

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Chassahowitzka

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*



*Chassahowitzka is one of more than 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

*The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network*



*Capt. Larry D. Campbell*

*of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife resource management program in the world.*



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

Located about 65 miles north of St. Petersburg, the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of over 31,000 acres of saltwater bays, estuaries and brackish marshes with a fringe of hardwood swamps along the eastern boundary. The northern boundary parallels and includes some of the Homosassa River. The refuge extends southward across the scenic Chassahowitzka River for 12 miles to its southern boundary at Raccoon Point.



USFWS

### **Habitat and Wildlife**

The refuge was established in 1943 primarily to benefit waterfowl in an area long famous as a wintering area for ducks and coots. Today, although waterfowl numbers in south Florida have declined, the refuge has become increasingly important for the endangered West Indian manatees which utilize many of the refuge's tidal bays, creeks and rivers.

Chassahowitzka is unspoiled estuarine habitat along Florida's west coast that serves as important



breeding and feeding ground for marine life. Shallow bays support an abundant growth of muskgrass which provides food for various birds and the endangered manatee.

Inland from the bays are the brackish creeks and ponds where wideongrass, watermilfoil and other foods grow in abundance. The eastern boundary provides a few thousand acres of swamp habitat where oaks, cypress and red cedar grow. The outer islands consist mainly of red and black mangrove which provides habitat for colonial birds.



Many species of birds, including cormorants, great blue herons, green-backed herons, ospreys, white pelicans, and various species of waterfowl and songbirds are observed on the refuge.

Other animals inhabiting the refuge include numerous alligators and raccoons. River otters are seen occasionally

exhibiting their aquatic skills. Deer, turkey, black bear, and predators such as the bobcat are occasional residents of the refuge.



Endangered and threatened species including nesting bald eagles, West Indian manatees, woodstorks, green sea turtles, Eastern indigo snakes and an occasional peregrine falcon are observed on the refuge.

The refuge provides a place for approximately 250 species of birds,



**ST. MARTINS KEYS**

*Little Homosassa*

*Homosassa*

*Homosassa Bay*

*Mason*

**Chassahowitzka Pt.**

**NORTHWEST KEYS**

*GULF OF MEXICO*

*Chassahowitzka Bay*







**Black Rock**

**BIRD ISLAND**

**CRAWL KEY**

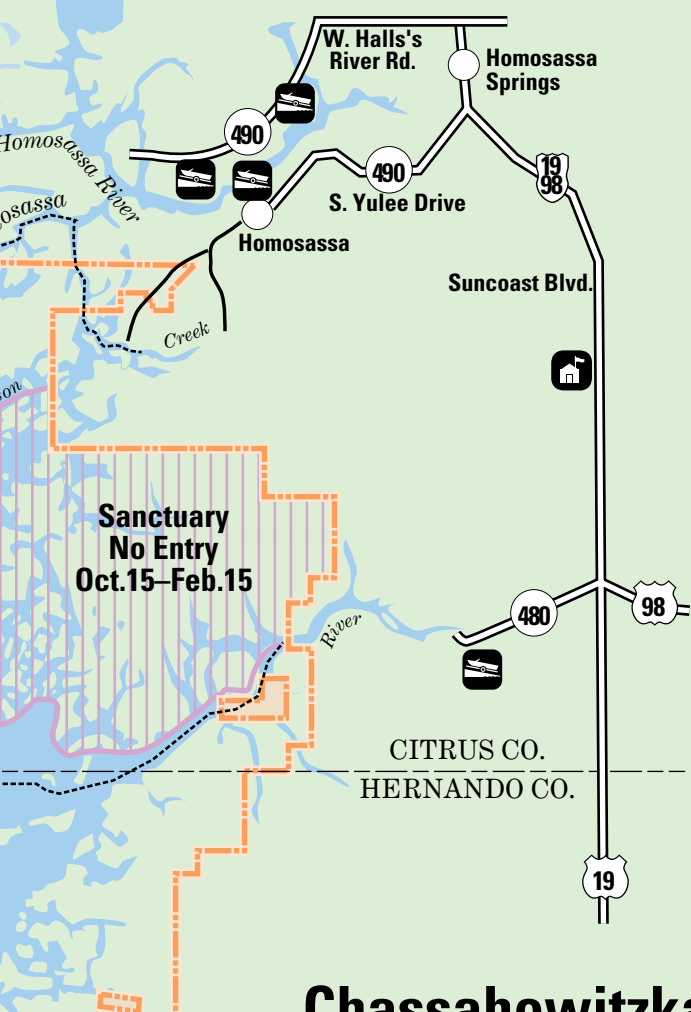
**Raccoon Pt.**

**Legend**

-  Sanctuary—No entry Oct.15–Feb.15
-  Private Land
-  Refuge Boundary
-  Airboat Routes
-  Maintenance Facility
-  Boat Ramp

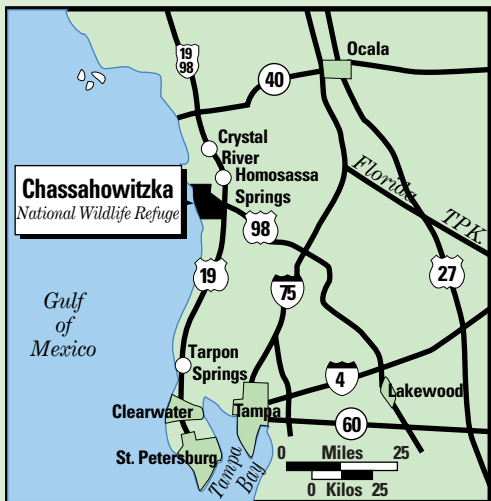






# Chassahowitzka

*National Wildlife Refuge*







over 50 species of reptiles and amphibians and at least 25 different species of mammals. Because of this, visitors are likely to see a variety of animals during a journey through the refuge.



### **Management**

Management objectives are oriented toward preserving and protecting the land and wildlife resources of the refuge. This requires an active law enforcement program designed to prevent disturbance of wildlife populations and the destruction of habitat.

The entire state of Florida is a fire ecosystem that has historically burned every three to ten years. Prescribed fire

is used on the refuge to mimic the natural fire regime. This improves habitat and food availability for several wildlife species including endangered and threatened species.

76% of the refuge is a designated Wilderness Area meaning land that will remain uninhabited and preserved in its' natural state.



## **Visiting the Refuge**

The refuge is only accessible by boat. Public boat ramps in the area of the refuge are limited, so visitors are advised to consult the enclosed map for the boat ramp access.

Because of the need to protect refuge lands and wildlife resources, special regulations have been enacted. These regulations concern public access and use of the refuge.

### *Speed Zone*

Between April 1 and August 31, special posted slow speed restrictions apply to portions of the Chassahowitzka River for the protection of manatees.

### *Airboat Use*

Airboat use on the refuge is restricted to Hernando County waters and posted routes in Citrus County. Operators are required to have a refuge airboat permit. Permits are issued from the refuge headquarters.

### *Firearms/ Weapons*

Firearms/weapons are prohibited on the Refuge except during designated hunts at which time firearms must be transported unloaded and encased or dismantled.

### *Hunting*

Special hunt regulations apply to the refuge. Consult Refuge Manager for current regulations. See map for closed hunt area.

### *Fishing*

County and state commercial/sport fishing regulations apply. Consult Florida Marine Patrol for current regulations.

### *Camping*

Camping is prohibited on the refuge.

### *Fires*

Fires are prohibited on the refuge.

## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Units of the National Wildlife Refuge system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys, and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

The Service also manages National Fish Hatcheries, and provides Federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance, and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals, and threatened and endangered species.



*Gaylen Rathburn*

### **More Information**

If you would like more information about this refuge, the Refuge system, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact:

Refuge Manager  
Chassahowitzka  
National Wildlife Refuge  
1502 Southeast Kings Bay Drive  
Crystal River, FL 34429  
352/563 2088

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**[www.nccentral.com/fcnwr.htm](http://www.nccentral.com/fcnwr.htm)**

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

**May 2001**

