

Pine Island

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



photo: Steve Alvarez



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1908.
- Acres: 602.
- Location: the refuge is located on the southwest coast of Florida north of Sanibel Island in Pine Island Sound.
- Administered as part of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Natural History

- The refuge is made up of approximately 17 islands consisting of densely forested red and black mangroves with little uplands habitat. Whoopee, Benedict and Patricio islands are the only islands within Pine Island Refuge able to support upland vegetation. Due to higher elevated upland sand ridges or shell mounds. Indian shell mounds located on these islands show evidence of Calusa Indians once inhabiting the area at the time of European exploration.
- Several of the islands are important nesting and roosting areas for colonial birds, particularly the brown pelican. Lack of human disturbance increases the importance of these reserved areas for these species. Racoons are the primary mammal found on the islands, and dolphins can be seen in the area waters. Small colonies of gopher tortoises may be found on some of the larger islands. Several endangered and threatened species benefit from the habitats described including: bald eagles, wood storks, sea turtles and Florida manatees.

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 exotic plants.

Public Use Opportunities

- Saltwater fishing.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildlife photography.
- (boat access only).

Questions and Answers

Where is Pine Island NWR?

Pine Island NWR is located in Lee County, Florida and is located south of Charlotte Harbor, between the western boundary of Pine Island and the coastal islands of Cayo Costa, North Captiva and Sanibel. Two of the original three islands set aside by President Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt can be found southwest of the Intracoastal Waterway at day beacons 64 and 65. The refuge currently includes 16 islands and is 548 acres in size. The nearest population center is the city of Fort Myers which is located approximately 12 miles to the southeast.

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How do I get there?

Access to the islands that makeup the Pine Island 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.

Where is the refuge closed to public uses?

The Pine Island NWR receives little public use, as most of the islands have no uplands and access is difficult in the mangrove areas. Occasionally, boaters visit some of the islands with uplands such as Patricio Island, but mosquitoes are usually so numerous that visiting any of the islands is extremely uncomfortable. Hemp Key and Bird Key are both closed to public access as they provide roosting and nesting islands for herons, egrets and pelicans.