

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

# **Pelican Island**

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*



*Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge was established as the first Refuge of the National Wildlife Refuge System in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt. The Refuge was established out of necessity to save the last brown pelican rookery on the east coast of Florida and provide a safe haven for other water birds that were being killed for their feathers and eggs.*







*Roseate spoonbill/Vince Lamb*



*Wood stork/Wendell Metzen*



## **The Pelican Island Rookery**

Pelican Island was discovered as a bird rookery (nesting and roosting place) in 1858 and continues to provide habitat for over 30 different species of birds. Typically, several thousand birds roost on Pelican Island nightly during the migratory season, November through March.

*At left: Brown pelican chick; at right: Pelican Island rookery/ both by Wendell Metzen*





*Great blue heron/Vince Lamb*



*Great egret displaying breeding plumes, or aigrettes/Jim Angy*



*Brown pelicans/Vince Lamb*

## **Birds of Pelican Island**

*Nesting birds  
(peak April – June)*

American oystercatcher

Anhinga

Black-crowned night heron

Brown pelican

Cattle egret

Common moorhen

Double-crested cormorant

Great blue heron

Great egret

Green heron

Little blue heron

Reddish egret

Snowy egret

Tricolored heron

White ibis

Wood stork

*Special summer visiting birds*

Magnificent frigatebird

Roseate spoonbill

*Special winter visiting bird*

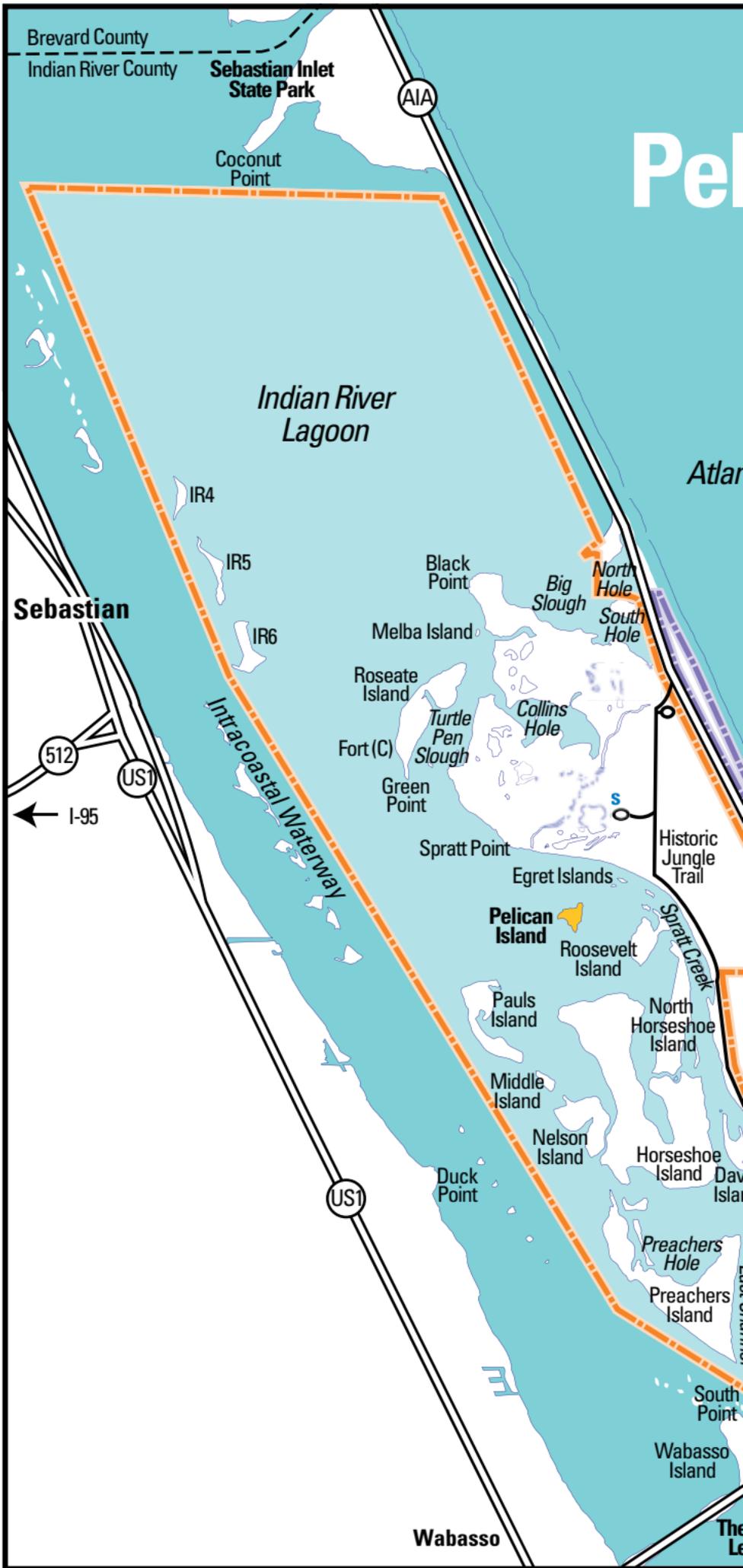
White pelican



*Roseate spoonbill with double-crested cormorant/  
Jim Angy*

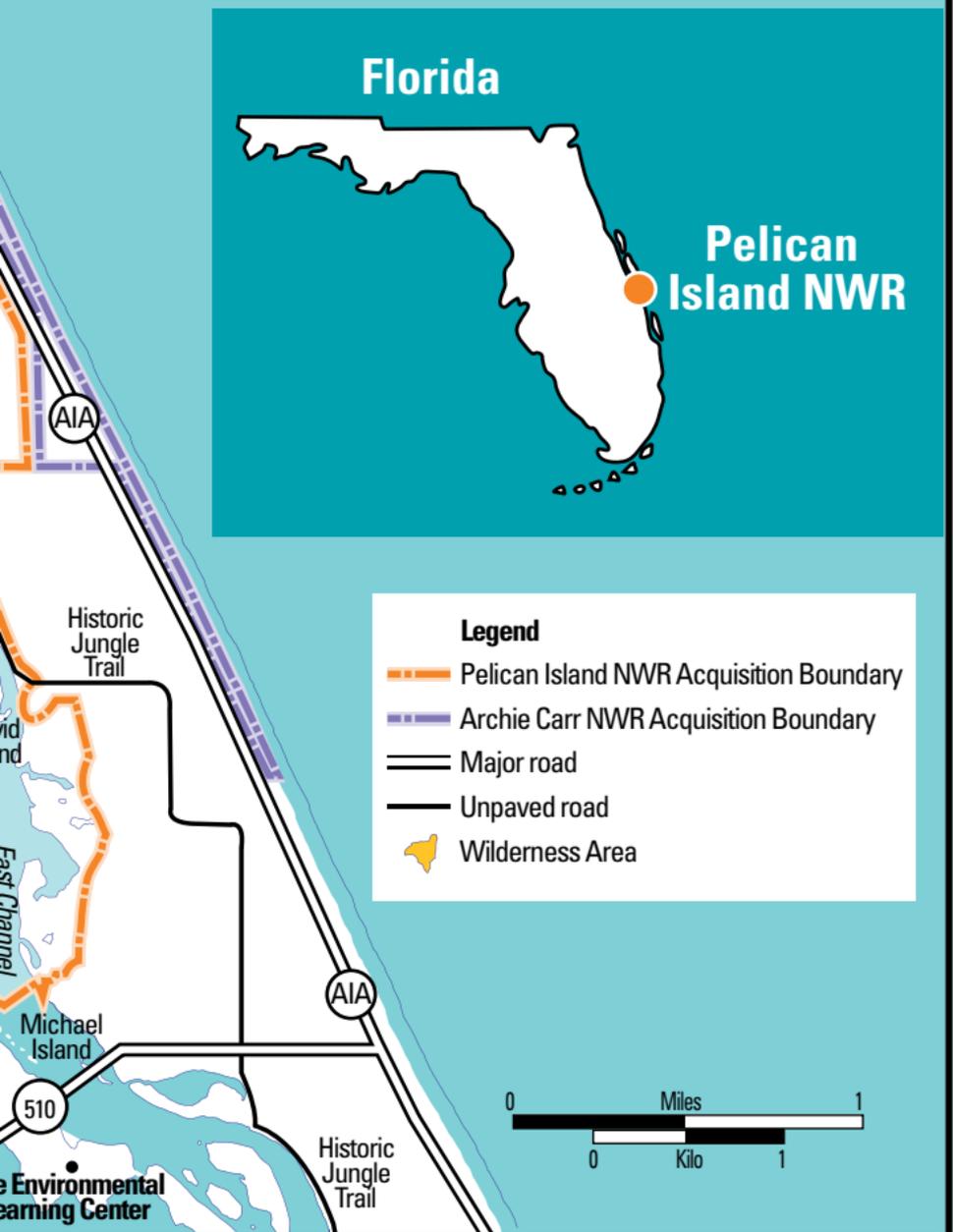


*White pelicans/Vince Lamb*



# Pelican Island NWR Vicinity Map

Atlantic Ocean



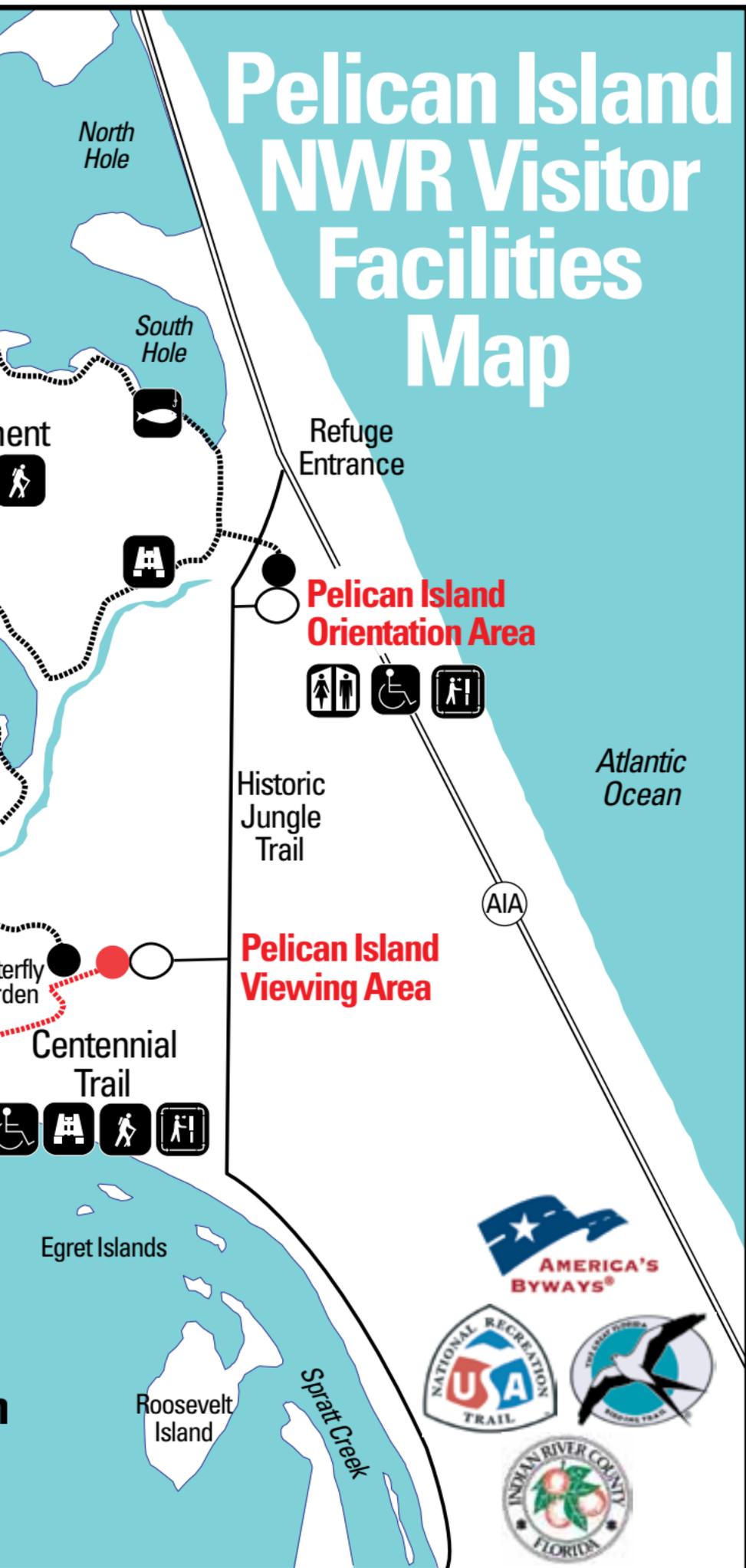


### Legend

-  US Highway A1A
-  Historic Jungle Trail (unpaved road)
-  Trails - 3 mile loops
-  Centennial Trail 3/4 mile round trip
-  Fishing
-  Wildlife observation
-  Self-guided trail
-  Accessible
-  Observation tower
-  Interpretive exhibits

**Pelican Island**

# Pelican Island NWR Visitor Facilities Map





*Osprey/Vince Lamb*



*Above: brown pelican/  
USFWS; below: Centennial  
Trail observation tower/  
USFWS/Joanna Webb*

## **Visiting the Refuge**

The Refuge has partnered with Indian River County to provide land-based visitor access every day of the year from dawn to dusk. There is no Visitor Center or day use fees and all opportunities are either self-guided or by commercial tour operators. The entrance to the Refuge is located at U.S. Highway A1A and north Historic Jungle Trail, 3.7 miles north of the Wabasso Beach Road (CR 510) or 3.3 miles south of Sebastian Inlet.

## **Wildlife Observation**

### *Viewing the Pelican Island Rookery*

The Centennial Trail observation tower, off Historic Jungle Trail, is the most popular way to view the Pelican Island rookery. The rookery is also viewable from a closer distance by boat or kayak, but from outside the *Closed Area* signs posted around the island (400 ft away).

### *Foot Trails*

The Refuge has one interpretive and two self-guided foot trails that provide great wildlife observation opportunities within the rare habitats of the barrier island ecosystem.





*Anhinga/  
Jim Angy*



*Giant swallowtail  
butterfly/  
Joanna Webb*



*Marsh rabbit/  
Vince Lamb*



*Spotting scope/  
Rob Larranaga*

## **The Centennial Trail**

¾-mile round trip; observation tower to view the Pelican Island rookery from a distance; ADA accessible.

## **Joe Michael Memorial Trail**

Three-mile loop; salt marsh habitat; observation platform into the marsh.

## **Bird's Impoundment Trail**

Three-mile loop; salt marsh habitat.

## **Saltwater Fishing**

Fishing by boat and recreational shellfish harvesting is permitted within the open waters of the Indian River Lagoon, but not within any of the designated commercial shellfish leases. The use of rakes for shellfishing is not permitted. There are several boat launch facilities in the area but not within the Refuge.

Bank fishing within the Refuge is permitted on the Indian River Lagoon side of both Bird's Impoundment and Joe Michael Memorial Trails. Fishing is not permitted in the interior of the salt marsh impoundments, lakes, or ponds. State fishing regulations apply: [www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com) or call 888/347 4356.

## **Help Us Protect the Refuge**

### *Prohibited*

- Going on Pelican Island proper or drifting inside the *Closed Area* signs posted around the island.
- Feeding or disturbing wildlife and their nests.
- Releasing any wild or domestic animal.
- Searching for and collecting artifacts, plants and animals.
- Dogs, horses, ATV's, bicycles or vehicles on foot trails.
- Camping and fires.
- Use of firearms and hunting.



*Gopher tortoise/  
Blair Witherington*



*Bobcat/  
Bruce Eilerts*



*Blue land crab/  
Blair Witherington*



*Piping plover/  
USFWS/Gene  
Nieminen*



*Southeastern  
beach mouse/  
USFWS*

## **Habitat and Wildlife**

Since its inception in 1903, the Refuge has expanded to include over 5,400 acres of mangrove and spoil islands, barrier island uplands, and submerged lands in the Indian River Lagoon, the most biologically diverse estuary in North America.

The Refuge is also located within an area on the southeast coast of Florida where the temperate and subtropical climatic zones merge, resulting in a broad diversity of species including several threatened and endangered species.

### *Federally Listed as Endangered*

West Indian manatee

Green sea turtle

Hawksbill sea turtle

Kemp's ridley sea turtle

Smalltooth sawfish

Wood stork

### *Federally Listed as Threatened*

Atlantic salt marsh snake

Eastern indigo snake

Johnson's sea grass

Loggerhead sea turtle

Piping plover

Southeastern beach mouse



*Loggerhead sea turtle/  
Blair Witherington*

## **Wildlife Emergencies**

Florida Fish  
and Wildlife  
Conservation  
Commission  
Wildlife Alert  
Hotline:  
888/404 3922



*Photos top to  
bottom: white  
pelican; West  
Indian manatee;  
juvenile brown  
pelican/all by  
Vince Lamb*





## Designations and Distinctions

- America's first National Wildlife Refuge
- National Historic Landmark (Pelican Island proper)
- National Wilderness Area (Pelican Island proper)
- Wetland of International Importance
- State Aquatic Preserve area
- National Scenic Byway site
- Great Florida Birding Trail site
- State Greenway and National Register of Historic Places (Historic Jungle Trail)
- National Recreation Trail (The Centennial Trail)

Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex also administers Archie Carr and Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuges. National Wildlife Refuges are administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a federal agency under the Department of Interior.

*Left: Historic  
Jungle Trail/  
USFWS/Joanna  
Webb*

*Right: tricolored  
heron/Jim Angy*



## **An Immigrant and a President**

In the mid to late 1800's, there was a profitable market for wildlife and their products. As a result, our nation was faced with the imminent extinction of the passenger pigeon and the Carolina parakeet, the near extinction of the American bison, and the extermination of 80% of all bird life in Florida.



*Paul Kroegel, first Refuge Manager, served at Pelican Island from 1903 until 1926. USFWS/George Nelson*

The ongoing slaughter of birds by market hunters (for feathers and eggs) into the early 1900's, left 5.5-acre Pelican Island as the only brown pelican rookery on the east coast of Florida and decimated many other bird populations. Tormented by the slaughter, a German immigrant, named Paul Kroegel, eventually made heroic attempts to ward off feather hunters from Pelican Island with his own 10-gauge, double-barrel shotgun. Kroegel's bravery and dedication received the attention of President Theodore Roosevelt.



*President Theodore Roosevelt believed that "conservation", a term he popularized, was a national public interest. USFWS*



While considering the fate of Pelican Island, President Roosevelt asked, “Is there any law that will prevent me from declaring Pelican Island as a Federal Bird Reservation?” Learning there were none, he proclaimed, “Very well then, I so declare it.”

On March 14, 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island as a “preserve and breeding ground for native birds” and appointed Kroegel as the first Refuge Manager.

This was the first time the federal government set aside land specifically for

*Feathers were popularly used to adorn women’s hats in the late 1800’s, but at the expense of millions of birds. USFWS*

wildlife conservation and 5.5-acre Pelican Island became the first unit of what we know today as the National Wildlife Refuge System. The System has grown to more than 150 million acres, including over 550 National Wildlife Refuges, 3000 Waterfowl Production Areas, and four Marine National Monuments, making it the largest system of lands for wildlife in the world.

**Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge**  
**1339 20<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**Vero Beach, Florida 32960**  
**Phone: 772/562 3909 x275**  
**Fax: 772/299 3101**  
**Email: PelicanIsland@fws.gov**  
**www.fws.gov/PelicanIsland**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**1 800/344 WILD**  
**<http://www.fws.gov>**

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