



Imperial National Wildlife Refuge

Welcome

Imperial National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1941 to protect habitat for a variety of migratory birds and other wildlife. It encompasses 30 miles of the lower Colorado River in Arizona and California, including the last unchannelized section before the river enters Mexico. The river and its associated backwater lakes and wetlands are a green oasis, contrasting with the surrounding desert mountains.

Refuge Highlights

Wetland wildlife is most abundant in winter, when ‘snowbirds’ such as cinnamon teal and northern pintail use the refuge. During the summer, look for permanent residents such as great egrets and muskrat.

In the desert, wildlife such as black-tailed jack rabbits and western whiptail lizards are plentiful. Watch at dawn and dusk for desert bighorn sheep and mule deer heading to the river for a drink.

Wilderness

More than 15,000 acres of Imperial National Wildlife Refuge is federally designated wilderness. Wilderness is protected to ensure that nature, not people, is the primary influence on this quiet, scenic place.

Forest in the Desert?

At one time, the banks of the Colorado River were lined with cottonwood and willow forests, sustained by the river’s natural periodic flooding. Animals depended on this green forest oasis for breeding, resting, feeding, and shade.

For More Information Contact

Imperial National Wildlife Refuge
12812 N Wildlife Way
Yuma, AZ 85365

928/783-3371
fws.gov/refuge/imperial



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Woodcutting during the steamboat era, clearing for agriculture, wild fire, exotic plants such as salt cedar, and dam construction have devastated cottonwood and willow stands along the Colorado River. Some animals that depend on these forests, such as the southwestern willow flycatcher, have become endangered.

Refuge staff are working with other agencies and organizations to plant cottonwood and willow trees. From the observation tower, look for patches of restored forest.

Marsh Management

Ducks, geese, shorebirds, and other waterbirds flock to the lower Colorado River each year to spend the winter. Refuge staff and volunteers restore wetlands, protect backwater lakes, and manage marsh units to provide food and resting area for these winter residents.

Things to do at the Refuge

The Visitor Center is open year-round Monday through Thursday 8:00 am -4:00 pm and Friday 8:00 am – 3:30 pm. During the winter months, approximately November through March, the Visitor Center is open 8:00 am – 4:00 pm daily. Enjoy the exhibits, desert garden, and observation tower.

Observation Points

Drive through the Sonoran desert landscape to access the observation points and the Painted Desert Trail. If you intend to drive further than the Painted Desert Trailhead, a 4-wheel drive, high clearance vehicle is recommended.

Palo Verde, Mesquite, Ironwood, and Smoke Tree points offer beautiful views of the Colorado River valley. Both desert and wetland wildlife may be seen. All of the observation points can be reached by vehicle.

Painted Desert Trail

Walk this 1.3 mile self-guided trail for an opportunity to see desert plants and wildlife. The trail takes you through a rainbow of colors left by 20-30 million year-old volcanic activity and features a panoramic view of the Colorado River valley. There is a vault toilet at the trailhead.

Meers Point

Looking for a quite place to canoe or fish? Meers point has shaded tables, vault toilets, and a boat launch.

Colorado River

The refuge surrounds one of the few remaining “wild” places on the Colorado River. This stretch is valued by boaters for its rugged scenery.

Hiking, Photography, and Wildlife Observation

Hiking, photography, and wildlife observation are permitted on the refuge, except within closed areas.

Wilderness

Travel in designated wilderness is by foot or horseback only.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing are permitted, according to state and refuge regulations. Imperial National Wildlife Refuge offers excellent hunting for a number of species, the most popular game animal serious hunters pursue here is the desert bighorn sheep. Refuge waters include Martinez Lake (1,040 acres), Clear Lake (200 acres), Island Lake (2,010 acres) and Adobe Lake (2,080 acres), as well as the Lower Colorado River (2,010 acres). Fishing season is year-round, except for the western half of Martinez Lake and the northern portion of Ferguson Lake, which are open March 1-September 30. Bank fishing is allowed on Martinez and Clear Lakes; all other fishing is boat accessed. Available species include largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, striped bass, catfish, crappie, tilapia and several species of sunfish.

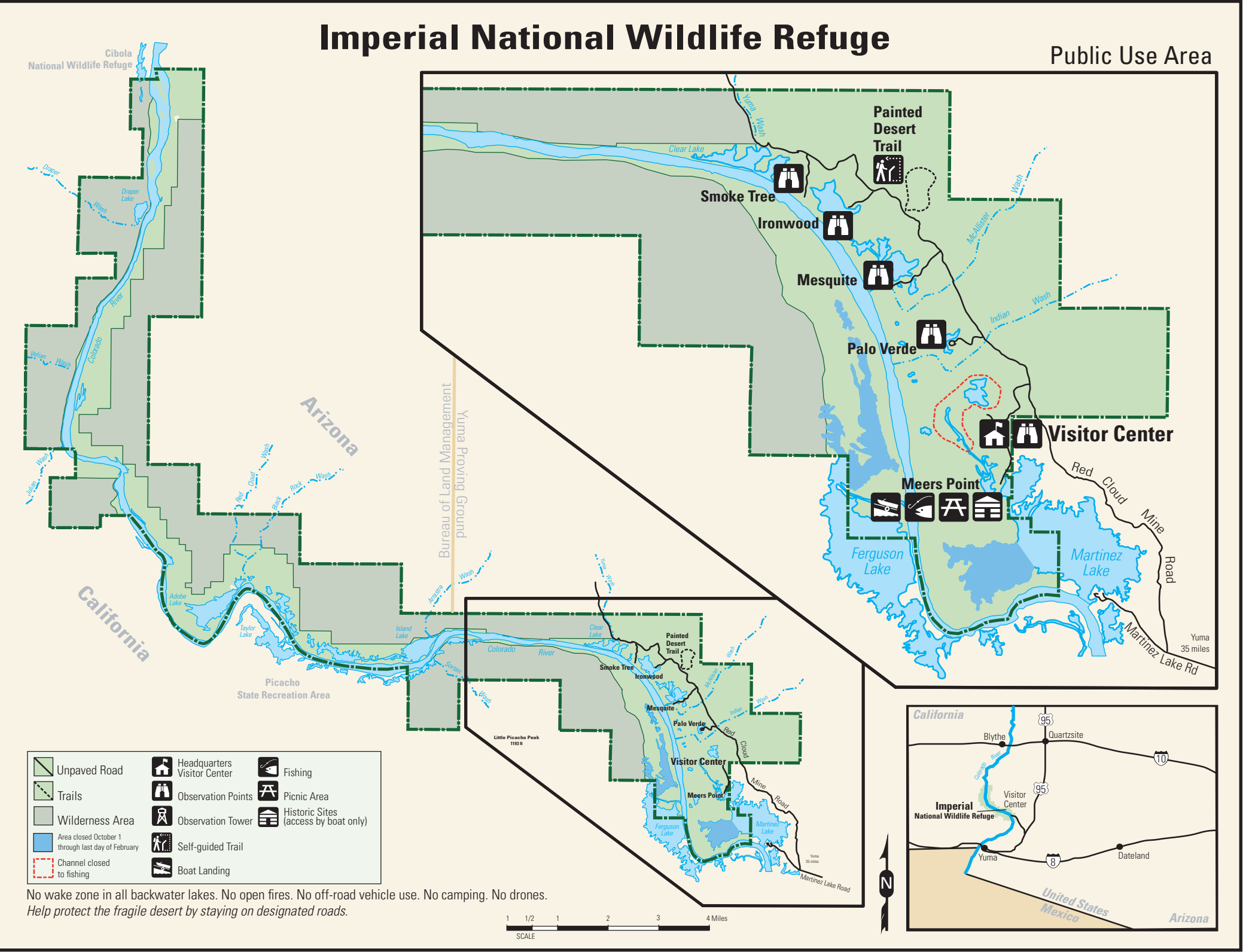
Boating

Boating is permitted along the Colorado River however; water skiing and tubing are prohibited on the refuge. All backwater lakes are no wake zones.

Off-Road Vehicles

Vehicles are permitted on designated roads only. All off-road vehicle travel is prohibited. Motorized vehicles, including all terrain vehicles and motorcycles, and operators, must be licensed and insured for highway driving. Speed limit is 25 mph unless posted otherwise.

*Photographs from left to right:
 Egrets wading, Roadrunner, Desert Tortoise, Imperial wetlands,
 Osprey gliding. All photos courtesy of USFWS.*



Wildlife Watching Tips

- Dawn and dusk are the best time to see wildlife.
- This is a warm climate, so little is moving on hot summer afternoons or on windy days.
- Observe from the sidelines. Leave “abandoned” young animals alone. A parent is probably close by waiting for you to leave. Don’t offer snacks; your lunch could disrupt wild digestive systems.
- Cars make good observation blinds. Drive slowly, stopping to scan places wildlife might hide. Use binoculars or a long lens for a closer look.

- Try sitting quietly in one good location. Let wildlife get used to your presence. Many animals that have hidden will reappear once they think you are gone. Walk quietly in designated areas, being aware of sounds and smells. Often you will hear more than you see.
- Teach children quiet observation. Other wildlife watchers will appreciate your consideration.
- Tracks, scat, feathers, and nests left behind often tell interesting stories.

Rock, Mineral, and Antiquity Protection

It is illegal to remove, deface, or damage rocks, minerals, semi-precious stones, Native American artifacts, paleontological objects, or objects of antiquity.

Plant and Animal Protection

Collecting, possessing, molesting, disturbing, injuring, destroying, removing, or transporting any plant or animal or part thereof (alive or dead) is prohibited, except for legally taken game.

Camping

Overnight camping is not permitted.

Fires

Fires are not permitted.

Pets

Dogs may be off leash when actively participate in legal hunting activities, otherwise, they must be confined or leashed. Only service animals are allowed in the Visitor Center.

Firearms

Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on National Wildlife Refuges must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32).

Weapons other than Firearms

Possession or use of crossbows, bow and arrows, air guns, or other weapons is prohibited except when they are used for approved hunting.

Bighorn sheep © Bob Hines