

Key West

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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photo: Bill Keogh

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1908.
- Acres: 189,497 owned, 154 managed for the U.S. Coast Guard (all 2,019 are designated Wilderness), 206,289 acres of marine waters managed with the state of Florida.
- Located: Monroe County, FL.
- The uplands portion of Key West NWR is on unpopulated islands, west of Key West, FL.
- The refuge is located 140 miles southwest of Miami and immediately west of Key West, FL. It is accessible only by boat.
- Administered by National Key Deer Refuge.

Natural History

- Refuge includes mostly mangrove islands, with a few sandy beaches and dunes that are critical nesting habitat for endangered sea turtles.
- Other habitat includes saltmarsh and coastal berm hammocks, plus sea grass and coral reef communities.
- Refuge, along with the Great White Heron Refuge, represents the last of the offshore (and raccoon-free) islands in the lower Florida Keys available as critical nesting, roosting, wading and loafing habitat to over 250 avian species — particularly wading birds.
- The area managed is overwhelmingly (99 percent) marine environment including large sand flats surrounding the islands that are used extensively by foraging wading birds.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Refuge has no dedicated personnel. It is managed as a satellite of NKDR.
- No quantitative data is available for public use of the refuge. It is estimated that 180,000 people use the managed waters of the KWNWR.

- Analyses of generated income for the Florida Keys Refuges only take into account the number of people that visit the headquarters on Big Pine Key — a fraction of the people that cross into the boundaries of all four refuges. Current estimate is: resident and non-resident visitors generated \$2.1 million in expenditures in FY 94.

Refuge Objectives

- To manage as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds and other wildlife.
- Provide habitat and protection for endangered and threatened fish, wildlife, plants and migratory birds.
- Protect the character of the designated wilderness.
- Provide opportunities for environmental education and public viewing of refuge wildlife and habitats.

Management Tools

- Mechanical/chemical control of invasive exotic plants.
- Interpretation/education.
- Routine wildlife monitoring.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships, both locally and nationally.

Public Use Opportunities

- Fishing.
- Wildlife observation.
- Environmental education.
- Photography.

Calendar of Events

April: Volunteer Recognition Ceremony, National Wildlife Week.

May: Migratory Bird Day.

August: refuge birthday.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

Questions and Answers

What islands are open for public use?

Two of the Key West NWR islands have portions of their beaches closed to the public. Portions of Woman Key and Boca Grande Key are posted as closed for the sensitive habitat they contain.

The remainder of the beaches, including those at the Marquesas Keys, are open during daylight hours for compatible, wildlife-oriented recreational uses such as wildlife observation, nature photography and environmental education. Camping is not allowed on refuge lands.

How do I get to Key West NWR?

Access is by boat only, personal, rental or guided. There are many commercial outfitters in Key West that offer trips to the refuge. One ecotour business has a permit to land on Woman Key.

What public uses occur within the refuge?

The waters around the islands and flats are prime locations for fishing, snorkeling, and wildlife viewing. The coral reef is a prime snorkeling, diving and fishing area. People travel from all over the world to visit this area. However, due to limited FWS presence within the boundaries of the refuge, it is felt that many visitors leave without knowing that they were within a national wildlife refuge.