Canaveral / Merritt Island

Canaveral National Seashore
National Park Service

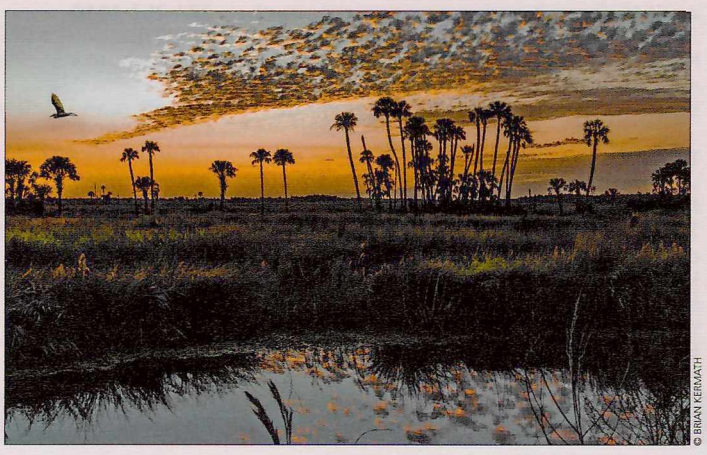
Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Florida



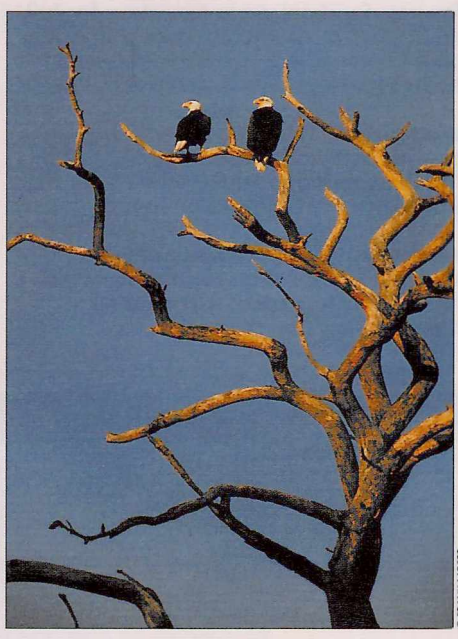
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Sheltering Spaces

Neither buildings nor seawalls disturb this wilderness beach on Florida's east coast. At both the national seashore and wildlife refuge, nature lives in harmony with human technology.



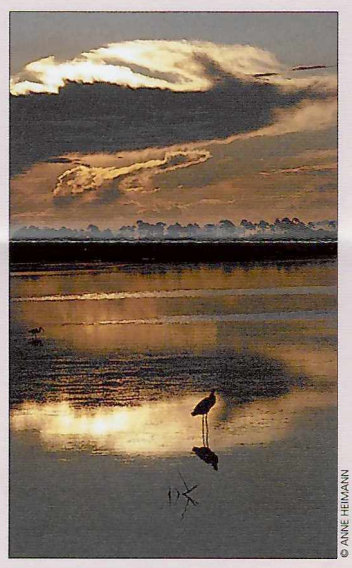
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Don't be surprised if you see a red-tailed hawk (*above*) or a bald eagle (*top right*) keeping watch over land and water.

From isolated beaches and inland channels to life-filled marshes and lagoons (*above*), water takes command here.

Guided by instinct, sea turtles struggle onto the protected beach to deposit eggs into nest cavities dug with their flippers.

Preserving Species

For many plants and animals found here, living at this national seashore and wildlife refuge means more than life as usual—it means life over extinction.

Mention Canaveral and Merritt Island, and many people imagine space exploration—the exciting countdown, the thrilling liftoff. But another quality of space here is almost a secret from outsiders. This space can be secluded as gentle breezes caress miles of primitive beach or endangered sea turtles struggle from their leathery eggs. This space can also be boisterous, as aromas of tropical blossoms waft on humid air—and insects noisily approve.

This space has been preserved through the teamwork of three federal agencies. In the 1950s it was set aside to buffer activities of the nearby National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The space race gave the John F. Kennedy Space Center world prominence and ensured preservation of this barrier island. Working with NASA, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has managed Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge since 1963, and the National Park Service has run Canaveral National Seashore since 1975. These agencies care for this special area where warm waters and a temperate climate nourish species as diverse as bald eagles and alligators, bromeliads and mangroves.

Winds and the Atlantic water massage the beach's sand grains into dunes that parallel the shore as far as you can see. Hidden in this graceful image is the buttress of a barrier island, a low-lying ribbon of land braced with a spine of sand dunes. Behind this protective island, salty Atlantic water flowing through inlets combines with seasonal rains to form the Indian River and Mosquito Lagoon estuaries. Fish, oysters, clams, and shrimp begin life in these fertile nurseries, which, in turn, attract an abundance of waterfowl. Until the late 1950s the marshes also nurtured saltmarsh mosquitoes, which at times could produce a million mosquitoes per square yard in one day. Saltmarsh mosquitoes do not lay eggs in fresh water, so engineers divided 69,000 acres of marsh into walled impoundments to control water levels, salinity, and mosquitoes. The new environment attracted new residents, and today it is common to find waterfowl, otters, alligators, and wading birds like snowy egrets, white ibises, and great blue herons.

The barrier island and its waters offer sanctuary for an abundant mix of plants and animals. Recorded here are 1,045 plant species and 310 bird species. Hammocks of ancient oaks draped with Spanish moss grow near sand dunes covered with palmetto and sea oats. Thousands of migratory birds stop over on their journeys north and south. Over a dozen wildlife species are federally listed as endangered or threatened, including sea turtles, West Indian manatees, wood storks, eastern indigo snakes, and Florida scrub jays.

Canaveral and Merritt Island form a sheltered space where the countdown is not of spaceships but of endangered animals ensuring life for future generations.

Inviting Spaces

You may not be near others, but you will not be alone. Come share the warm sand with shorebirds and watch for other wildlife and flowers along quiet trails.



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An angler casts in early morning surf. Near-tropical water temperatures attract bluefish, whiting, and pompano, making sport fishing popular here.



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At the Cruickshank observation tower on the refuge's wildlife drive you'll want your binoculars. Bird species recorded here include reddish egrets and wood storks.

Canaveral, a "place of canes" to Spanish explorers, bears one of North America's oldest recorded site names. Surveyor Pedro Marratt probably named Merritt Island, charting it in the early 1800s.

Long before European explorers put ashore, fertile estuaries and a temperate climate drew people to the area. They harvested oysters and clams and discarded the shells in piles we call middens (mounds made by human activity), like those at Seminole Rest, Turtle Mound, and Castle Windy.

In April 1513 Ponce de León's sailors claimed the land for Spain, and in 1763 the British took control of Florida's east coast. Vast wetlands, clashes with the Seminole, and clouds of saltmarsh mosquitoes delayed the area's development.

In 1830 Douglas Dummett planted an orange grove, launching the Indian River citrus industry. For the next 100 years villages near citrus groves or water passages took hold briefly, then fell to storms, isolation, or killing frosts. Eldora was a late-1800s town near Mosquito Lagoon. Eldora State House alone survives and is open to visit. Seminole Rest, where the Timucua probably gathered and shelled clams, dates from 4,000 to 500 years ago. Early-1900s settlers who refused to sell its contents for road building preserved its clues about Timucuan life. It is now 18 feet high. Exhibits on a half-mile trail tell more of this history.

Today, this inviting space is yours to enjoy. Relax on a deserted beach or hike in forests of Spanish moss-draped live oaks. By boat, sail, or canoe, explore Indian River or Mosquito Lagoon for oysters, clams, pink shrimp, or blue crabs. And don't miss Black Point Wildlife Drive: Its six miles can take an hour or all day, depending on how many stops you make to observe wildlife. Whether you seek solace or adventure, the national seashore and the wildlife refuge welcome you.

Enjoy the National Seashore and National Wildlife Refuge

Directions Use US 1, I-95, and FL 528 (Beachline Expressway). *Northern access*: New Smyrna Beach is on FL A1A. Seminole Rest is east of US 1 on River Road in Oak Hill. *Southern access*: Titusville is on FL 406/402. Take FL 402 to Playalinda Beach.

Fees, Passes The seashore has a seven-day entry fee and accepts a National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass.

Visitor Centers Seashore Visitor center is seven miles south of New Smyrna Beach on FL A1A. Exhibits, publications, schedules, and orientation program. Call 386-428-3384. Refuge Visitor Center is four miles east of Titusville on FL 402. Exhibits, publications, and information. Call 321-861-0669.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information ask a ranger, go to or call a visitor center, or check the websites. • Playalinda and Apollo beaches are wheelchair-accessible; for current locations ask at an entrance station.

Closures Seashore areas may close for full parking lots or rocket launches at Kennedy Space Center. Check *www.nps.gov/cana* for updates on Playalinda Beach closures.

Refuge Scenic Drive Black Point Wildlife Drive (6 miles, self-guiding) goes through pine flatwoods and impounded marsh for good views of many wildlife species.

Beaches All have boardwalk access and restrooms. Information centers have first aid and drinking water. • The seashore allows surfing; the refuge does not.



• The seashore has undeveloped beaches and limited services: no drinking water, food, picnic facilities, phones, or showers. • Reach Klondike Beach by foot or bicycle only. • Horses are allowed on a designated Apollo District section from November 1 to April 15 (permit and reservation required).

Hunting The seashore and refuge allow migratory waterfowl hunting in season as part of refuge waterfowl management.

Trails The seashore and refuge offer short, self-guiding trails. Castle Windy and Turtle Mound trails pass shell middens left by the Timucua. Turtle Mound Trail offers views of the ocean and Mosquito Lagoon. • Oak Hammock, Eldora Hammock, and Palm Hammock trails go through dense vegetation. • Cruickshank Trail has an observation tower and marsh views.

Camping Camp year-round at the Apollo District's designated island sites (permit and reservation required). • Camping in the refuge is not allowed. • Find private campgrounds in nearby communities.

Regulations, Safety Keep vehicle on roads. Park only in designated spaces. Never leave valuables in vehicle, especially in parking areas. • Vehicles, metal detectors, and glass containers are not allowed on beaches. • Pets are prohibited on beaches and in public buildings and must be leashed at all times. • Picnics—no open fire—are allowed on beaches. Use portable grills; remove coals. • Skateboarding, roller and inline skating, and using remotely piloted aircraft like drones are prohibited. • Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features. Do not remove vegetation, feed or harm animals, or disturb archeological sites. • For firearms regulations ask a ranger or check the seashore and refuge websites.

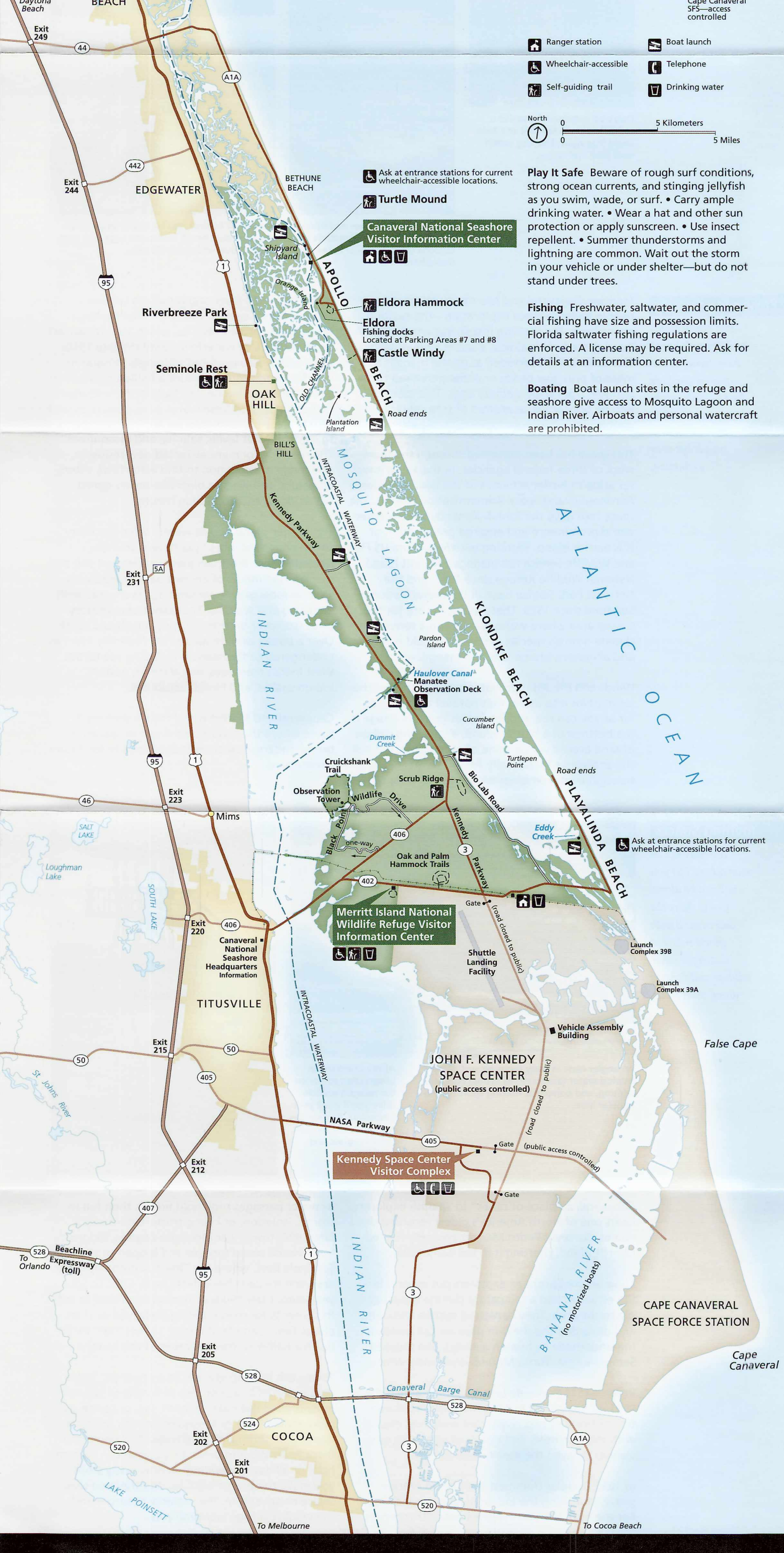
More Information, Permits

Canaveral National Seashore
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www.nps.gov/cana
Learn about national parks: *www.nps.gov*.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
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National Park Foundation.
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Play It Safe Beware of rough surf conditions, strong ocean currents, and stinging jellyfish as you swim, wade, or surf. • Carry ample drinking water. • Wear a hat and other sun protection or apply sunscreen. • Use insect repellent. • Summer thunderstorms and lightning are common. Wait out the storm in your vehicle or under shelter—but do not stand under trees.

Fishing Freshwater, saltwater, and commercial fishing have size and possession limits. Florida saltwater fishing regulations are enforced. A license may be required. Ask for details at an information center.

Boating Boat launch sites in the refuge and seashore give access to Mosquito Lagoon and Indian River. Airboats and personal watercraft are prohibited.