

# Pelican Island

## *National Wildlife Refuge*



Photo: USFWS



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**Charlie Pelizza, Refuge Manager**  
**Layne Hamilton, Project Leader**  
**Pelican Island NWR**  
1339 20th Street  
Vero Beach, FL 32960-3559  
Phone: 772/562 3909, Ext. 275  
Fax: 772/299 3101  
E-mail: [pelicanisland@fws.gov](mailto:pelicanisland@fws.gov)  
Website: [www.fws.gov/pelicanisland](http://www.fws.gov/pelicanisland)

### Refuge Facts

- Established: 1903.
- Acres: 5,413.
- Located: Indian River County, Florida.
- The first national wildlife refuge.
- Other management: lease with state of Florida for open waters and islands; conservation easement with water management district and mosquito control district for impoundments; management agreements with Bureau of Land Management and Indian River County for uplands; conservation easement with Orchid Island Properties covering barrier island shoreline.
- Location: the refuge is situated on central Florida's Atlantic coast within the Indian River Lagoon and the barrier island between Sebastian Inlet and the Wabasso Causeway, east of the Intracoastal Waterway. The nearest town is Sebastian located on peninsular Florida just west of the refuge.
- Administered as a staffed satellite refuge of Merritt Island NWR Complex. Pelican Island NWR Complex has a shared staff with and manages Archie Carr and Lake Wales Ridge NWR's.

### Natural History

- Pelican Island proper is a historic and significant bird rookery island, providing nesting habitat for over sixteen different species of colonial water birds. Over thirty species of water birds use the island during the winter migratory season. Over 130 species of birds are found throughout the entire refuge.
- The Pelican Island rookery provides critical nesting habitat for the endangered wood stork. Other refuge areas provide critical habitat for several other threatened and endangered species, including manatees, loggerhead and green

sea turtles and southeastern beach mice.

- Surrounded by development, the refuge is becoming increasingly important as a sanctuary for native wildlife.

### Financial Impacts of Refuge

- Permanent, full-time staff of three.
- Shared funding and staff also support Archie Carr and Lake Wales Ridge NWR's.
- 90,000 annual visitors.
- Fiscal Year 2010 annual budget of \$690,000.

### Refuge Objectives

- Protect the historic rookery on Pelican Island.
- Protect, enhance and restore marsh and lagoon habitat for migratory birds.
- Provide habitat for threatened and endangered species.
- Protect Pelican Island as a National Historic Landmark, National Wilderness Area, Wetland of International Importance, and State Aquatic Preserve.
- Increase public understanding through outreach, interpretation, environmental education and compatible recreation.

### Management Tools

- Wildlife surveys and studies.
- Habitat restoration to restore native habitats for the benefit of wildlife.
- Law enforcement to protect wildlife, habitat and the visiting public.
- Mechanical/chemical control of invasive-exotic plants.
- Volunteer and financial support by the Pelican Island Preservation Society.
- Volunteer program.

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- Shoreline restoration and bird rookery habitat management.
- Public education and outreach to help instill conservation ethics.
- Connecting people with nature through outdoor recreation programs and activities.
- Cooperative management of water levels within two salt marsh impoundments for wading bird foraging habitat, mosquito control, and natural tidal exchange.

### Public Use Opportunities

- Boardwalk and observation tower to view Pelican Island, 3/4 mile.
- Two salt marsh impoundment hiking trails, each three miles, including a new wildlife observation deck extending 75 feet into the salt marsh.
- Wildlife observation and photography.
- Boating, kayaking, canoeing.
- Boat and bank fishing.
- Interpretation/Outreach/Environmental Education.
- Special outreach events in partnership with the Pelican Island Preservation Society.
- Commercial guided boat tours and rental available locally.
- The Centennial Trail, designated as a National Recreation Trail.
- Historic Jungle Trail, designated as a state Greenway.
- Refuge is part of the Indian River Lagoon Scenic Byway.
- Refuge is a designated Great Florida Birding Trail site.

### Calendar of Events

- *Third Saturday in March:* Pelican Island and Refuge System Anniversary celebrated with the Pelican Island Wildlife Festival.
- *Late December:* Christmas Bird Count

### Questions and Answers

#### *Where is Pelican Island?*

Pelican Island is located in the Indian River Lagoon east of Sebastian, Florida.

#### *Can I visit Pelican Island?*

Yes, although access to the island itself is restricted to outside of the posted 'closed area' signs around the island. Pelican Island and its array of birds can be viewed on your own or via a commercial guided tour. You may view the island from the Centennial Trail observation tower, located adjacent to the island, or by your own boat. The refuge does not provide a boat ramp access but there are several public ramps in the local area and at the Sebastian Inlet State Park. There are several commercial boat/kayak/canoe rental vendors and tour operators in both Sebastian and Vero Beach. Reservations are required for these commercial guided tours to the island.

#### *Does the refuge have any public facilities?*

Yes. Public facilities were dedicated in 2003 marking the Centennial of Pelican Island and the National Wildlife Refuge System. The facilities include an accessible 3/4-mile round-trip trail and boardwalk that culminates at an 18-foot high observation tower overlooking Pelican Island and the Indian River Lagoon; two 3-mile salt marsh foot trails including a new wildlife observation deck into the salt marsh; informational kiosks and educational signs along the trails; rest-rooms and two parking areas. The facilities are located west of Highway A1A on the north end of Historic Jungle Trail. The parking lot areas and rest-rooms are managed and maintained by Indian River County, Parks and Recreation Department.

#### *Is this really the first National Wildlife Refuge?*

Yes. President Theodore Roosevelt set aside Pelican Island as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds on March 14, 1903. Plume hunters, egg collectors and vandals had exterminated all the egrets, herons and spoonbills from the island in the 1800's. Paul Kroegel (first refuge manager) protected the remaining brown pelicans and petitioned ornithologists and naturalists to help

him. At the urging of the Florida Audubon Society and the American Ornithologists' Union, President Roosevelt acted to protect Pelican Island and subsequently many other wildlife areas that were to become the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest and most diverse assemblage of lands for wildlife.

Today, the Refuge System boasts over 550 National Wildlife Refuges and thousands of Waterfowl Production Areas across the country and in U.S. territories totalling over 150 million acres of managed and protected lands. The most recent additions of four Marine National Monuments in early 2009 effectively increased the size of the System by another 50% and includes the deepest point on earth, the Marianas Trench.