

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Cameron Prairie

*National Wildlife Refuge*

*Southwest Louisiana National*

*Wildlife Refuge Complex*



*Mission: Manage, protect, and perpetuate coastal marshes to provide high-quality food and habitat for wintering migratory waterfowl, and other migratory birds and native wildlife.*





*This blue goose, designed by “Ding” Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

## **Introduction**

This National Wildlife Refuge hosts more than 200 species of migrating, wintering, and resident birds annually. Bird species include snow and white-fronted geese, green-winged teal, ring-necked ducks, songbirds, northern bobwhite, mourning doves, and wading birds.

Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (Cameron Prairie NWR) was established in 1988 and was the first refuge established under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, a treaty among Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

Cameron Prairie NWR is located 25 miles southeast of Lake Charles, Louisiana, in Cameron Parish. It serves as the Headquarters for Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex which includes Cameron Prairie, Lacassine, Sabine, and Shell Keys National Wildlife Refuges.

Cameron Prairie NWR contains two separate and distinct units: the Gibbstown Unit where the facilities are located and the East Cover Unit which is only accessible by boat. The Gibbstown Unit contains 9,621 acres of fresh marsh, coastal prairie, and moist soil units. It is managed to provide natural foods for wintering waterfowl and other water birds.

The East Cove Unit consists of 14,927 acres of brackish and salt marsh. It is a nursery ground for brown and white shrimp, blue crab, and many fish species.

## **Wildlife**

Cameron Prairie’s marshes and moist prairies provide nesting and wintering habitat for many birds and other wildlife. The refuge is a winter home to thousands of ducks and geese including green-winged teal, mallards, northern pintail, ring-necked ducks, white-fronted

*Diane Borden-Billiot*



*Eastern meadowlark along Pintail Drive.*

*Left: Blue-winged teal in flight by mon-sourphotography.com*

and snow geese. Ducks that regularly nest on the refuge include mottled and fulvous whistling ducks. Wading birds including white and white-faced ibis, roseate spoonbills, and numerous species of herons and egrets abound on the refuge throughout the year.

Forested refuge levees and nearby remnant beach ridges called “cheniers” provide important stopover habitat for migratory birds such as painted and indigo buntings, rose-breasted grosbeaks and warblers. Over 250 species of birds winter in Mexico, and Central and South America and cross the Gulf of Mexico en route to their North American nesting grounds. Cheniers and levees are often the first habitat migrants encounter where they can rest and feed before continuing on to nesting grounds.

## Habitat Management

Resource management programs on Cameron Prairie Refuge are directed at preserving and improving habitat for wildlife.

In the past, approximately 1,230 acres of agricultural land in the Gibbstown Unit was farmed for rice. Now, this acreage is managed for moist soil plants

that provide food for wildlife.

Earthen levees have been repaired and water control structures installed to maximize water management in the marshes for waterfowl. Some of the marshes are drained or burned periodically in the fall to promote



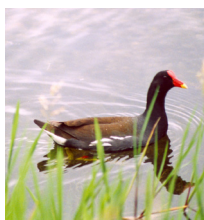
Mike Hoff



Mike Hoff

*Top: Northern Pintails feeding in a managed marsh. Below: Wintering white-fronted and snow geese behind the visitor center.*

Diane Borden-Billiot



the growth of natural foods. In the early winter, these areas are flooded to benefit waterfowl, primarily ducks and other wetland birds.

The marshes of the East Cove Unit are being managed to preserve a delicate balance between salt and fresh water. Water control structures located along a 19-mile levee on Calcasieu Lake are managed in an effort to provide the best habitat for the wildlife that live there.

Ty Ivey

The Cameron Creole Watershed Project, which includes the East Cove Unit, is a cooperative effort among local, State, and Federal agencies, as well as the private sector, to develop methods to restore 64,000 acres of marsh in Cameron Parish. It is one of the largest marsh restoration projects in the United States.

Mike Hoff



### Visiting the Refuge

Cameron Prairie NWR offers a variety of wildlife-oriented recreation for the public to enjoy. Visitor opportunities include wildlife viewing, photography, bird watching, a visitor center and boardwalk with educational displays, a wildlife drive trail with a half mile boardwalk, primitive hiking, fishing, boating, and hunting. All activities are permitted during daylight hours only.

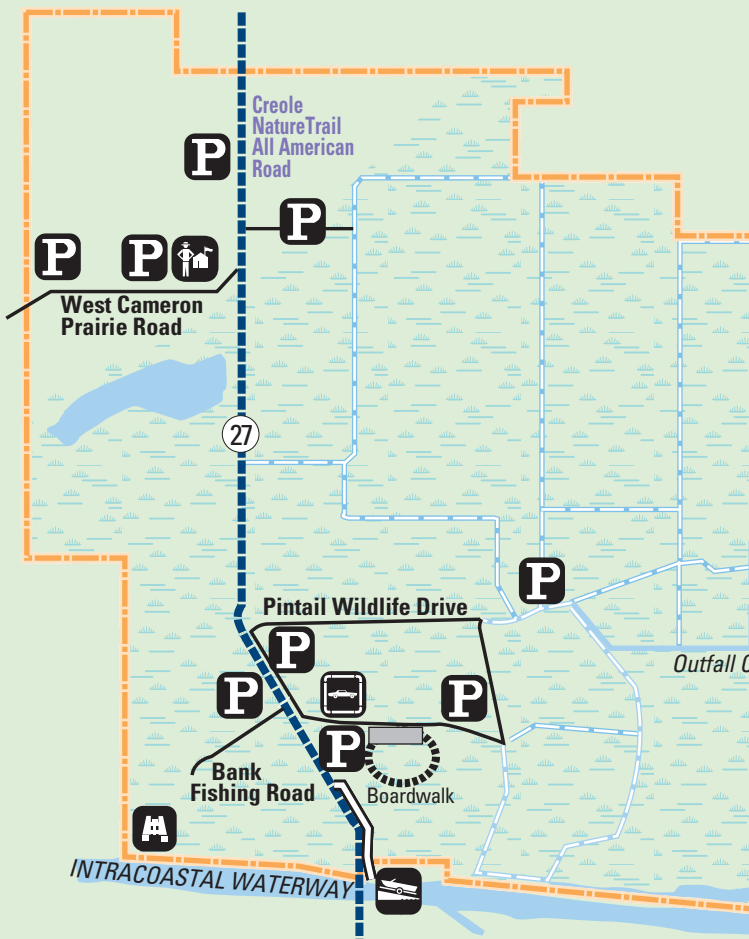
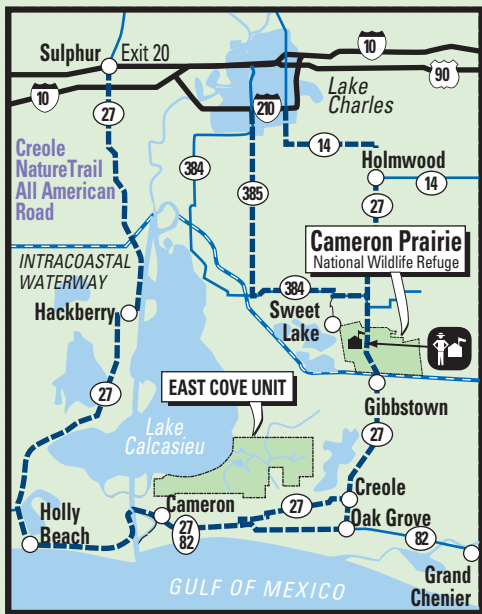
Mike Hoff



*Top to bottom:  
Common Moorhen.  
Painted Bunting.  
Walter's millet is  
an abundant choice  
duck food. Flatsedge  
seeds are also a  
preferred duck food.*

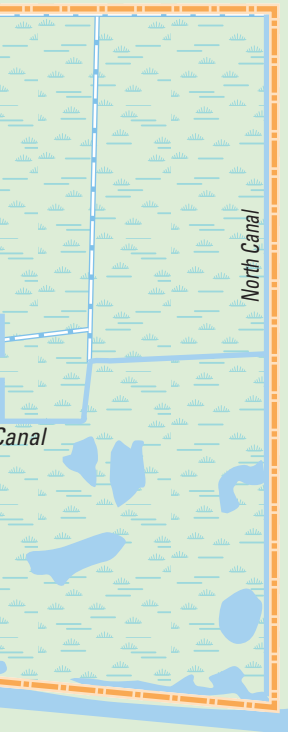
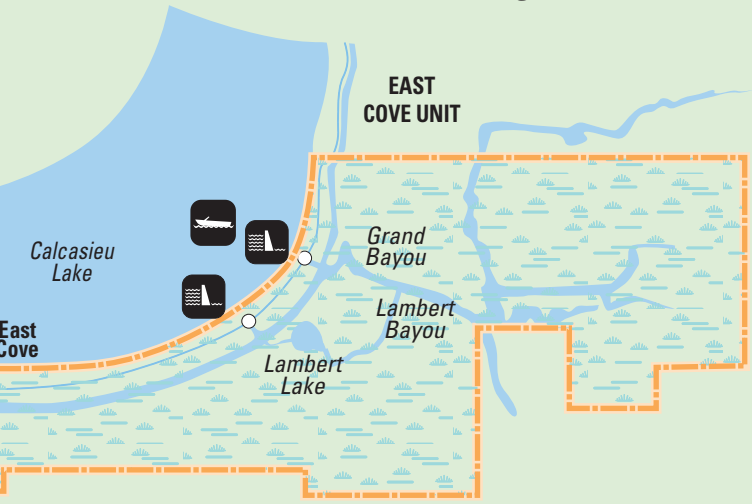
The Refuge is also home to the Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex Visitor Center. The Center includes dynamic interpretive exhibits about Cameron Prairie, Lacassine, Sabine and Shell Keys National Wildlife Refuges, their habitats and wildlife, and the native people of southwest Louisiana.

















The Center is located on Highway 27, approximately 25 miles southeast of Lake Charles, 11 miles south of Holmwood, and 30 miles north of the Cameron Ferry. The Center is open most weekdays 7 am – 3 pm and closed weekends and federal holidays.



# Cameron Prairie

## National Wildlife Refuge



-  Refuge Office and Visitor Center
-  Parking
-  Refuge Boundary
-  Paved Road
-  Unpaved Road
-  Creole Nature Trail  
All American Road
-  Canals
-  Levees
-  Boat Launching
-  Fishing
-  Pintail Wildlife Drive
-  Water Control Structure
-  Boat Access  
Grand Bayou Control Structure
-  Wildlife Observation
-  Marsh
-  Water

Mike Hoff



Mike Hoff



*Top: Moist soil management- field preparation prior to vegetative growth.  
Below: Moist soil management- same field after vegetative growth.*

## **Safety**

Please do not feed any wildlife. It is unhealthy for them and dangerous for people. Keep yourself and your pets away from alligators. Alligators bite and they will eat pets. Watch where you step, be cautious of poisonous snakes such as the cottonmouth (water moccasin) and biting fire ants. Insect repellent and/or protective clothing are recommended to prevent mosquito and other insect bites. Protect yourself from heat disorders

and sunburn by drinking plenty of water and using sun block regularly.

## **Wildlife Observation and Photography**

These activities are available year round throughout open areas of the refuge. The most favorable times of day to observe wildlife are early morning and late afternoon.

Some species are more likely to be seen during specific seasons of the year. Migrating songbirds, shorebirds, and sunning alligators are most easily observed during spring and fall. Wading birds are plentiful throughout the summer, while flocks of migrating ducks and geese can be seen throughout the fall and winter.

Excellent wildlife observation opportunities are available along Pintail Wildlife Drive, located approximately two miles south of the





Wading birds including roseate spoonbills, great and snowy egrets, Louisiana and little blue herons, and white ibis congregate in tidal areas to feed. Nesting Great Egret.



Clumps of eastern blue-eyed grass line the Pintail Wildlife Drive.

visitor center. During the fall and winter, flocks of ducks and geese can be seen feeding in the fields along the drive. Throughout the year, Pintail Wildlife Drive is an excellent place to view and photograph alligators, wild flowers, wading birds, and other wildlife.

## Hiking

*Gibbstown Unit.* Primitive hiking opportunities are available to the adventuresome visitor. Gibbstown unit dikes and levees are open to hiking, unless otherwise indicated. Review above safety recommendations.

*East Cove Unit.* This unit is restricted to boat use only.

## Fishing and Boating

*Gibbstown Unit.*

Fishing is permitted in accordance with State laws in designated areas. Fishing is permitted along Bankfishing Road and its associated ditches year round. Hand launched non-motorized boats are permitted in the water along bank fishing road and in the roadside ditches, however, launching may only take place from Bankfishing Road or its parking areas. Fishing is also permitted in Outfall Canal from March 15 through October 15. See Refuge Complex fishing regulations brochure for additional information.

*East Cove Unit.* Fishing and boating are permitted in this unit year round **except** during the Louisiana waterfowl hunting season and/or when the Grand Bayou boat bay is closed. Motorized boats may be operated in East Cove Unit canals, bayous, and lakes with no restrictions on boat motor horsepower. Only electric trolling motors and push poles may be used in refuge marshes. See Refuge Complex fishing regulations brochure for additional information.



*Many red-eared slider turtles inhabit the visitor center's pond.*



## **Hunting and Firearms**

### *Gibbstown Unit*

Refuge hunting opportunities include archery white-tailed deer hunting, snipe and dove hunting, and limited permit youth waterfowl hunting. Shotguns are permitted on the refuge only during the refuge hunting season. Only approved non-toxic shot may be used on the refuge. See Refuge Complex hunting regulations and permit brochure for additional information.

### *East Cove Unit*

This unit is not open to any type of hunting.

*Water moccasins are a common venomous snake. They are also referred to as cottonmouths due to their white mouth.*



*Refuge visitors enjoy observing turtles, alligators, fish and birds from the boardwalk.*

## **Permitted Recreational Activities**

### *Sunrise to sunset only*

Refer to Southwest Louisiana NWR Complex fishing and hunting brochures for fishing, crabbing, cast netting, and boating regulations.

### *Year Round Activities*

Designated areas only.

- Wildlife Observation
- Photography
- Fishing
- Visitor Center Exhibits
- Motor boating-East Cove Unit -except during LA waterfowl hunt season and/or when Grand Bayou boat bay is closed.

### *Seasonal Activities*

Designated areas only.

- Cast netting for shrimp - LA inshore shrimp season only
- Limited permit youth and senior waterfowl hunting - LA waterfowl season
- Motor boating-Gibbstown Unit- March 15 - October 15

### *Prohibited Activities and Items*

- Presence on the refuge before sunrise and after sunset, except boat travel
- Boat travel prior to 1 hour before sunrise and after 1 hour past sunset
- Littering
- Feeding or harassing wildlife
- Disturbing or collecting plants, animals, or artifacts
- Pets without a leash
- Swimming or wading
- Overnight parking
- Camping
- Glass containers/bottles
- Portable grills, campfires, and cooking fires

**Cameron Prairie  
National Wildlife Refuge  
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Bell City, LA 70630-9618  
Phone: 337/598 2216  
Fax: 337/598 2492**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
[http://www.fws.gov/refuge/cameron\\_prairie/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/cameron_prairie/)**

**August 2018**

