

Crystal River

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1983.
- Acres: 46.
- Located in Citrus County, FL.
- Location: the refuge is located 75 miles north of St. Petersburg, FL, in the town of Crystal River, FL, and is accessible only by boat.
- Administered by Chassahowitzka NWR.

Natural History

- The refuge is comprised of 20 islands and several small parcels of land surrounded by the crystal clear, spring fed waters of Kings Bay.
- The refuge aids in preserving Florida's most significant naturally occurring warm water refugium for the manatee and provides critical habitat for approximately 25 percent of the nation's endangered Florida manatee population.
- 600 million gallons of fresh water flow daily from more than 30 natural springs. The temperature of the water flowing from the springs remains a constant 72° F.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Five-person staff.
- 100,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect critical wintering habitat and individuals of the Crystal River herd of the endangered West Indian manatee.
- Provide habitat and protection for other wildlife species including wading birds, raptors, alligators, and fish.
- Provide wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education for the public.

Management Tools

- Law enforcement.
- Designated "Manatee Sanctuary Areas" (November 15-March 31).
- Designated slow and idle boat speed zones.
- Aerial manatee surveys.
- Aquatic vegetation surveys.
- Water quality monitoring.
- Education/interpretation (Manatee Education Center).
- Manatee Watch volunteer program.
- Manatee Rescue Team.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Diving/snorkeling.
- Wildlife observation.
- Sport fishing.
- Nature photography.
- Motorized and non-motorized boating.

Volunteer Opportunities

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

Calendar of Events

February: Florida Manatee Festival.

April: Earth Day.

September: Coastal Clean Up.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

November: Manatee Awareness Day.

Questions and Answers

When can we see the manatees?

The best time to see wild manatees at Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is from December-March.

The weather is at its coolest, and the manatees are the most concentrated around the warm water springs that they depend on for their survival.

Captive manatees may be viewed year round at the Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park, located 7 miles south of Crystal River on U.S. Highway 19.

How do I swim with the manatees?

You can arrange a guided manatee snorkel tour through one of the many commercial dive shops in the town of Crystal River or you can arrange to rent a boat and go on your own. The refuge currently does not provide tours.

Is it OK to touch a manatee?

It is OK to touch a manatee with one open palm if the manatee approaches you first. Observe manatees from the surface of the water and at a distance. Manatees on the bottom are likely to be resting or feeding and should not be disturbed.

How big do manatees get?

Manatees can grow up to 12 feet and weigh up to 3500 lbs.

Why do manatees come to Crystal River?

Manatees depend on the warm water (72°) springs in Kings, Bay, Crystal River for their survival. Manatees cannot survive in waters below 68° for extended periods of time. They will die of hypothermia.