

St. Marks

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



photo: J. Greene



photo: USFWS



photo: R. Will

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1931.
- The refuge is located on the Gulf Coast 22 miles south of Tallahassee, Florida. It contains 68,931 acres in Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties (17,746 acres of this is designated Wilderness). Plus, an additional 31,500 acres in the Gulf of Mexico.
- The refuge administers 14 conservation easements totaling roughly 1,200 acres in Georgia and Florida.
- The refuge may be reached from Tallahassee by driving 16 miles south on FL Highway 363 then east on U.S. Highway 98 for three miles to Lighthouse Road, County Road 59, then three miles south to the office and visitor center.

Natural History

- The refuge has concentrations of waterfowl, wading birds, raptors and songbirds. There are also several active rookeries, eagle and osprey nests, and a diverse native mammal population.
- 32,000 acres of woodlands including bottomland hardwoods, cypress or tupelo swamps and longleaf pine/wiregrass communities.
- 35,000 acres of marsh and water.
- A large number of cultural sites extending through prehistoric, Spanish Colonial and Civil War periods.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- 21-person staff.
- 300,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide wintering habitat for waterfowl and other birds.
- Provide habitat for endangered species.
- Provide habitat for resident wildlife species.

- Provide for wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education for the public.

Management Tools

- Water management for waterfowl on 1,500 acres of impoundments.
- Prescribed fire.
- Forest management.
- Public hunting.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking trails.
- Auto tour route.
- Fishing and hunting.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.

Calendar of Events

January: small game hunt, duck tours.

March: Impoundments open for boat fishing March 15, shorebird migration.

April: Welcome Back Songbirds Festival, spring turkey hunt, Spring Wildflower Days.

May: Welcome Back Manatee Festival.

September: Coastal Awareness and Cleanup Day.

October: Monarch Butterfly Weekend.

November/December: deer hunting, waterfowl tours, duck tours.

Questions and Answers

What may I do or see here?

You may take our seven-mile wildlife drive, hike on 85 miles of marked trails (including 41 miles of the Florida National Scenic Trail); observe and photograph wildlife from roadsides, dikes, observation decks or from a boat. The refuge is transected by five navigable rivers and has 35 miles of Gulf Coast between the Ochlockonee and Aucilla Rivers. Fact sheets, detailing wildlife behavior and likely viewing locations, are provided at the visitor center. The refuge bookstore offers a variety of publications about the plants and animals native to North Florida.

When is the best time to visit?

October through May are the most comfortable times. Winters are mild with good wildlife viewing opportunities. If you come in the summer months, prepare for hot, humid weather and bring insect repellent. The refuge visitor center is open year-round, 8 am to 4 pm Monday-Friday, and 10 am to 5pm Saturday-Sunday. Closed on Federal holidays.

Where is the lighthouse?

The St. Marks lighthouse is on the National Register of Historic Sites and attracts a lot of visitor attention. The lighthouse is located seven miles south of the Visitor Center on Lighthouse Road, County Road 59, on beautiful Apalachee Bay. Nearby is a trail along a coastal dike, an informational kiosk, and an observation tower overlooking wilderness salt marshes.

May I hunt or fish?

The refuge has hunting for deer, feral hogs, wild turkey, ducks and small game. All hunts require permits and most have limited openings. Applications are available June-August. Fishing is permitted year 'round. The pools are open to boats from March 15 through October 15. Lakes, rivers, and the Gulf of Mexico are open to boats year-round.