

Matlacha Pass

National Wildlife Refuge

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1908.
- Acres: 538.
- Location: the refuge is located within the Matlacha Pass of the Charlotte Harbor estuary Lee County, FL, approximately eight miles from Ft. Myers.
- Administered as part of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Natural History

- The refuge encompasses 23 islands as well as 145 mainland acres near the Sanibel Causeway at Bunche Beach. It consists primarily of tidally influenced wetlands with low sand and shell ridges. The vegetation of many of the islands is almost exclusively red mangrove but on some islands the interior wetlands will be dominated by black mangroves, often mixed with white mangroves and buttonwood. The sand and shell ridges are vegetated with cabbage palms and tropical species such as seagrape, strangler fig and gumbo limbo.
- The refuge uplands and wetlands are maintained in their natural condition in order to provide undisturbed habitat for birds, fish, invertebrates and other animals. The refuge is used as a nesting and roosting area by an assortment of colonial birds.

Refuge Objectives

- To protect and provide suitable habitat for endangered and threatened species including the Florida manatee, wood stork, eastern indigo snake, American crocodile and bald eagle.
- To implement sound wildlife management techniques to provide feeding, nesting, and roosting habitat for a wide diversity of shore birds, wading birds, waterfowl, raptors and neo-tropical migratory species.

- To provide wildlife-oriented recreation compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

Management Tools

- Law enforcement.
- Wildlife population surveys.
- Partnerships.
- Education/interpretation.
- Marine protected area.
- Chemical and mechanical control of invasive plants.

Public Use Opportunities

- Saltwater fishing.
- Wildlife photography.
- Wildlife observation.
- Boat access only.

Questions and Answers

Where is Matlacha Pass NWR?
Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge is located in Lee County, Florida. It is located in southern Charlotte Harbor between the eastern boundary of Pine Island and the western boundary of Cape Coral. The nearest population center is the city of Fort Myers, located approximately 10 miles to the east.

How do I get there?
Access to the islands that make up the Matlacha Pass NWR is by boat only. Boaters should consult navigational charts and tide schedules before attempting to visit any of the refuge islands. Shallow back bay/estuary waters are difficult to navigate and damage to fragile seagrass beds is common due to boaters running aground. Access to the mainland area of the refuge is from John Morris Road toward Bunche Beach.

Where is the refuge closed to public uses?

The Matlacha Pass NWR receives little public use, as most of it has no uplands and access is difficult in the mangrove areas. Occasionally, boaters visit some of the islands with uplands, such as McCardle Island, but mosquitoes are usually so numerous that visiting any of the islands is extremely uncomfortable. The mainland area at Bunche Beach, Skimmer Island, Lower Bird Island, Givney Key, Upper Bird Island and Lumpkin Island are all closed to public access due to fact that they are roosting and nesting islands for herons, egrets and pelicans.