

# Ten Thousand Islands

## *National Wildlife Refuge*



photo: USFWS



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### Refuge Facts

- Established: December 1996.
- Acres: 35,000.
- Located in Collier County, Florida, 25<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.
- Location: The refuge is located 20 miles southeast of Naples, FL, south of U.S. 41 near Goodland, FL. The refuge headquarter is located in the Comfort Inn at exit 101 off of Interstate 75.

### Natural History

- Refuge receives freshwater flow from the Fakahatchee Strand and Picayune Strand watersheds, which nourishes the refuge's diverse wetland habitats and dependent wildlife.
- Large concentrations of wading birds, including herons, egrets, rosette spoonbills, and wood storks utilize the refuge wetlands. Shorebirds, waterfowl, and other water birds, such as rails, rest, feed and nest on the refuge.
- Ten percent of Florida's manatee population utilizes the refuge and adjacent waters. Loggerhead sea turtles nest on the beaches.
- Refuge is part of the largest mangrove estuary in North America. The southern portion of the refuge is mangrove estuary, consisting of mangrove islands surrounded by open tidal waters. Uplands on the islands contain sea grapes, gumbo limbo, Jamaican dogwood and other tropical species. To the north are brackish and freshwater marshes, with small upland hammocks of gumbo limbos, live oaks and slash pine.
- Several large pre-Columbian Indian sites are located on the refuge.

### Financial Impact of Refuge

- 2 person staff. Refuge operations supported by the staff at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.
- Approximately 100,000 visitors annually.
- Current budget (FY08): Refuge operations funded through Florida Panther NWR

### Refuge Goals

- Conserve, enhance, and protect the fish and wildlife resources, especially threatened and endangered species, and the other natural values supported within the refuge portion of this unique south Florida coastal ecosystem.
- Provide visitors with quality recreational opportunities, guided by the refuge's vision and mission, and compatible with its purpose.
- Promote the interpretation, education, and appreciation of coastal natural resources of the Ten Thousand Islands area, and the importance of conserving them.
- Promote cooperation among agencies, private landowners, organizations, and other stakeholders in the management of natural and cultural resources within the Big Cypress Watershed.
- Promote refuge cultural resources, encourage archaeological investigations, and promote interpretation and appreciation of the area's history.

### Management Tools

- Mechanical/chemical/biological control of non-native pest plants.
- Prescribed fire.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

- Partnerships: Florida Department of Environment Protection, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, South Florida Water Management District, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, National Park Service, Collier County Sheriff.

### Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking.
- Wildlife observation.
- Canoeing/kayaking.
- Fishing.
- Photography.
- Waterfowl hunting.
- Camping.

### Calendar of Events

**January:** Southwest Florida Wildlife Birding Festival.

**January-March:** Optimal time for manatee viewing.

**May:** International Migratory Bird Day.

**October:** National Wildlife Refuge Week.

**November-January:** Waterfowl hunting.

### Questions and Answers:

*Where is the Ten Thousand Island National Wildlife Refuge?*

The refuge is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Naples, FL on the south side of U.S. 41. The eastern boundary lies just east of the Port of the Islands community and Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve. The western boundary is adjacent to Collier Seminole State Park and Winddancer Airboat Tours. The refuge surrounds the town Goodland, just off of County Road 92. The Gulf of Mexico forms the southern boundary.

*How can I access this refuge?*

The best method to access the refuge is by boat. The marine portion of the refuge is accessible by private boat ramps in Goodland (C.R. 92) and Port of the Islands Marina (U.S. 41). The northern marshes are accessible by canoe and kayak. A one-mile hiking trail will take the refuge visitor through the northern marsh. This trail is located off of U.S. 41.

*What can I do on the refuge?*

The refuge offers outstanding salt and freshwater fishing opportunities. During the winter, many visitors camp on the refuge islands to better enjoy the fishing and wildlife observation opportunities.

Summer months can be hot with voracious mosquitoes. Dolphins, sea turtles and manatees frequent the tidal waters, while bald eagles, osprey soar overhead. Wading birds and shorebirds utilize the refuge in great abundance.

In the winter, manatees concentrate adjacent to the refuge at Port of the Islands, north and south of the U.S. 41 Bridge. Nearly 100-200 manatees can be seen in this area on very cold days. Winter time is also the best time to walk the hiking trail. Wintering and migratory songbirds can be seen along the trail and as water levels drop, large concentrations of wading birds, alligators, and waterfowl utilize the wetlands adjacent to the trail.