photograph alligators, wild flowers, wading birds, and other wildlife.

Diane Borden-Billiot



*Refuge visitors enjoy observing turtles, alligators, fish and birds from the boardwalk.*

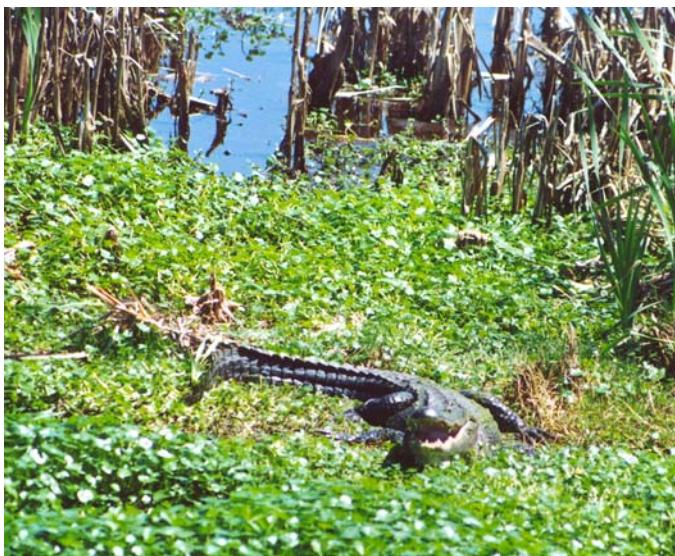
Diane Borden-Billiot



Diane Borden-Billiot



Top: Pintail Wildlife Drive signs indicate where the driving trail begins. Below: Clumps of eastern blue-eyed grass line the Pintail Wildlife Drive.



*Top: Alligator sunning along the wildlife drive. Below: Armadillos, although common on the refuge, are rarely seen.*

### **Hiking**

*Gibbstown Unit.* Primitive hiking opportunities are available to the adventuresome visitor. Gibbstown unit dikes and levees are open to hiking, unless otherwise

indicated. Review above safety recommendations.

*East Cove Unit.* This unit is restricted to boat use only.

### **Fishing and Boating**

*Gibbstown Unit.* Fishing is permitted from March 15 through October 15 in accordance with State laws in designated areas. Motorized boats are only allowed in the Outfall canal from March 15 through October 15. Non-motorized boats are permitted in water along Bank Fishing Road. See refuge fishing regulations brochure for additional information.

*East Cove Unit.* Fishing and boating are permitted in this unit year round **except** during the Louisiana

Jim Ashfield



Ray Matlack



Diane Borden-Billiot



*Top to bottom: Grand Bayou boat bay, East Cove Unit. Many red-eared slider turtles inhabit the visitor center's pond. A spotting scope is available for visitor use on the Al Bonsack Observation Deck behind the visitor center.*

waterfowl hunting season and when the Grand Bayou boat bay is closed. Motorized boats may be operated in East Cove Unit canals, bayous, and lakes with no restrictions on boat motor horsepower. However, only electric trolling motors may be used in refuge marshes. See refuge fishing regulations brochure for additional information.

## **Hunting and Firearms**

*Gibbstown Unit.* Refuge hunting opportunities include archery white-tailed deer hunting, snipe and deer hunting, and limited permit youth waterfowl and rabbit hunting. Shotguns are permitted on the refuge only during the refuge hunting season. No other firearms are permitted at any time. Only approved non-toxic shot may be used on the refuge. Shotguns carried in vehicles on the refuge must be unloaded (no shells in gun) and dismantled or completely encased in a closed gun case that has latches, a draw strap, or a zipper.

Mike Hoff



Paul Yakupzack



See refuge hunting regulations and permit brochure for additional information.

*East Cove Unit.* This unit is not open to any type of hunting. No firearms of any type are permitted.

*Top: Youth waterfowl hunting is a popular refuge lottery hunt. Below: Archery white-tailed deer hunt success.*

**Cameron Prairie  
National Wildlife Refuge**  
1428 Highway 27  
Bell City, LA 70630-9618  
Phone: 337/598 2216  
East Cove Boat Bay Hotline: 337/598 4235  
Fax: 337/598 2492  
E-mail: [cameronprairie@fws.gov](mailto:cameronprairie@fws.gov)

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://cameronprairie.fws.gov>

**January 2004**

**Visitor Center Hours:**  
Monday-Friday: 7:30 am - 4:00 pm  
Saturday: 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

