

# Welcome to the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge

A maze of mangrove islands and narrow waterways serve as the nursery for many plants, animals and fish and define the area known as Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge. The 35,000-acre refuge provides vital habitat for all kinds of protected plants and animals. Nearly 200 fish species have been documented in the waters, which are also home to several endangered species including the West Indian Manatee, Snail Kite, Peregrine Falcon, Wood Stork, and the Atlantic Loggerhead, Green, and Kemp’s Ridley sea turtles. Many of the nearly 200 species of birds that use the refuge are migratory and use the mangrove islands to protect them from storms, as feeding grounds, and to simply rest during their long migrations. Throughout the year, visitors can expect to see herons, egrets, manatees, raccoons, river otters, and bottle-nosed dolphins.



Above: white egret and spoonbill; below: loggerhead sea turtle

The estuary, where salt and fresh water mix, is a rich story of plant and animal communities that are amazingly adapted to living on the dynamic edge of the sea. A great abundance of food in the Ten Thousand Islands area has attracted humans as well. For 2,000 years, the Calusa Indian tribe utilized the islands extensively, constructing large shell mounds, or middens. The midden structures made by these native people are only a small part of the story left for us, but have served as a testament to the enduring spirit and added to the historical significance of the area.

The importance of the refuge increases with the pressure of growing cities which continue to change the landscape. Preservation of natural areas for our nation’s wildlife serves to protect our ecological systems as well as to provide beautiful areas for recreation and wildlife observation.



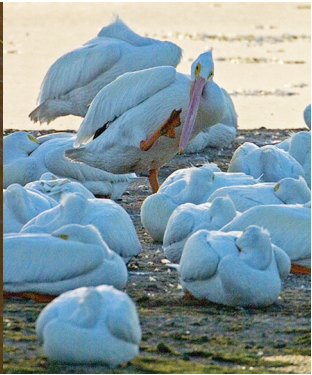
Left to right: woodstorks, tri-colored heron, West Indian manatee and calf, raccoon, oystercatcher; swallow-tailed kites, dolphin and white pelicans, all USFWS/ Larry Richardson.

Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1996 under the provisions of the Arizona-Florida Land Exchange Act of 1988, and the tidal waters are co-managed with Rookery by National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The refuge is located east of Marco Island in Collier County, on the southwest coast of Florida, and is part of the extensive Ten Thousand Islands estuary. The refuge was established in order to develop, advance, manage, conserve, and protect the refuge’s unique (subtropical) estuarine ecosystem and its fish and wildlife resources (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956). There is a parking lot on US 41 for access to the hiking trail, observation tower and limited access to some canoe trails.

## Rich Wildlife and Habitat Diversity

The rich estuarine, mangrove and marsh habitats attract hundreds of species of wildlife. During the summer, thousands of water birds roost on the coastal islands. On summer nights, the loggerhead sea turtles drag themselves onto refuge beaches to nest, as they have been doing for thousands of years. Mangrove Cuckoos and Black-whiskered Vireos can be heard from the mangroves as they mark their home territory on the refuge. Manatees feed within the estuary and find shelter from the cold in the winter months at Port of the Islands. Wintering waterfowl forage in the northern marshes as Bald Eagles soar over the open water searching for a meal. Rare reptiles, like the beautiful diamondback



terrapiin, can also be spotted if you’re quiet. The islands with higher elevations also have Tropical Hardwood Forests that add diversity to the plant communities that can be found on the refuge. The abundance and diversity of wildlife on Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge are directly related to the health and diversity of the habitats on the refuge.

## Activities

- Fishing (All state regulations apply)
- Boating
- Wildlife Observation
- Wildlife Photography
- Hunting (Waterfowl only)
- Camping

## Fishing

Fishing is the most popular recreational activity in the refuge. Fishing is productive year-round. Common saltwater sportfish include tarpon, snook, redfish, seatrout, and mangrove snapper. Check local phone listings for tour or fishing guides.

## Canoeing

In the northern marsh, canoeing is allowed but visitors should check water levels beforehand because they vary greatly seasonally. The refuge has four canoe trails with launch sites located off



of US 41. The refuge currently does not provide parking for trails 1, 3 and 4, so use caution when accessing those areas along US 41. Most areas for canoe and kayaks are accessible from late summer to early winter.

## Hunting

Duck hunting is allowed by permit and all state regulations apply. An early teal season opens in late September. Waterfowl season starts in late November and is open until January. Hunting is only conducted on Wednesdays, Saturdays, Sundays and federal holidays.

## Camping

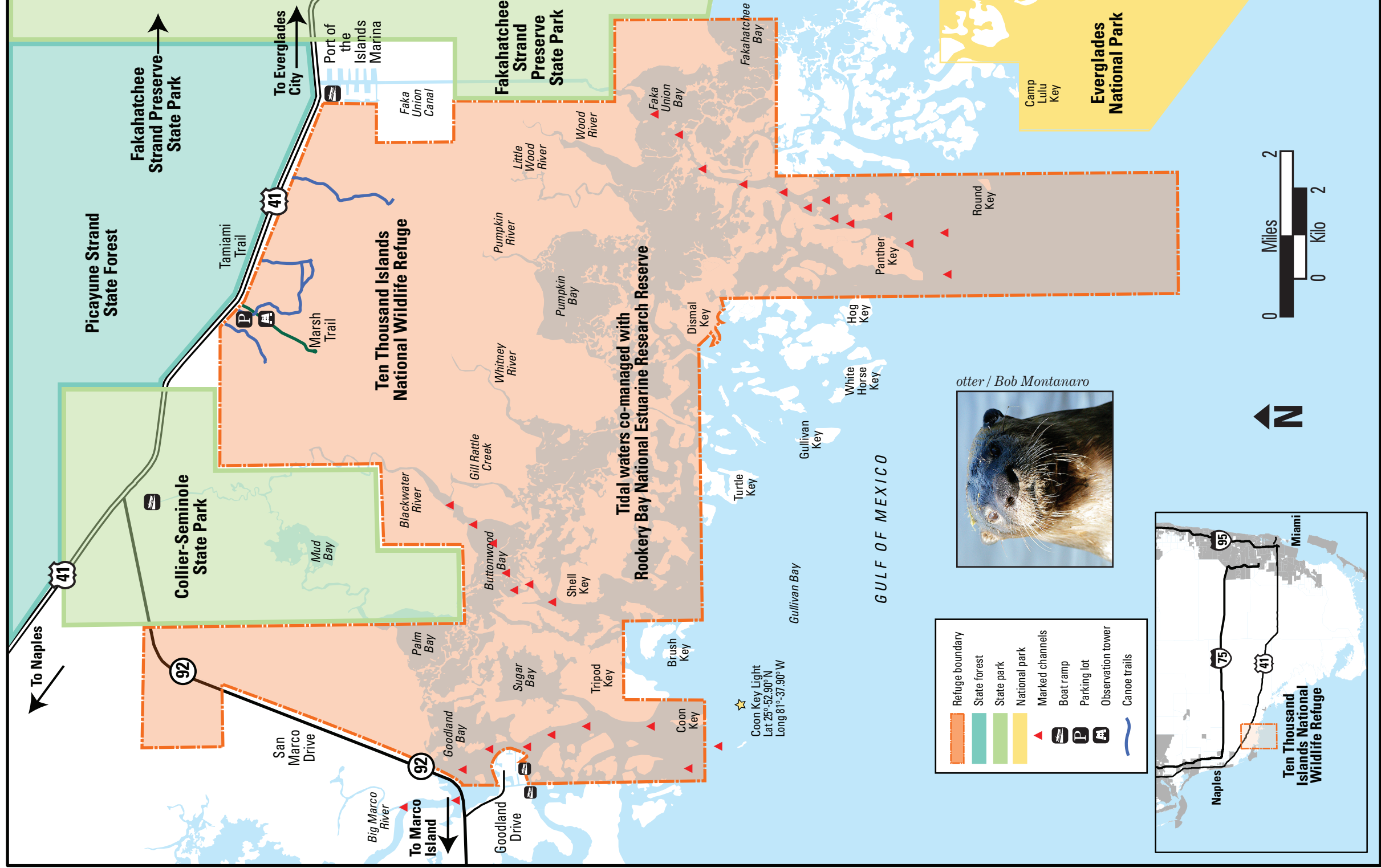
Camping is allowed only on the outer barrier islands of the refuge for fishing and wildlife observation. Practice “Leave No Trace” to minimize the damage to wildlife habitats. There are no facilities on the islands. If campfires are built, only dead branches can be used. No cutting or clearing of live plants is allowed. Take sufficient drinking water for camping and day trips.

## Special Events

Special events such as bird walks, canoe trips, and coastal clean-ups are scheduled in late September and October to commemorate National Wildlife Refuge week. The refuge also hosts a bird walk during the annual Southwest Florida Nature Festival. Check local listings or with the refuge for additional activities scheduled throughout the year. Please contact the refuge office directly for more information about upcoming events, hunting permits or water level data.

**Volunteers are welcome as we expand the activities on the refuge! Biological survey, interpretive and maintenance opportunities are available to interested individuals or groups. Contact the refuge office or fill out a volunteer form online at [www.volunteer.gov](http://www.volunteer.gov).**





**“Leave No Trace” principles let everyone enjoy the wildlife!**

All plants and animals are protected.

Stay far enough away from resting birds so that they do not flush.

Take no live shells. Stay on trails. Take your trash with you.

Be a responsible boater. Avoid building campfires.

Use facilities on your boat or a “portable potty.”

Dig a cat hole above the high tide line for fecal matter.

Protect yourself from sun stroke, biting insects, and be aware of dangerous currents while swimming.

No digging or removal of artifacts.

**For more information contact the refuge**

Office hours: Monday through Friday  
7:30 am to 3:30 pm

Phone: 239/657 8001

Fax: 239/657 8002

12085 State Road 29 South  
Immokalee, FL 34142

Website: <http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther/>

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