

**Welcome to Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge**

Established in 1979, the 53,000 acre Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for wildlife and wildlife-oriented outdoor recreation. This unique refuge protects one of the largest undeveloped river-delta estuarine systems in the United States – the lower 20 miles of the famous Suwannee River. Lower Suwannee is one of more than 540 national wildlife refuges that protect 100 million acres throughout the United States.



photo: Sean Dowrie

**Refuge Headquarters**

The Headquarters for Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys NWR's is located off State Road 347 between Chiefland and Cedar Key, Florida. Hours of operation are Monday – Friday 7:30 am – 4:00 pm.

**Wildlife and Habitat**

One of the primary purposes for Lower Suwannee NWR is to protect bottomland hardwood swamps and forests that surround the Suwannee River. Along with these unique wetlands, pine forests and scrub ridges provide habitat for thousands of land-dwelling creatures. White-tailed deer, eastern wild turkeys, gray fox, river otters, swallow-tailed kites, and bald eagles are but a few of several hundred species that inhabit the refuge.

Natural salt marshes, tidal flats, and tidal creeks provide unspoiled estuarine habitat along Gulf Coast waters at the southern end of west Florida's Big Bend region. These areas provide important feeding and breeding grounds for marine life and various birds including wading birds and shorebirds. Fiddler crabs, often seen scavenging refuge tidal marshes in large numbers, and other small marsh critters are an important food source for many birds and other wildlife. The federally threatened Gulf sturgeon swims up the Suwannee River to spawn. The endangered West Indian manatee travels throughout the Suwannee River and its tributaries.

**Refuge Management**

Refuge employees strive to provide high quality habitat conditions for a variety of native wildlife. When the refuge was established, more than 6,000 acres of uplands had been commercially managed. Projects designed to restore these areas to more natural conditions are underway. Hundreds of acres of slash pines have been selectively thinned - and in some cases clear-cut - to move toward reforestation to more native longleaf/wiregrass and mixed hardwood communities.

Much of the state of Florida consists of ecosystems that have adapted with fire, typically burning naturally every 3 to 10 years. Prescribed fire (controlled burning) is used on refuge uplands and wetlands to mimic the natural fire regime which improves habitat and food availability for many species of wildlife. Scrub habitat is being restored through mechanical cutting and the use of fire on high, dry sandy ridges to benefit species such as the gopher tortoise and eastern indigo snake.

**Recreational Opportunities**

Lower Suwannee NWR provides opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors through wildlife-oriented recreation including wildlife observation and photography, fishing, hunting, environmental education, interpretive programs, and canoeing. There is no admission fee and most of the refuge is open 24 hours a day 365 days per year.

More than 40 miles of primary roads are open for driving, hiking, or bicycling and 50 additional miles of secondary roads are open to foot and bicycle traffic. Observation towers and platforms, fishing piers, boardwalks, a canoe trail, and several boat launch areas provide excellent access to many refuge areas that are off the beaten path.

**Hiking Trails**

River Trail – 1 mile loop. Located near the Refuge Headquarters off SR 347.

Shell Mound Trail – 0.3 mile loop. Located at Shell Mound off CR 326.

Dennis Creek Trail – 1 mile loop. Located at Shell Mound off CR 326.

**By Vehicle or Bicycle**

In Levy County, the Lower Suwannee Nature Drive winds nine miles through a variety of habitats. Wading birds, songbirds, and alligators are often visible along the way.

In Dixie County, the historic Dixie Mainline Road (nine miles) connects County Road 349 and County Road 357.



photo: ©Sean Dowrie



photo: USFWS



photo: Bruce Coltin

Outstanding views of bottomland hardwoods and tidal creeks are available along the road. Alligators, birds of prey, and wading birds are common along this route.

**By Boat**

Public boat ramps that provide access to the Suwannee River are available at Fowler's Bluff and the town of Suwannee. Access to coastal waters is available at Cedar Key, Shired Island, and also the town of Suwannee. Small boats and kayaks/canoes can be launched at McCormick Creek, Shell Mound, and Fishbone Creek.

**Hunting and Fishing**

Much of the refuge is open for hunting of deer, hogs, wild turkeys, and small game within State seasons. In addition to State hunting regulations, special Refuge regulations apply and a Refuge Hunting



photo: Larry Richardson



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



photo: Bruce Coltin



photo: USFWS



photo: ©Sean Dowrie

Permit is required. For additional details, contact the Refuge Headquarters at 352/493 0238. For information on State Hunting Regulations call 1-888-HUNT FLORIDA.

Fishing is allowed in coastal waters, tidal creeks, interior ponds, and the Suwannee River year-round as per State regulations. Universally accessible fishing piers are available at Shell Mound and Salt Creek. For a copy of State fishing regulations, contact the Florida Marine Patrol at 1-800-DIAL-FMP (saltwater) or 1-888-FISH FLORIDA (freshwater).

**For Your Safety**

- Biting insects and ticks are numerous along trails during summer months. Use of insect repellent is advised.
- Lock your vehicle and take your valuables with you or store them securely out of sight.

- Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when to expect your return.

**Prohibited Activities**

- Camping is not allowed. Campgrounds are located near-by in Levy and Dixie Counties.
- Fires of any type.
- Spotlighting.
- Dogs off leashes.
- Feeding or disturbing alligators or any other species of wildlife.
- Entry into areas posted as closed.
- Cutting of timber.
- Release of any wild or domestic animal.
- Use of metal detectors.
- Taking artifacts.

- Horseback riding.
- Firearms, except as allowed during hunting season.
- Off-road vehicles (ATV's, unlicensed motorcycles).
- Taking (living or dead) or injuring any plant or animal other than legally taken fish or game species.

**For more information please contact:**

Refuge Manager  
 Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge  
 16450 Northwest 31<sup>st</sup> Place  
 Chiefland, FL 32626  
 352/493 0238  
 Internet: [www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee](http://www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee)

