

Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge

Chassahowitzka NWR is one of more than 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Chassahowitzka NWR serves as an important breeding and feeding ground for marine life with its mix of saltwater bays, estuaries, brackish marshes and fringe of hardwood swamp.



Located about 65 miles north of St. Petersburg, the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of over 31,000 acres of saltwater bays, estuaries and brackish marshes with a fringe of hardwood swamps along the eastern boundary. The northern boundary parallels and includes some of the Homosassa River. The refuge extends southward across the scenic Chassahowitzka River for 12 miles to its southern boundary at Raccoon Point.

Habitat and Wildlife

The refuge was established in 1943 primarily to benefit waterfowl in an area long famous as a wintering area for ducks and coots. Today, although waterfowl numbers in central Florida have declined, the refuge has become increasingly important for the endangered Florida manatees which utilizes many of the refuge's tidal bays, creeks and rivers.

Chassahowitzka is unspoiled estuarine habitat along Florida's west coast that serves as important breeding and feeding ground for marine life. Shallow bays support an abundant growth of muskgrass which provides food for various birds and the endangered manatee.

Inland from the bays are the brackish creeks and ponds where widgeongrass, watermilfoil and other foods grow in abundance. The eastern boundary provides a few thousand acres of swamp habitat where palms, oaks, cypress and red cedar grow. The outer islands consist mainly of red and black mangrove which provides habitat for colonial birds.

Management

Management objectives are oriented toward preserving and protecting the land and wildlife resources of the refuge. This requires an active law enforcement program designed to prevent disturbance of wildlife populations and the destruction of habitat.

The entire state of Florida is a fire ecosystem that has historically burned every 3 to 5 years. Prescribed fire is used on the refuge to mimic the natural fire regime. This improves habitat and food availability for several wildlife species including endangered and threatened species.

Seventy-six percent of the refuge is a designated Wilderness Area ensuring that the land will remain uninhabited and preserved in its natural state.



Located on the refuge's northeastern-most boundary, just over a mile from Hwy 19, the Salt Marsh Trail facility offers visitors a two story viewing tower, a shelter picnic area and 1 mile of trails. The tower overlooks the salt marsh, several maritime hammocks and tidal streams where a diverse array of wildlife may be spotted year-round."

Visiting the Refuge

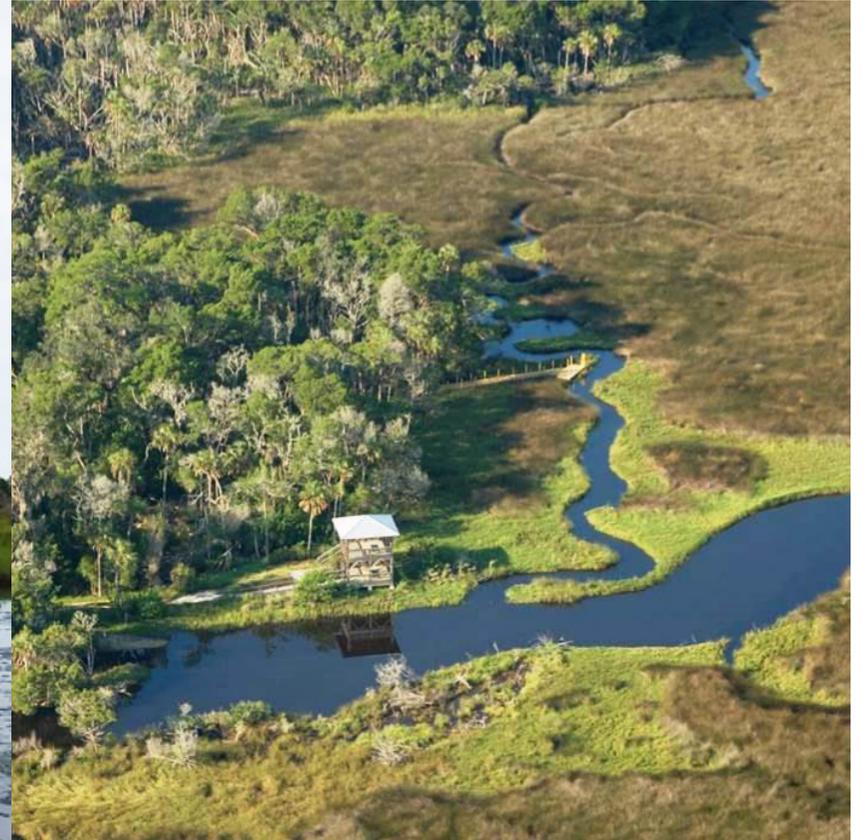
Most of the refuge is only accessible by boat. The only land base access to the refuge is located at the Salt Marsh Trail (see map) off Mason Creek Road, where visitors can hike trails, launch paddle craft, enjoy a sheltered pavilion, and observe wildlife from a two story tower. Public boat ramps near the refuge are limited, so visitors are advised to consult the enclosed map for boat ramp access. There is no admission charged to enter the refuge.

Specific Regulations

Speed Zone: Between April 1 and August 31, special posted slow speed restrictions apply to portions of the Chassahowitzka River for the protection of manatees.

Airboat Use: Airboat use on the refuge is restricted to Hernando County waters and posted routes in Citrus County. Operators are required to have a refuge airboat permit. Free permits are issued from the refuge headquarters.

Firearms/ Weapons: Firearms/weapons are prohibited on the refuge except during designated hunts at which time firearms must be transported unloaded and encased or dismantled.



Hunting: Special hunt regulations apply to the refuge. Consult refuge office or Refuge Manager for current regulations.

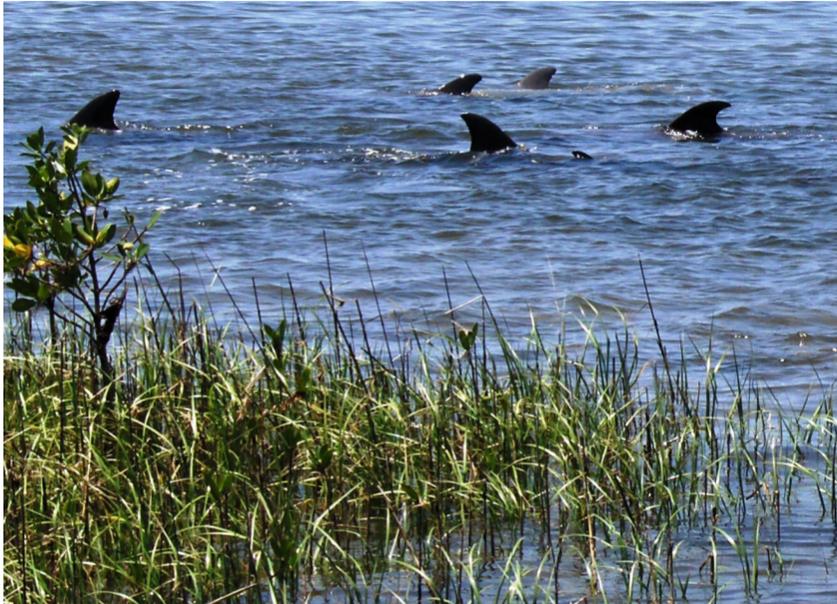
Fishing: County and State commercial/sport fishing regulation apply. Consult Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for current regulations: 386/758 0525

Camping: Camping is prohibited on the refuge. However, camping and boat rentals are available nearby. Please contact Chassahowitzka River Campground, a county park and recreation area, for more information call: 352/382 2200.

For Your Safety:

Be prepared and observe regulations concerning: Refuge hours; airboat permits; fishing or hunting license requirements; boat registration; and safety equipment.

- Do not leave valuables in your vehicle.
- Allow time to return to your vehicle and leave the area before sunset.
- If canoeing or boating, carry insect repellent, foul weather clothing and an emergency light. If lost or disabled, stay with



Several dolphin pods forage on a daily basis around Chassahowitzka. Chassahowitzka is home to marine mammals such as dolphins and manatees; reptiles such as sea turtles; and hundreds of fish species.

your boat and attempt to reach the main canal. Display emergency light after dark. Remember, floating vegetation and changing water levels can block canals and hide boat trails.

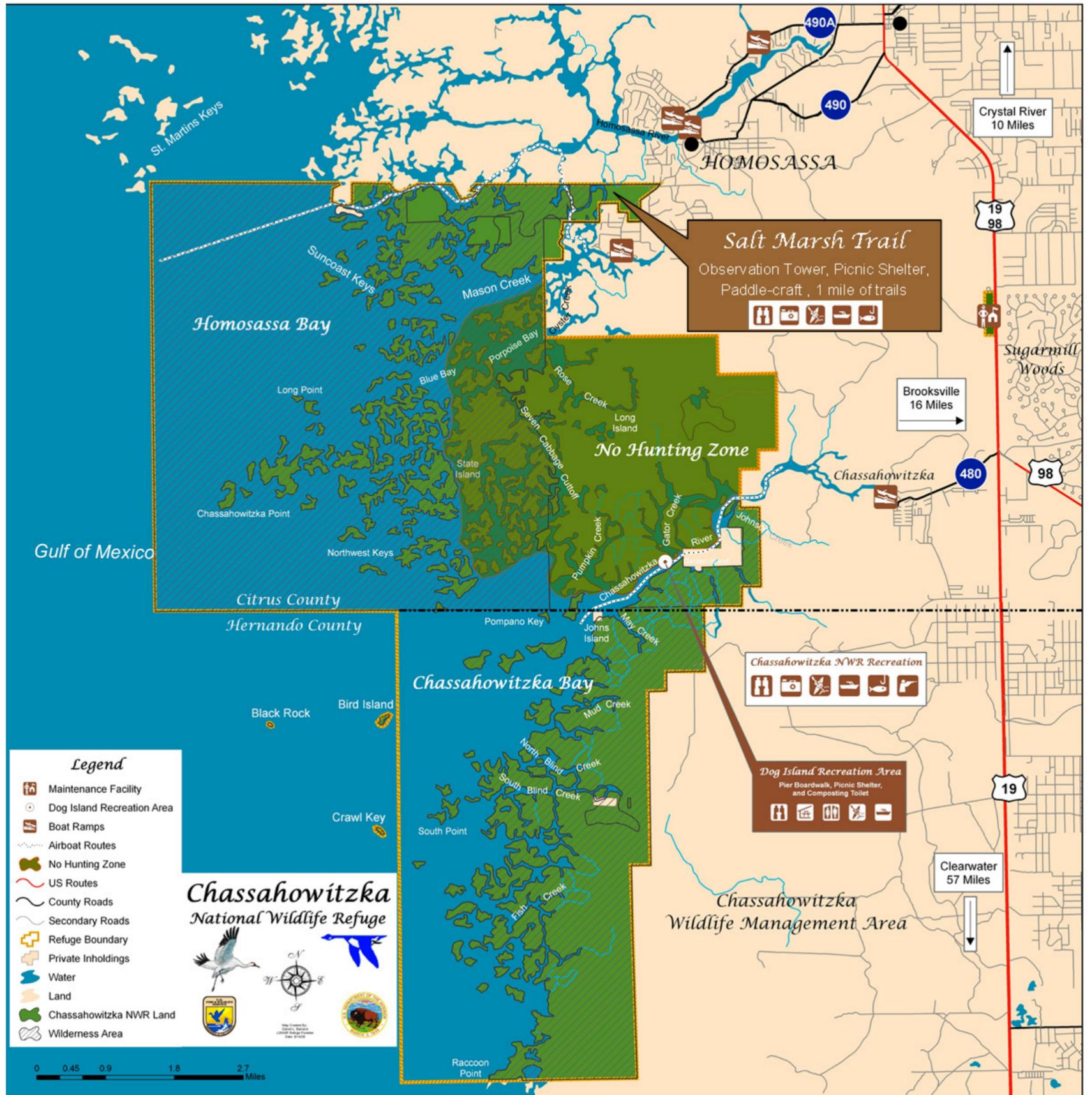
- Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when you should return.

Prohibited:

- Feeding, enticing, or disturbing the wildlife.
- Firearms or weapons of any kind except during designated hunts at which time firearms must be transported, unloaded, and encased or dismantled.
- Taking of turtles, frogs, and snakes by any means.
- Release of any wild or domestic animals.
- Taking (living or dead) or injuring any plant or animal (this includes parts) other than legally taken fish or waterfowl.
- Fires of any type, camping, or spotlighting.

If you would like more information about this refuge, the refuge system, or if you would like to volunteer your services, please contact:

Refuge Manager
 Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge
 1502 SE Kings Bay Dr.
 Crystal River, FL 34429
 Phone: 352/563 2088
 Fax: 352/795 7961
 E-mail: FW4_RW_Chassahowitzka@fws.gov
 Website: www.fws.gov/chassahowitzka



This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

