

Pea Island

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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Refuge Facts

- Established: April 12, 1938.
- Size: Originally: 5,915 acres (land), 25,700 acres (Proclamation Boundary Waters). Currently: 4,655 acres.
- Administered by Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.
- Located on the north end of Hatteras Island, a coastal barrier island and part of a chain of islands known as the Outer Banks.
- Approximately 13 miles long (north to south) and ranges from a quarter mile to one mile wide (from east to west).
- Location: 10 miles south of Nags Head, NC on NC Highway 12.
- The Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge was completed July 17, 2006.

Natural History

- Area was historically used for market waterfowl hunting, hunt clubs, commercial fishing, farming, and livestock operations.
- Refuge is comprised of ocean beach, dunes, upland, fresh and brackish water ponds, salt flats, and salt marsh.
- Bird list boasts more than 365 species; wildlife list has 25 species of mammals, 24 species of reptiles, and 5 species (low number due to salt environment) of amphibians.
- Concentrations of ducks, geese, swans, wading birds, shore birds, raptors, and neotropical migrants are seasonally abundant on the refuge.
- Refuge has 790 acres of manageable waterfowl and waterbird impoundments.
- Several colonial waterbird nesting areas are located on the refuge.

- Endangered and threatened species include loggerhead sea turtles and piping plovers. Both species nest on the refuge.

Financial Impacts

- Administered by Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. Pea Island has no assigned staff or budget.
- One employee reports for duty to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge on a daily basis.
- Numerous volunteers devote approximately 25,000 hours each year to Pea Island.
- 2.7 million visitors annually.
- Known as a “Birder’s Paradise”; birders are among the most affluent eco-tourists. Other visitors include paddlers, fishermen, and photographers.

Refuge Goals

- Protect, maintain, and enhance healthy and viable populations of indigenous migratory birds, wildlife, fish, and plants including federal and state threatened and endangered species.
- Restore, maintain, and enhance the health and biodiversity of barrier island upland and wetland habitats to ensure optimum ecological productivity.
- Provide the public with safe, quality wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities that focus on barrier island wildlife and habitats of the refuge. Continue to participate in local efforts to sustain economic health through nature-based tourism.
- Protect refuge resources by limiting the adverse impacts of human activities and development.
- Acquire and manage adequate funding, human resources, facilities, equipment, and infrastructure to accomplish all refuge goals.

Management Tools

- Water level manipulation in three brackish/freshwater impoundments.
- Prescribed fire.
- Mechanical/chemical control of noxious and invasive plants.
- Wildlife and habitat surveys.
- Environmental education.
- Wildlife Interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Outreach.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Half-mile, universally-accessible foot trail.
- Refuge Visitor Center with interpretive wildlife exhibits and sales area operated by the Refuge's non-profit support group, the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society.
- Surf and sound fishing.
- Observation tower and platforms.
- Nature photography, including public photo-blind.
- Environmental education.
- Interpretive programs.

Calendar of Events

Year-round: Weekly Bird Walks.

May: International Migratory Bird Day, weekly bird walks.

May-October: guided canoe tours (fee program).

June: Crabbing/Fishing Rodeo.

June-August: children's wildlife programs, summer bird walks, turtle talks, guided canoe tours (fee program).

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

November: Wings Over Water.

Questions and Answers

What can I do to help Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge?

You can help this refuge by volunteering your time as a volunteer, donating your money to the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society (the refuge non-profit support group), and by being a good steward for natural resources. Contact the Society (<http://www.fws.gov/alligatorriver/cwrs.html>)! They'll tell you all kinds of ways you can help!

Pea Island Refuge uses volunteers in a variety of program areas. Local volunteers work regularly staffing the Visitor Center, maintaining interpretive trails, putting up signs, conducting interpretive tours, and assisting with biological and maintenance work. We also have programs for interns and resident volunteers.

Why do some rangers wear green uniforms and some wear brown?

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) uniform is primarily brown. Pea Island Refuge lies within Cape Hatteras National Seashore. While Pea Island is administered by FWS, Cape Hatteras National Seashore falls under National Park Service (NPS) administration. NPS uniforms are green and gray.

Both FWS and NPS are Interior Department agencies; however, they have different primary missions. Stated simply, parks are for people; refuges are for wildlife. Both agencies manage wildlife; both offer many public use opportunities. The difference is in priorities. On refuges, wildlife are top priority. The refuge was established to provide habitat for wildlife and to provide compatible wildlife-dependent public use opportunities that don't conflict with providing that wildlife habitat.

When and where can we see a sea turtle on the refuge?

Healthy sea turtles only come ashore to lay eggs during the summer months. Laying usually occurs at night, and the refuge is open to the public only during daylight hours. Refuge beaches average 10 nests each year. Therefore, it is unlikely that visitors will see a healthy sea turtle on refuge beaches. Occasionally, dead or injured sea turtles wash ashore and

can be found on the beach or in the surf.

Why is the refuge called Pea Island?

At one time, a majority of the greater snow goose population in North America wintered on what is now Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. Historically, these birds foraged in the dunes and along the sound shore. In the dunes, they found a small plant whose tiny pink/lavender flowers matured to form beans that were packed with energy. These "dune peas" provided a predictable food source for the wintering geese: the refuge was literally the "pea island" for snow geese.

Why is there constant work on the highway and adjacent land through Pea Island (sand bags, moving sections, bulldozing, plantings, etc.)?

The ocean and sound, with associated winds and tides, can be an overwhelming force with which to contend. Spring tides, sustained winds, and storms frequently cause dune blowouts, tidal surges, and blowing sand. These make sections of the road impassable due to flooding and shifting of the dunes. NC Highway 12 is the only road connecting the seven villages that lie south of the refuge on Hatteras Island with each other and mainland North Carolina. The powerlines, paralleling NC 12, provide electricity to the villages. The NC Department of Transportation currently moves sand, drains water, and tries to stabilize dunes in an attempt to keep NC 12 open and is planning to replace the Bonner Bridge soon.

What is Wings Over Water?

WOW is a community-sponsored festival that celebrates wildlife and wildlands, history, and culture of eastern North Carolina. It usually occurs the first week in November.

The purpose of WOW is to work together with partners to highlight the trust resources of the area and promote eco-tourism relating to those resources.