

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Chassahowitzka

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Chassahowitzka is one of more than 500 refuges included within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

This unique network of lands and waters,



photo: Capt. Larry D. Campbell

administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat, and represents the most comprehensive wildlife resource management program in the world.



This blue goose, designed by J. N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Located about 65 miles north of St. Petersburg, the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of approximately 31,000 acres of saltwater bays, estuaries and brackish marshes with a fringe of hardwood swamps along the eastern boundary. The northern boundary parallels and includes some of the Homosassa River. The refuge extends southward across the scenic Chassahowitzka River for 12 miles to its southern boundary at Raccoon Point.



USFWS

Habitat and Wildlife

The refuge was established in 1943 primarily to benefit waterfowl in an area long famous as a wintering location for ducks and coots. Today, although waterfowl numbers in south Florida have declined, the refuge has become increasingly important for the endangered West Indian manatees which utilize many of the refuge's tidal bays, creeks and rivers.

photo: USFWS



Chassahowitzka is unspoiled estuarine habitat along Florida's west coast that serves as important breeding and feeding ground for marine life. Shallow bays support an abundant growth of wigeon-grass which provides food for various birds and the endangered manatee.

Inland from the bays are the brackish creeks and ponds where muskgrass, watermilfoil and other foods grow in abundance. The eastern boundary provides a few thousand acres of swamp habitat where oaks, cypress and red cedar

grow. The outer islands consist mainly of red and black mangrove which provided habitat for colonial birds.

Many species of birds, including double-crested cormorants, great blue herons, green herons, ospreys, white pelicans, and various species of waterfowl and songbirds are observed on the refuge.

photo: USFWS



Other animals inhabiting the refuge include numerous alligators and raccoons. River otters are seen occasionally exhibiting their aquatic skills. Deer, turkey, black bear, and predators such as the bobcat are occasional residents of the refuge.

photo: Mike Lockart



Endangered and threatened species including nesting bald eagles, West Indian manatees, woodstorks, green sea turtles, Eastern indigo snakes and an occasional peregrine falcon are observed on the refuge.

photo: USFWS



ST. MARTINS KEYS

Little Homosassa

Homosassa

Homosassa Bay

Mason

No

Chassahowitzka Pt.

NORTHWEST KEYS

GULF OF MEXICO

Chassahowitzka Bay

Black Rock

BIRD ISLAND

CRAWL KEY

Raccoon Pt.

Legend



No Hunting Area



Private Land



Refuge Boundary



Airboat Routes



Maintenance Facility



Boat Ramp





Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge





The refuge provides a place for approximately 250 species of birds, over 50 species of reptiles and amphibians and at least 25 different species of mammals. Because of this, visitors are likely to see a variety of animals during a journey through the refuge.



photo: USFWS

Management

Management objectives are oriented toward preserving and protecting the land and wildlife resources of the refuge. This requires an active law enforcement program designed to prevent disturbance of wildlife populations and the destruction of habitat.

The entire state of Florida is a fire ecosystem that has historically burned every three to ten

years. Prescribed fire is used on the refuge to mimic the natural fire regime. This improves habitat and food availability for several wildlife species including endangered and threatened species.

Seventy-six percent of the refuge is a designated Wilderness Area meaning land that will remain uninhabited and preserved in its' natural state.



photo: George Gentry

Visiting the refuge

The refuge is only accessible by boat. Public boat ramps in the area of the refuge are limited, so visitors are advised to consult the enclosed map for the boat ramp access.

Because of the need to protect refuge lands and wildlife resources, special regulations have been enacted. These regulations concern public access and use of the refuge.

Boating Speed

Between April 1 and August 31, special posted slow speed restrictions zone apply to portions of the Chassahowitzka River for the protection of manatees.

Airboat Use

Airboat use on the refuge is restricted to Hernando County waters and posted routes in Citrus County. Operators are required to have a refuge airboat permit. Free permits, which describe refuge regulations, are issued from the refuge headquarters.

Firearms/ Weapons

Firearms/weapons are prohibited on the Refuge except during designated hunts at which time firearms must be transported unloaded and encased or dismantled.

Hunting

Special hunt regulations apply to the refuge. Consult Refuge Manager for current regulations. See map for location of hunt area and areas closed to hunting.

Fishing

County and state commercial/sport fishing regulations apply. Consult Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for current regulations.

Camping

Camping is prohibited on the refuge.

Fires

Fires are prohibited on the refuge.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Units of the National Wildlife Refuge System stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys, and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

The Service also manages National Fish Hatcheries, and provides Federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance, and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals, and threatened and endangered species.



photo: Gaylen Rathburn

More Information

If you would like more information about this refuge, the Refuge System, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact:

Refuge Manager
Chassahowitzka
National Wildlife Refuge
1502 Southeast Kings Bay Drive
Crystal River, FL 34429
352/563 2088.

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CELEBRATING A
CENTURY
of CONSERVATION