

Passage Key

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



photo: Patrick D. Hagan



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James Kraus, Refuge Manager
Chassahowitzka NWR Complex
Passage Key NWR
1502 Southeast Kings Bay Drive
Crystal River, FL 34429
Phone: 352/563 2088
Fax: 352/795 7961
E-mail: Chassawitzka@fws.gov

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1905.
- Acres: Variable.
- Located in Manatee County, FL.
- Location: the refuge is located off shore from St. Petersburg and is accessible only by boat.
- Administered by Chassahowitzka NWR.

Natural History

- Passage Key is one of the first national wildlife refuges in the system. When established, it was a mangrove island with a fresh water lake. A 1920 hurricane destroyed the island. Today it is a 5-acre meandering barrier island and submerged lands.
- The island once hosted the largest royal tern and sandwich tern nesting colonies in the state of Florida.
- The island is currently closed year-round to all public use.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Unstaffed.
- Managed as part of Chassahowitzka NWR Complex.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide nesting, feeding and resting habitat for colonial water birds including laughing gulls, royal terns, black skimmers, sandwich terns, brown pelicans and oyster catchers.
- Provide critical habitat and protection for thousands of shore birds and water birds.

Management Tools

- Law enforcement.
- Designated wilderness area.
- Wildlife population surveys.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

Closed to all public use.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer opportunities exist for visitor center operations, manatee watch activities, and refuge maintenance projects.

Questions and Answers

Where is Passage Key?

Passage Key NWR is located off shore from the town of St. Petersburg, FL.

How do I get there?

The island is accessible only by boat and public entry is prohibited.

Why is the refuge closed to public use?

Passage Key NWR is a designated Wilderness Area and is closed because of its small size and importance to nesting and roosting sea birds and other sensitive bird species.

What wildlife species use the island?

Laughing gulls, royal terns, black skimmers, sandwich terns, brown pelicans and a few oyster catchers nest on the island.