

Pelican Island

National Wildlife Refuge

Photo: USFWS



Photo: Paul Tritaik



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1903.
- Acres: 5,413.
- Located: Indian River County, Florida.
- Officially the first 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.
- Location: the refuge is situated within the Indian River Lagoon and the barrier island between the Sebastian Inlet and the Wabasso Causeway, east of the Intracoastal Waterway. The nearest community is Sebastian located near the western boundary of the refuge.
- Administers Archie Carr NWR.

Financial Impacts of Refuge

- Permanent, full-time staff of six.
- Shared funding and staff with Archie Carr NWR.
- Current budget (FY 2003) of \$414,000.
- 66,000 annual visitors.

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 and Wetland of International Importance.

- 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.
- Partnerships through the Pelican Island Working Group.
- Volunteer activities.
- Shoreline restoration and bird rookery habitat management.
- Public education and outreach to help instill conservation ethics.
- 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 2.5 miles.
- Wildlife observation and photography.
- Boating, kayaking, canoeing.
- Boat and bank fishing.
- Interpretation.
- Outreach activities.
- Species events in partnership with the Pelican Island Preservation Society.
- Commercial guided boat tours and rentals.

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Calendar of Events

- March – Pelican Island Wildlife Festival.
- September – National Public Lands Day and the Great American Coastal Cleanup.
- October – National Wildlife Refuge Week.
- 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 guided tour. You may visit the refuge on your own from the refuge's new public facilities, located adjacent to the island, or by your own boat, kayak or canoe. There are several boat/kayak/canoe rental vendors and public boat ramps in the local area. Several boat/kayak/canoe vendors in the Sebastian and Vero Beach areas offer guided tours to the island. Reservations are required.

Does the refuge have any public facilities?

Yes. New public facilities were opened and dedicated on March 14, 2003 marking the Centennial of Pelican Island and the National Wildlife Refuge System. The new facilities include a 1/4 mile boardwalk and 18 foot observation tower to view Pelican Island, two 2.5 mile salt marsh impoundment foot trails, interpretive signs, informational kiosks, restrooms and parking areas. The facilities are located west of Highway A1A on the north end of Historic Jungle Trail. They were produced through a partnership with Indian River County, St. Johns River Water Management District, Florida Inland Navigation District, Florida Power and Light, ConocoPhillips, Wild Birds Unlimited, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and many others. Future plans include additional boardwalks, an overlook, a photo blind and a wildlife drive.

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.