

J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Requests Public Review and Comment for Two Draft Environmental Assessments to Replace Office and Bunkhouse Facilities Destroyed by Hurricane Ian in 2022 at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge

J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1945 as a sanctuary for migratory birds. The 6,406-acre refuge protects wildlife, wetlands, and endangered species while serving over 800,000 visitors annually. The refuge is part of the Southwest Florida Gulf Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex, located on Sanibel Island on Florida’s southwest Gulf coast.

In September 2022, Hurricane Ian, a powerful Category 5 storm, affected Sanibel Island, bringing a storm surge that impacted nearly every facility within the refuge. The storm destroyed five mobile homes, which had provided essential housing for interns and entry-level employees supporting critical refuge operations. Additionally, the hurricane extensively damaged the first-floor office space at 1 Wildlife Drive, further disrupting refuge activities. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking comments on two Draft Environmental Assessments that propose to replace these facilities.

The Service is proposing to construct, operate, and maintain a 5,700-square-foot bunkhouse on Sanibel Captiva Road with approximately 10 bedrooms to replace facilities destroyed during Hurricane Ian. The Service is also proposing to construct, operate, and maintain an approximately 1,500-square-foot office space wing addition to the existing Visitor and Education Center. Both facilities will support refuge management priorities and activities.

No significant direct, indirect, short-term, long-term, or reasonably foreseeable adverse impacts would be anticipated under the two proposed actions.

To ensure consideration of your comments in the development of final decisions on these proposed actions to replace facilities destroyed by Hurricane Ian, please submit your comments prior to July 23, 2025.

Additional information and links to the documents are available online at the refuge’s website: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/jn-ding-darling>. Please let us know if you need the documents in an alternative format. Please submit comments by one of the listed methods.

- Email: Send email to DingDarling@fws.gov with “Proposed Office” and/or “Proposed Bunkhouse” in the subject line

- Hard Copy: Submit by U.S. mail or hand delivery with “Proposed Office” and/or “Proposed Bunkhouse” in the subject line to: Public Comments Processing; J.N. “Ding” Darling NWR; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 1 Wildlife Drive, Sanibel, FL 33957-3032

Across the country, national wildlife refuges work closely with state and Federal agencies, Native American Tribes, local governments, non-governmental organizations, private partners, and the public, to engage them in refuge management activities and proposals.

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The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.