

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Crystal River

*National Wildlife Refuge*



*Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of several islands, totaling approximately 46 acres. They are surrounded by the crystal clear, spring-fed waters of Kings Bay. Crystal River is one of more than 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*





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

The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife resource management program in the world.

Units of the 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.



### **Especially for Manatees**

The Nature Conservancy, a national conservation and land preservation agency, acquired the refuge islands with funds raised in a year long drive spearheaded by the citizens of Citrus County. These lands were subsequently purchased by the Service, and Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge was established on August 17, 1983.

*cover photo:  
Patrick M. Rose ©*

National wildlife refuges are established for the primary purpose of providing habitat for the protection of all wildlife. Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is unique in that it was established specifically for the protection of the endangered West Indian manatee.



photo: Jeff Foott

### **Preserving Unspoiled Habitat for Wildlife**

Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge preserves the remaining unspoiled and undeveloped habitat in Kings Bay. The refuge

is adjacent to the town of Crystal River and much of the surrounding area is developed. This area is famous for its clear waters and fantastic fishing.

The refuge also aids in preserving Florida's most significant naturally occurring warm water haven for the manatee and provides critical habitat for approximately twenty percent of the nation's manatee population. Six hundred million gallons of fresh water flow daily from more than thirty natural springs. The temperature of the water flowing from the springs remains a constant 72 degrees Fahrenheit. Manatees, like people, are susceptible to cold and hypothermia and cannot survive for extended periods when water temperatures fall below 68 degrees Fahrenheit. These warm water springs are essential for manatee survival.

This gentle giant is endangered largely because of alteration and destruction of coastal habitats by man. Refuge islands and surrounding waters provide excellent habitat for a

photo: Larry Richardson ©

large number and variety of wildlife species. Some of the more common bird species you may see adjacent to the refuge are herons, egrets, ospreys, laughing gulls, cormorants, anhingas, white ibis and an occasional bald eagle. Fish are also abundant. Mullet, largemouth bass, alligator gars, mangrove snappers and tarpon are seen frequently.

It is this natural abundance and concentration of wildlife that has captured the imagination, respect and scientific interest of people throughout the world, and has made the Crystal River area internationally famous.

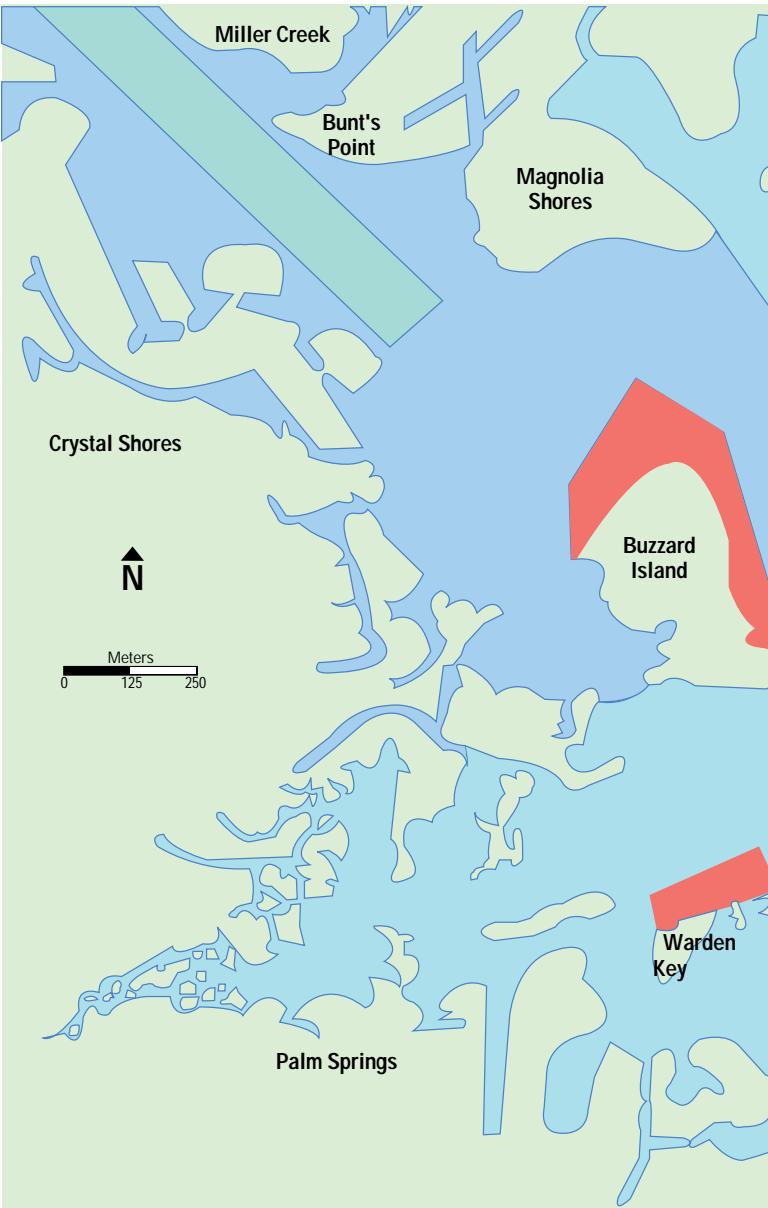
### **Manatee Management**

Management on the Crystal River Refuge is oriented toward preservation and protection of the West Indian manatee and its habitat.

During times of heavy manatee concentrations, certain areas in Kings Bay are designated, "Manatee Sanctuary Areas." These sanctuaries provide places for manatees to rest and feed undisturbed in the warmth of the springs.



In an effort to reduce the number of manatees killed and injured by boats, idle and slow speed zones are in effect throughout Kings Bay.



# Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge

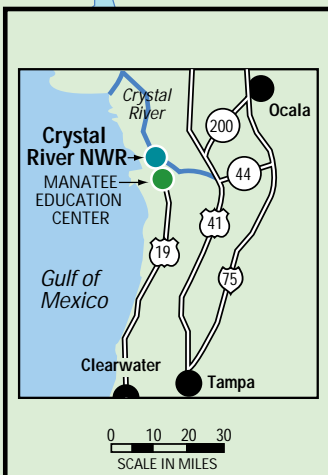
Including manatee sanctuaries and speed zones within Kings Bay, Crystal River  
Speed zones effective September 1-April 30

(Contact Florida Department of Environmental Protection for information on changes during summer months)

	Idle speed
	Slow speed
	No entry November boating
	Crystal River inside manatee outside)
	Refuge



ed  
 eed  
 y zone—Manatee Sanctuary,  
 per 15-March 31 (swimming,  
 diving, fishing prohibited)  
 River Boating Channel (25 mph  
 marked channel; slow speed  
 headquarters



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regularly monitors manatee abundance in the Crystal, Salt, Homosassa, Chassahowitzka Rivers. Aerial counts are flown once a month in the summer and once weekly in the winter.



photo: USFWS

Many manatees exhibit scars where they have been struck by boats and their propellers. These scars are so common and distinctive that researchers use them for recognition and identification of individuals.

The Service currently has a volunteer program called "Manatee Watch." These volunteers provide the refuge staff with assistance in educating visitors about sanctuary locations and boating speed zones to better protect the manatee.



photo: USFWS

### Enjoy the Refuge

Manatees are abundant throughout coastal and inland waters of Florida. During times of cold weather, manatees will concentrate in warm natural springs or in warm water discharges from power plants, both essential for their survival. Crystal River is special because it supports the largest concentration of



manatees in a natural spring area. Manatee concentrations in Crystal River are one of the highest in the State. Individual manatees often return to the same wintering areas year after year.

The public is welcome to visit the refuge year round, however, the best time to see the manatees is December-March. The weather is at its coolest and manatees are the most concentrated around the warm



photo: Jeff Foott



photo: Capt. Larry D. Campbell ©

water springs that they depend on for their survival.

The refuge is accessible only by boat and visitors are encouraged to plan ahead and make reservations with one of the many dive shops and marinas in the town of Crystal River for a manatee/snorkel tour.

## Mind Your Manatee Manners

Passive observation (observing from a distance) is the best way to protect manatees and all wildlife. If you see manatees while swimming, diving, or boating, please follow these suggestions:



photo: Jeff Foott

Do not enter designated manatee sanctuaries for any reason. Sanctuaries are in effect from November 15-March 31.

Operate boat at idle and slow speed where posted speed zones are in effect

Observe manatees from the surface of the water and at a distance. Manatees on the bottom are likely to be resting or feeding.

Avoid excessive noise and splashing.

Use snorkel gear when attempting to watch manatees—the sound of scuba gear may cause them to leave the area.

Do not feed manatees or give them water.

Never ride, chase, poke or surround manatees.

Never separate a mother and calf or an individual from the group.

## **Headquarters**

The refuge headquarters office is located on Kings Bay Drive in the town of Crystal River. Office hours are from 7:30 am-4:00 pm Monday -Friday.

## **Manatee Education Center**

The Manatee Education Center is located 7 miles south of Crystal River on U.S. Highway 19. The center is located at the Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park, a partnership project between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Florida Park Service.

Here the visitor can become acquainted with the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Chassahowitzka and Crystal River National Wildlife Refuges. A 900 square foot exhibit area is accessible to the disabled, providing many interactive displays for all ages. Manatee Education Center hours are



photo: Patrick M. Rose ©

9:00 am-5:30 pm daily. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State Park “manatee experts” are available to answer questions and orient visitors to the area.

If you would like more information about this refuge, the refuge system, or if you would like to volunteer your services, please contact the refuge manager.

Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge  
1502 Southeast Kings Bay Drive  
Crystal River, FL 34429  
352/563 2088  
[www.gorp.com/gorp/resource/us\\_nwr/fl\\_cryst.htm](http://www.gorp.com/gorp/resource/us_nwr/fl_cryst.htm)

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov/~r4eao>

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