

Welcome to Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge

Established in 1929, the 800 acre Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for wildlife and wildlife-oriented outdoor recreation. The primary purpose of the Refuge is to serve as breeding grounds for colonial nesting birds. Cedar Keys is one of more than 540 National Wildlife Refuges that protect 100 million acres throughout the United States.

Cedar Keys NWR consists of 13 offshore islands ranging from 1 to 165 acres. Four of the islands (Snake, Bird, North, and Seahorse) are designated as wilderness areas. The most recent addition to the Refuge is Atesna Otie Key just off the town of Cedar Key. The island is owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District and managed under a cooperative agreement by the USFWS.

Wildlife and Habitat

The Refuge provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species – most notably wading birds and shorebirds. Egrets, herons, pelicans, cormorants, and white ibis are commonly seen and many nest on island interiors. During the 1960's and 1970's, 200,000 birds nested on Cedar Keys NWR islands. Today that number is about 20,000. Ospreys and occasionally bald eagles also nest on the islands.

Thousands of shorebirds forage on island beaches, especially during migration, in search of small fish and other marine creatures needed for survival. Magnificent frigatebirds can often be seen circling the coastal waters and islands. More than 250 species of birds have been documented on the refuge.

The islands are famous for another type of resident – cottonmouth snakes. Snake densities on many of the islands are significant. Raccoons, armadillos, small mammals and other reptiles also inhabit the islands. Hundreds of fiddler crabs forage along the beaches and marshes.

Recreational Opportunities

Wildlife observation, canoeing, kayaking, nature photography, and bank fishing are popular activities at Cedar Key National Wildlife Refuge. Most recreational opportunities are centered at Atesna Otie Key. Access is by boat only. Because of its small size and importance to wildlife, the Refuge can support only limited public use. The interiors of all islands, with the exception of Atesna Otie Key, are closed to the public year-round to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat.



Kathy Whaley, USFWS



Sean M. Dowie



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Atsena Otie Key

The Muscogean words, pronounced locally as "seenee ota," means cedar island. Thousands of years ago, ancient anglers used his land mass when it was only mud flats in the Gulf. The midden of shells they amassed, seen as you walk up the dock, helped build-up the island over the millennia to be typical of uplands. In 1860, having been settled by pioneers to Florida, this original Cedar Key housed 3 factories, a school, a church and as many as 297 residents until the devastating hurricane of 1896.

The island open to the public offers a dock, an interpretive kiosk, a restroom, and a trail that takes you to the historic cemetery and the ruins of the Faber pencil factory.

Seahorse Key

The Cedar Keys light station sits atop a relict Pleistocene dune, the highest point in the Gulf. The rookery, filled with nesting birds from March 1 through June 30

necessitates the full closure of the island for those four months. The 233 cottonmouths per acre beneath the rookery is a perfect example of nature's symbiotic relationships as they control arboreal rats.

The University of Florida has leased a portion of the island for its Marine Research Lab and dorm since 1952. They join us in hosting our annual open house events on the third weekend of October, from 9am -4pm.

Island Beaches

The beaches of all islands are open for public use year-round with the **exception of Seahorse Key** from March 1 through June 30 annually **when it is closed to all public entry**, including a 300 foot buffer surrounding the island, to protect nesting birds. Interiors of all islands have thick undergrowth as well as poisonous snakes.



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Hiking, birding, wildlife observation, and fishing are available nearby at the Shell Mound Unit of Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

For Your Safety

- Biting insects and ticks are numerous along trails during summer months. Use of insect repellent is advised.
- Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when to expect your return.
- When accessing the islands, it is important to pay attention to weather and tide conditions. All islands are surrounded by shallow mud flats. During low tides, they become relatively inaccessible by boat.

Prohibited Activities

- Camping is not allowed. Campgrounds are located near-by in Cedar Key and Levy County.

- Interiors of all islands except Atesna Otie Key are closed to all public entry and use.
- Fires of any type
- Spotlighting
- Dogs off leashes
- Entry into areas posted as closed
- Cutting of vegetation
- Release of any wild or domestic animal
- Use of metal detectors
- Digging for and/or taking artifacts or other cultural resources
- Firearms
- Taking (living or dead) or injuring any plant or animal other than legally taken fish or game species

Getting There

You are welcome to take your own boat to Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. Local vendors also offer transportation to the island and guided tours of the area by water. Contact the Refuge Headquarters for a list of currently permitted outfitters.

Refuge Headquarters

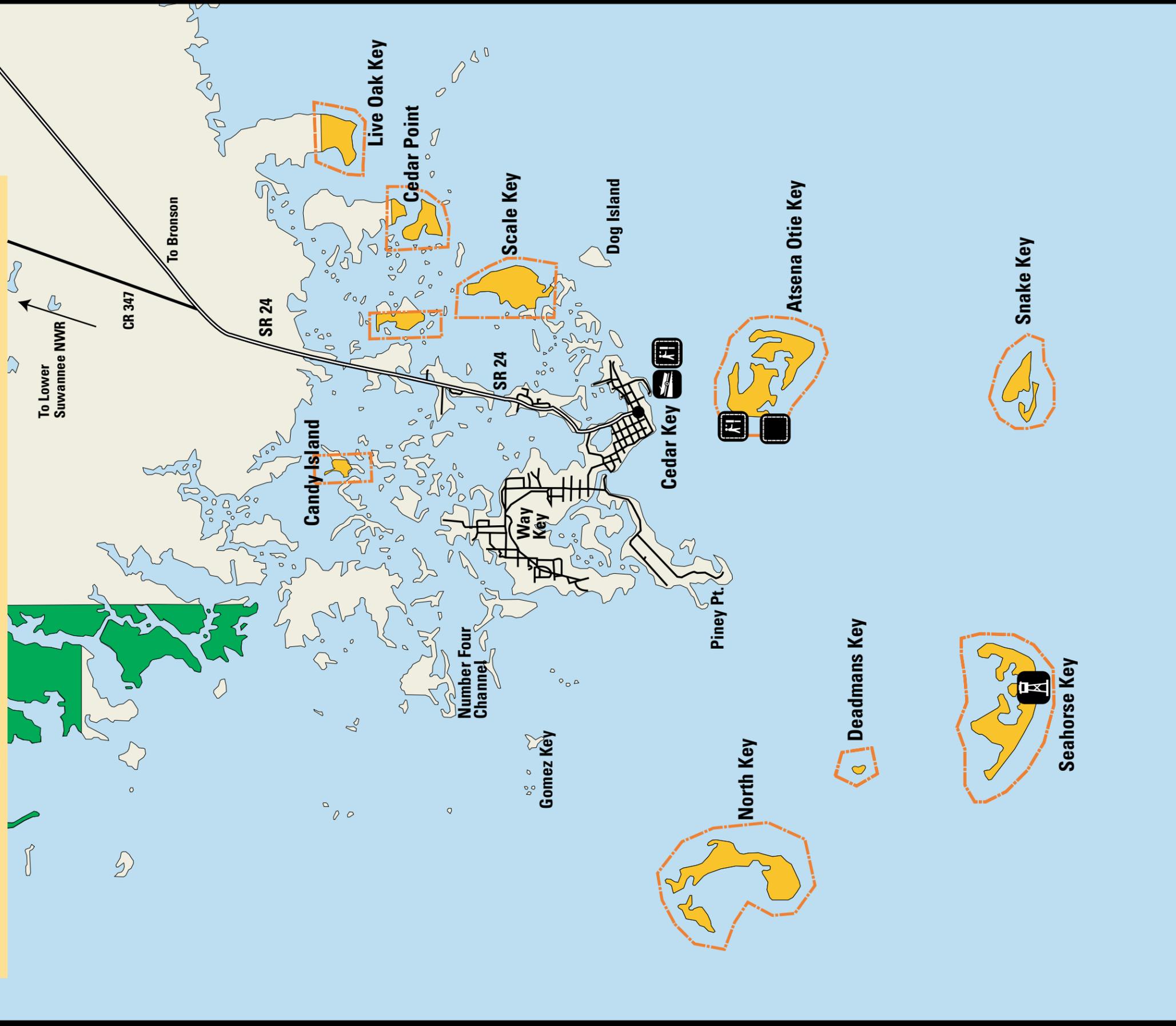
The Headquarters for Cedar Keys and Lower Suwannee NWR's is located off SR 347 between Chiefland and Cedar Key, Florida. Hours of operation are Monday – Friday 7:30 am – 4:00 pm.

For more information please contact:

Refuge Manager
Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge
16450 North West 31st Place
Chiefland, FL 32626
352/493 0238
www.fws.gov/cedarkeys



Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge



Legend

- State Highway
- County Road
- City Road
- Refuge Boundary
- Cedar Keys NWR
- Lower Suwannee NWR
- Lighthouse
- Atsena Otie Trail
- City Boat Ramp
- Information Kiosks

