



National Key Deer, Key West and Great White Heron NWR's
Big Pine Key Plaza
179 Key Deer Boulevard
Big Pine Key, FL 33043
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Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge
P. O. Box 370
Key Largo, FL 33037

September 2014



This sign indicates the boundary of the refuge. The Refuge Manager has authorized this area open during daylight hours to public access for wildlife-dependent activities.

This sign means that there is NO public access permitted in the area beyond this sign. Access is prohibited to protect wildlife and habitat and/or to protect visitors.

To enhance your visit, the following wildlife-dependent activities are permitted on National Key Deer Refuge
Fishing on Ohio Key

- Fishing on Ohio Key
- Wildlife and wildlands observation
- Personal photography
- Hiking on designated trails
- Pets on leashes (only on National Key Deer Refuge)
- Bicycles permitted except the Watson and Mannillo Trails
- Horses are permitted on refuge lands, access limited, consult refuge manager

To protect you, other visitors and the environment, the following activities are prohibited on National Key Deer Refuge
Hunting or discharging firearms

- Hunting or discharging firearms
- The use of metal detectors to search for antiquities or treasure.
- Camping on refuge lands
- Fires
- Poles or pipes such as beach umbrellas

Feeding, injuring, harassing, or removing wildlife, plants, or natural items

Introducing exotic plants or wildlife

Storing equipment or property on refuge lands

Commercial activity without a permit

National Key Deer Refuge, Key West, Great White Heron and Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuges

Welcome to the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges - National Key Deer Refuge, Great White Heron, Key West and Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuges. These four refuges are located in an extraordinary and seemingly endless expanse of sea, islands and sky. These refuges are part of a vast subtropical ecosystem. This distinct chain of islands stretches almost 150 miles from the southeastern tip of Florida, curving gently westward dividing the aqua-green waters of the Gulf of Mexico from the distant deep blue Atlantic.



Key deer

The four refuges include more than 416,000 acres of land and open water. Most keys are fringed along the shoreline by red and black mangroves. On larger keys, this gives way to a wide variety of tropical and subtropical trees and shrubs on slightly higher ground. These lands maintain a unique biodiversity by protecting and preserving important marine water, freshwater wetlands, mangroves, tropical hardwood forests (hammocks), and pine forests. Together, these habitats provide the four basic components of a habitat- food water, shelter, and open space, necessary for the survival of 24 federally listed threatened or endangered species and other native wildlife. As commercial and residential development in the Keys increases, pressure on limited land and water resources become more crucial to the survival of this fragile ecosystem.

National Key Deer Refuge

The 84,351 acre National Key Deer Refuge is located in the Lower Keys on 25 islands and consists of a patchwork of small and large tracts of pine forest, mangrove forest, hardwood hammocks, freshwater wetlands and marine waters. Key deer are found on these 25 islands. The Key deer is the smallest sub-species of the Virginia white-tailed deer. Because the Key deer population is low and remains under threat of extinction from human interaction, the subspecies is federally listed as endangered. The current population is estimated at over 800. Key deer can best be seen at dawn or dusk throughout Big Pine and sometimes on other islands between Big Pine and Cudjoe/Sugarloaf Keys. Please help keep the Key deer wild by not feeding them. Not only is it illegal, it's bad for their health.

The refuge has a visitor center on Big Pine Key and offers the Blue Hole site, the Jack Watson Wildlife Trail and the Fred Mannillo Wildlife Trail. Refer to the map for their location. Also, visitors are welcome to hike refuge fire roads that are open for access. There are additional hiking trails on Cudjoe Key, Upper Sugarloaf Key, and Lower Sugarloaf Key. Big Pine Key has extensive growths of Florida slash pine, silver palms, thatch palm, and poisonwood. Poisonwood produces an oil which can cause a rash to humans similar to poison ivy. To identify it, look for telltale "burn" marks on the leaves.



Poisonwood

The Blue Hole is an abandoned limestone quarry. The rock material removed was used to build many of the original roads on Big Pine Key. The water level is dependent on rainfall and from salt water which flows through the surrounding limestone. Wildlife here includes fish, turtles, birds and alligators. **Do not feed or harass the alligators—it is dangerous and illegal!**



Pinelands and prescribed burn

Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Crocodile Lake NWR was established in North Key Largo in 1980 to protect and preserve critical habitat for the endangered American crocodile. The mangrove wetlands of the refuge provide habitat, solitude, and the only known nesting area on Key Largo for this shy reptile. Mangrove forests fringing the shoreline also support a wide variety of wildlife including wading birds and songbirds, as well as serving as important nursery habitats for many fish species.

The refuge also protects a unique tropical hardwood hammock, which supports a high diversity of plant species, 80% of which are of West Indian origin. The refuge and the adjacent Key Largo Hammock State Botanical Site contain the largest continuous tract of hardwood forest remaining in



Crocodile

the Florida Keys. Nearly 100 species of native trees and shrubs can be found in these hammocks, more than found in some entire states! These forests are home to several endangered and threatened species including the Key Largo woodrat, Key Largo cotton mouse, Schaus swallowtail butterfly, Eastern indigo snake and Stock Island tree snail. Hardwood hammocks also provide important seasonal habitat for migratory neotropical songbirds and permanent homes to colorful tree snails and butterflies.



Key Largo woodrat, credit: Clay DeGayner



Great white heron chick

Due to the small size of the refuge and sensitivity of the habitat and wildlife to human disturbance, the refuge is closed to general public use. A single disturbance to a female crocodile could cause it to abandon its nest leaving the nest unguarded against predators. An interpreted butterfly garden is open to public access next to the refuge headquarters. The garden and office is located on State Road 905, approximately two miles north of US 1 at mile marker 106 in Key Largo. The public can visit the self-guided nature trail located at the Key Largo Hammocks State Botanical Site adjacent to the refuge to see similar habitat and wildlife species.

photos: USFWS

Key West and Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuges

Encompassing numerous islands known locally as the Backcountry, these two refuges are among the oldest refuges in the nation. These areas were set aside for the primary purpose of maintaining a preserve and breeding ground for native birds. In contrast to the "main" Keys (linked by the Overseas Highway/US 1), the Backcountry, with a few exceptions, is a pristine, uninhabited area of islands scattered amidst the biologically rich waters of the Florida Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. In 1975, Congress recognized the special qualities of these refuges by designating many of the islands as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, providing them with additional protection.

Both refuges are of great interest scenically and scientifically, exemplifying a subtropical region unlike any other part of the United States.

Key West National Wildlife Refuge was established by Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 to curtail the slaughter of birds whose feathers were highly valued in the hat industry. Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1938 to protect habitat for the great white heron and other migratory birds. Wading birds were threatened with extinction before this refuge began providing a safe haven for them and other threatened plant and animal species.

These two refuges encompass more than 200,000 acres of open water and over 8,000 acres of land on 49 islands, protecting habitat for a wide variety of birds, the endangered Atlantic green and loggerhead turtles and is one of the only breeding sites in the U.S. for the endangered hawksbill turtle. The Marquesas represents a truly unique area within this refuge and needs added protection. Camping is not allowed in these refuges and access is restricted so as not to disturb birds and other wildlife.



Pelican