

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Cameron Prairie

*National Wildlife Refuge*



*Unmatched anywhere in the world, the National Wildlife Refuge System is an extensive network of lands and waters protected and managed especially for wildlife and its habitat. Refuges stretch across the U.S. from above the Arctic Circle in Alaska to the subtropical waters of the Florida Keys and beyond to the Caribbean and South Pacific. The National Wildlife Refuge System is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which protects and manages over 500 refuges for wildlife and for people to enjoy.*



*This blue goose, designed by "Ding Darling," has become a symbol of the Refuge System.*

### **Introduction**

At least 5,000 to 10,000 snow geese are among the migrating and wintering waterfowl that populate Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge during the fall, winter, and spring. More than 200 bird species have been recorded at the refuge including white-fronted and Canada geese, green-winged teal, ring-necked ducks, songbirds, northern bobwhite, mourning doves, and wading birds.

Established in December 1988, Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge is the first refuge formed 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 and consists of two separate and distinct units.



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

The East Cove Unit, which was transferred from nearby Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in 1992, is made up 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.

### Wildlife

Cameron Prairie's moist prairies are home to resident songbirds, northern bobwhites, mourning doves, and white-tailed deer. In its marshes are found ducks, geese, shorebirds, wading birds, and alligators to name a few.



The refuge is a winter home to thousands of ducks and geese and a spring and summer home to migrating songbirds. During fall, winter, and spring the refuge marshes and waters are

used by migrating and wintering waterfowl. Snow geese are abundant. Green-winged teal are the most numerous of the fall and winter duck population, closely followed by ring-necked ducks. Each spring, these ducks fly to northern nesting grounds. Mottled and fulvous whistling ducks are the most common ducks that regularly nest at Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.



Wading birds abound in the summer and the shorebird migration in the spring is often spectacular. White and dark-faced ibises; snowy, great, and cattle egrets; purple gallinules; common moorhens; roseate spoonbills; and several species of herons call these marshes home for at least part of the year.

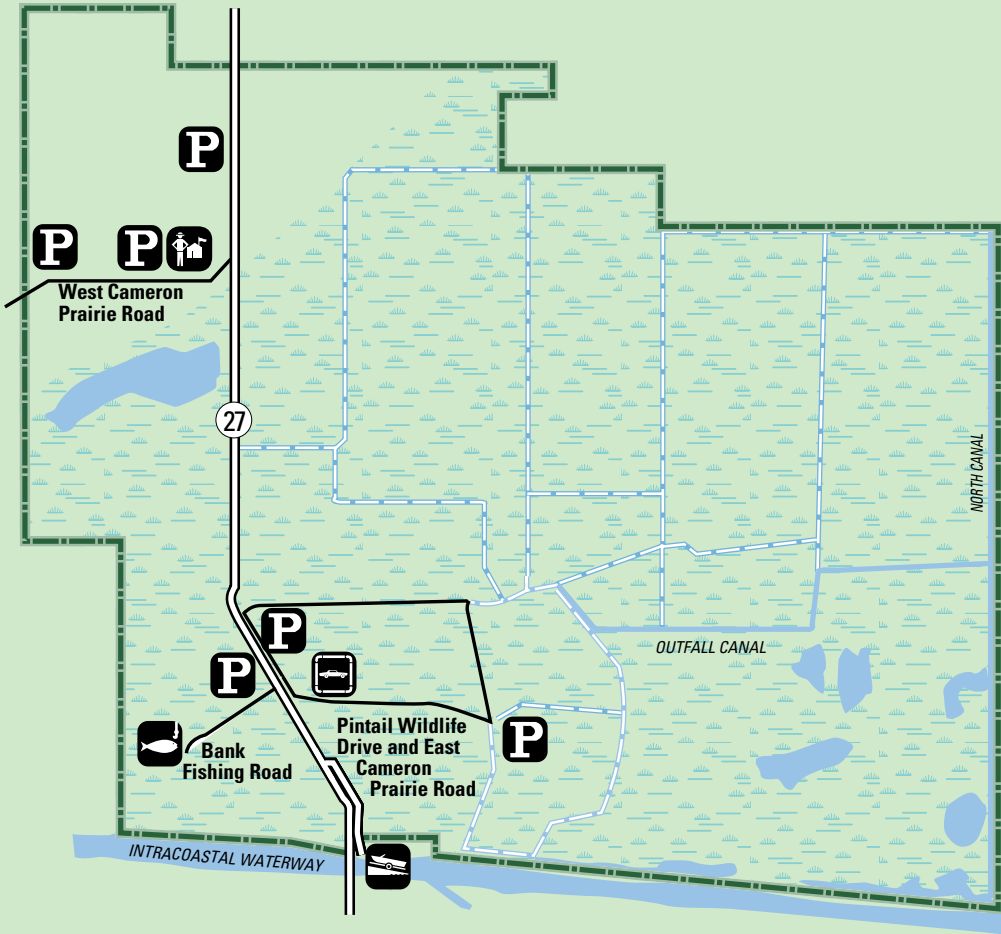
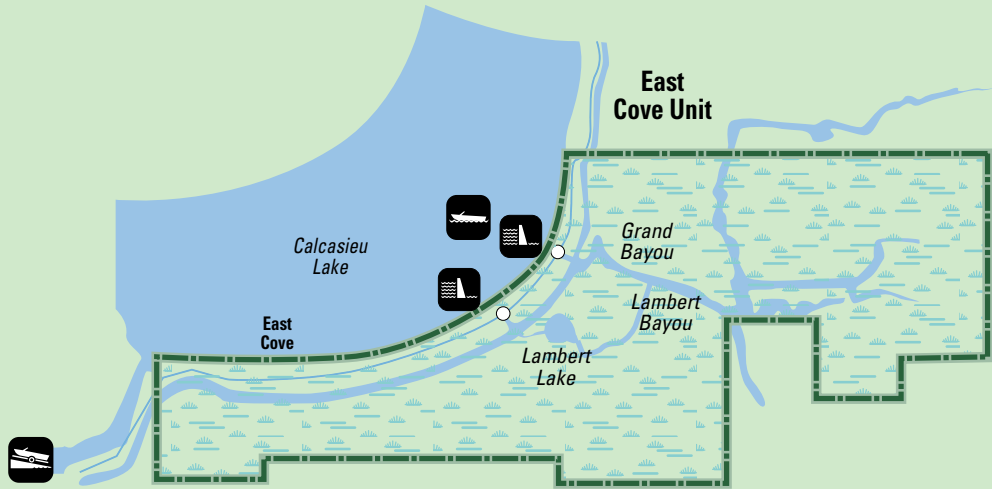
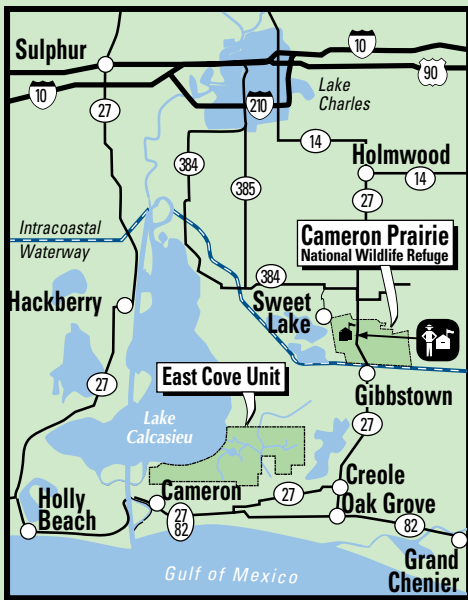
Flocks of shore birds include black-necked stilts, lesser yellowlegs, and dowitchers.















An important and unique habitat, the chenier plain is found near Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. These ancient tree covered ridges run parallel along the coast for 10 to 50 miles. Some species of neotropical migrants, birds that winter in Mexico, Central and South America, fly north to the refuge and beyond. These coastal cheniers are the first land these small birds come to after a long and exhausting flight across the Gulf of Mexico. Some of the many neotropical migrants landing on the cheniers include: indigo buntings, painted buntings, and rose-breasted grosbeaks.

### 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

# Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge



-  Refuge Office and Visitor Center
-  Parking
-  Refuge Boundary
-  Paved Road
-  Unpaved Road
-  Canals
-  Levees
-  Boat Launching
-  Fishing
-  Pintail Wildlife Drive
-  Water Control Structure
-  Boat Access—Grand Bayou Control Structure
-  Marsh
-  Water





acreage is managed for moist soil plants that provide food for wildlife.

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.

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.

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

### *Wildlife Observation*

### **Enjoy Your Visit**

Cameron Prairie National Wildlife



Refuge offers a variety of wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities for the public to enjoy. These activities are permitted during daylight hours only.



To learn more about what to do and see during your visit, stop by the Refuge Visitor Center located south of Lake Charles on Louisiana Highway 27, eleven miles south of Holmwood, Louisiana. The Visitor Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.





Bird watching, photography, and sight-seeing are encouraged year round. Fall and winter months offer the best opportunities to observe flocks of migrating geese and ducks. Spring and summer are the best times to see wading and shore birds. Songbirds can be observed passing through the area on their spring and fall migrations. A bird checklist is available at the visitor center.

### *Pintail Wildlife Drive*



Excellent wildlife observation opportunities are available approximately 2 miles south of the visitor center along the Pintail Wildlife Drive. During the fall and winter, flocks of ducks and geese can be seen feeding in the fields along the road. In addition to the seasonal waterfowl, wading birds and alligators can also be observed. Remember, alligators can be dangerous. Please stay a safe distance away from them, and keep all pets in the car. Do not feed any wildlife.

### *Hiking*

The dikes and levees on the refuge are open to hiking, unless otherwise indicated, and the more adventuresome are welcomed. However, be cautious of poisonous snakes, such as cottonmouths. Insect

### *Boating*



repellent is a must to guard against mosquitos and biting flies during the warm months of late spring to early fall. All public use of the East Cove Unit is restricted to boats only.

### **Gibbstown Unit**

Motorized boats are only allowed in the outfall canal from March 15, through October 15. Motors over 25 horsepower are prohibited in the canal. Non-motorized boats are permitted in the bankfishing area. See refuge fishing brochure for more information.

### **East Cove Unit**

The refuge is closed to all public use during the Louisiana Waterfowl Hunting season and when the Grand Bayou Boat Bay is closed. Motorized boats may be operated in refuge canals, bayous and lakes. Only electric trolling motors may be used in refuge marshes. Boat motor horsepower is not restricted.

### *Fishing*



### **Gibbstown Unit**

Fishing is permitted from March 15, through October 15, in accordance with State laws in designated areas. See refuge fishing brochure for more information.

### **East Cove Unit**

Fishing is permitted year round, except during the Louisiana Waterfowl Hunting season and when the Grand Bayou Boat Bay is closed. See the East Cove Fishing brochure for more information.

### **Gibbstown Unit**

The refuge does have a bow hunting season for white-tailed deer. Please see the refuge hunting brochure for more information.

### *Hunting*

All firearms are prohibited. Cased and unloaded weapons may be transported through the refuge on through routes of travel.

**Cameron Prairie  
National Wildlife Refuge  
1428 Highway 27  
Bell City, LA 70630  
318/598 2216  
Fax: 318/598 2492**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov/~r4eao>**

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