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Roseate spoonbill
USFWS/Diane Borden-Billiot

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sabine

National Wildlife Refuge

Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex



Located in Cameron Parish in the southwest corner of Louisiana, Sabine National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 560 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Snow geese are common refuge inhabitants from October - February, photo by William Vieth.



Introduction

Sabine National Wildlife Refuge is the largest refuge within the Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex which also includes Cameron Prairie, Lacassine and Shell Keys National Wildlife Refuges.



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

Sabine refuge was established in 1937 and is the largest coastal marsh refuge on the Gulf. The primary management objective is to preserve a large area of coastal wetlands for wintering and migrating waterfowl from both the Mississippi and Central Flyways. It is also a major nursery area for many estuarine-dependent marine species as well as being the home for alligators and other reptiles, mammals, and numerous wading, water, and marsh birds. The refuge contains 124,511 acres; its marshes range in salinities from fresh to almost sea-strength.

Management Activities

The refuge habitat is for the use of all wildlife, with special emphasis on waterfowl. The management of this 124,511 acre refuge is not as intensive as that found on smaller refuges.

An estimated 40,000 acres of habitat loss has occurred on Sabine refuge due to a combination of man-caused and natural events, such as digging channels, building levees, hurricanes, and vegetative eat-outs by wildlife. Major efforts are being taken to restore marsh habitat and prevent further habitat loss.

Photo at left, Louisiana heron, by William Vieth.



This alligator stayed dried in the mud for weeks during a drought, however, he slithered away after the rain started.



Black-necked stilt by William Vieth.

All photos credit USFWS/Diane Borden-Billiot, unless otherwise indicated.

Management techniques used at Sabine include water quality manipulation, marsh creation, and burning. Water management activities are facilitated by three major water control structures along the eastern edge of the refuge. These structures are managed to limit the amount of saline water entering the refuge, and striving to have a diversity of marshes from saline to fresh across the refuge.

Techniques used to create or restore marsh from open water areas include building marsh using dredge spoil from the Calcasieu Ship Channel and building low-lying levees called terraces. Terraces help slow wave action in open water areas, which then allows water clarity to improve so that plants may grow and create new marsh. Wildland fire management is used to remove dead vegetation and invigorate growth of desirable wildlife food plants and additionally to reduce wildfires.

Research

This coastal refuge serves as the biological research management center for the southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Biological research is conducted by academic, federal, state, and local entities. Projects investigate everything from plant and animal species, to soils, water drainage, habitats, landscapes, and management techniques.

A Vital Productive Area

The basin of wetlands that lies between the Gulf's beach cheniers (oak ridges) and the coastal prairie is one of the most productive and fertile areas in North America. This is where fresh river water and the Gulf's saline water mix. This area could be called an estuary, a marsh, a wetland; its name is Sabine National Wildlife Refuge and it is home to an abundance of wetland dependent wildlife.



Duck-wing shaped terraces reduce water turbulence and encourage plant growth.



Prescribed fire is one of the tools used by refuges to manage coastal wetlands. photo by USFWS/Chris Hoag.



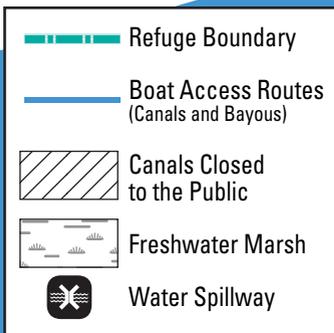
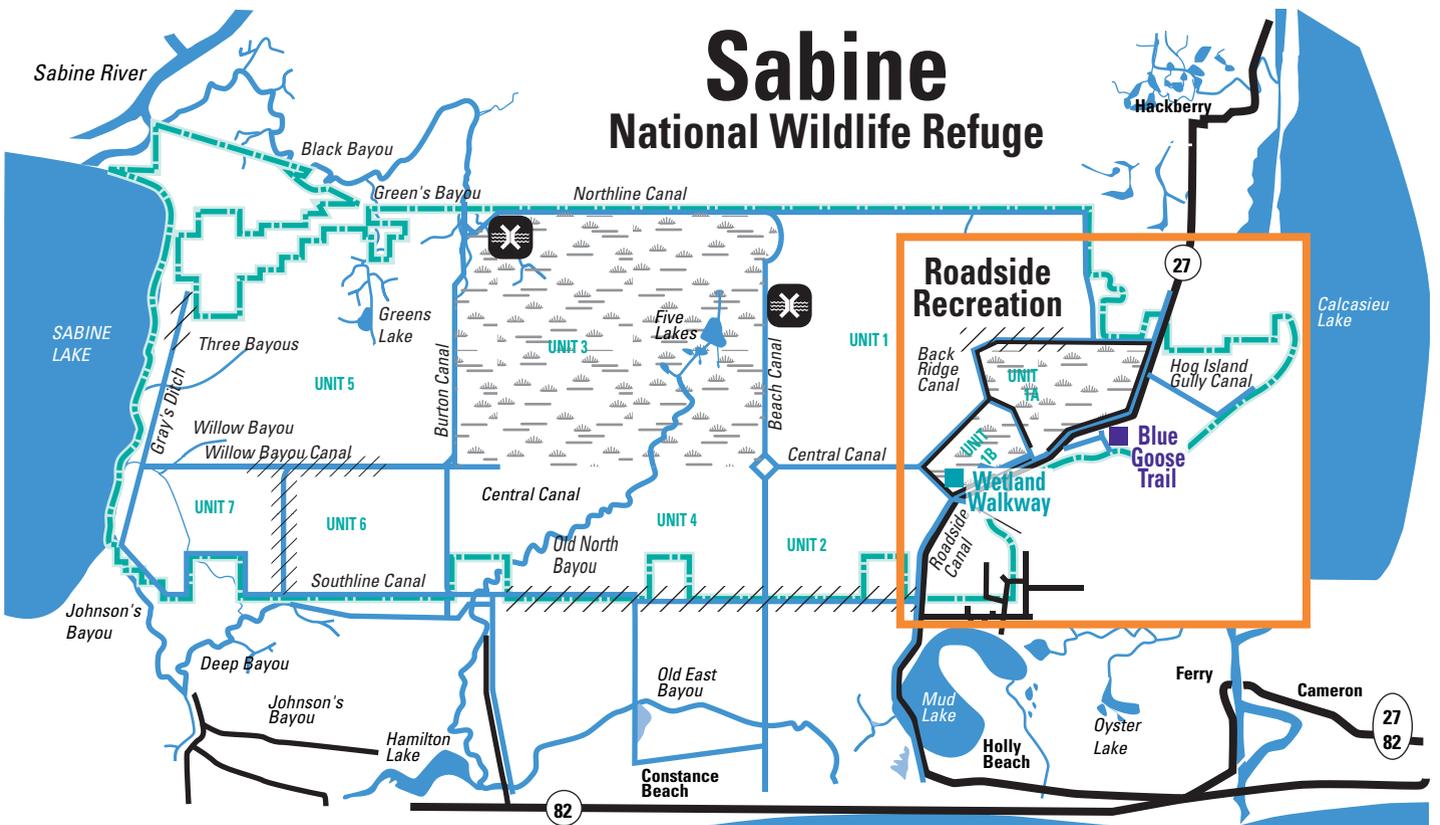
Above: opossum and below: virginia rail

Wildlife

Wildlife is both diverse and abundant. Sabine refuge provides important habitat for more than 300 species of birds, 26 species of mammals, 41 species of reptiles and amphibians, 132 species of fish and 68 species of marine invertebrates. Wildlife species diversity in productive coastal wetlands is second only to rainforests.

Sabine refuge is home to thousands of American alligators, both large and small. Furbearers including white-tailed deer, river otters, muskrats, rabbits, mink, raccoons and coyotes are numerous. Marshes here are important nursery grounds for many salt water fishes, blue crabs, and shrimp. They also provide vital wintering waterfowl habitat and nesting habitat for migrant and resident birds alike. For a complete list of bird species found on the refuge, pick up a copy of the Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex Bird List brochure.

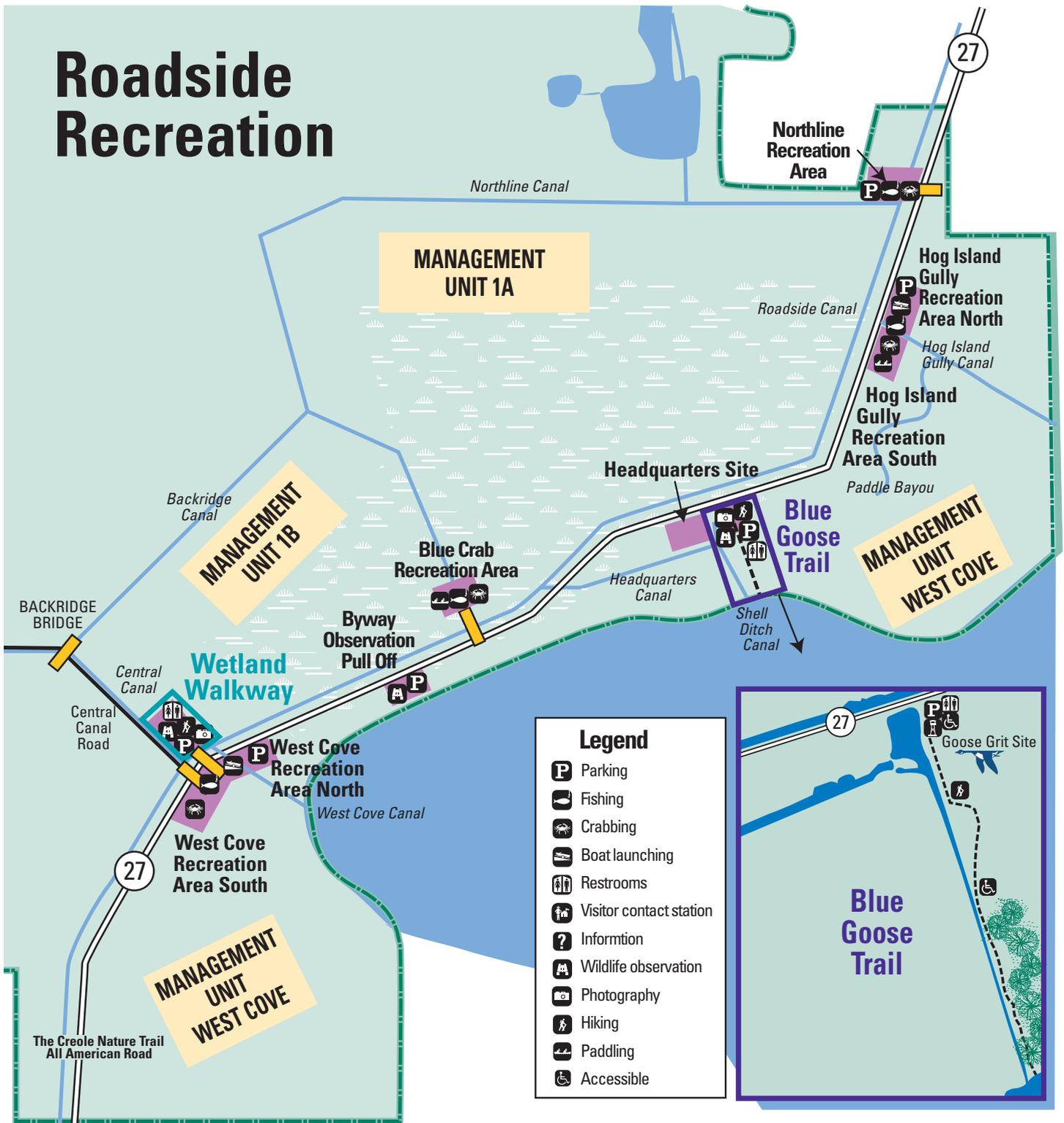
Sabine National Wildlife Refuge



GULF OF MEXICO

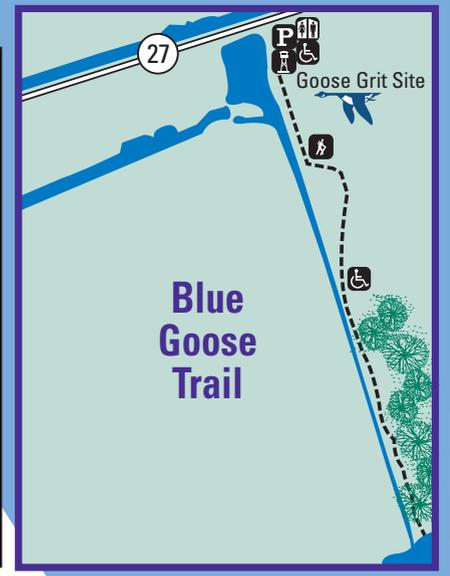


Roadside Recreation



Legend

- Parking
- Fishing
- Crabbing
- Boat launching
- Restrooms
- Visitor contact station
- Information
- Wildlife observation
- Photography
- Hiking
- Paddling
- Accessible





Top to bottom:
diamond backed
terrapin,
cottonmouth, and
raft of American
coots.

Visiting the Refuge

Sabine is the westernmost refuge within the Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex, approximately one and half hours from Cameron Prairie NWR and two hours from Lacassine NWR.

To visit Sabine NWR take exit 20 off of I-10 in Sulphur, Louisiana. Turn south on Highway 27. The refuge is located approximately 22 miles south of Sulphur and seven miles south of Hackberry. If traveling east on Highway 82 from Texas, turn north on Highway 27 at Holly Beach and drive six miles to the refuge. If traveling west on Highway 27/82 from Cameron, turn north on 27 at Holly Beach and drive six miles to the refuge. The refuge has multiple entrances along a nine mile stretch of Highway 27, also known as the Creole Nature Trail All American Road.

Safety

Please do not feed, approach or touch any wildlife, especially alligators. Although alligators may appear to be sleeping or dead, they are not. They can move quickly if disturbed or hungry. Keep yourself and all pets away from alligators and the water where they may be lurking.

Watch where you step! Sabine is home to venomous snakes like the cottonmouth (water moccasin) and biting fire ants. Protect yourself from biting insects by using insect repellent and/or protective clothing. Drink plenty of water and use sun block regularly to prevent heat disorders and sunburn.

Activities to Enjoy

Sabine National Wildlife Refuge offers a variety of wildlife-oriented recreational opportunities.

Permitted Recreational Activities

Sunrise to Sunset Only

See maps within for permitted activity locations.



Above: the
nutria, a large
non-native
rodent from
South America,
is commonly
seen in refuge
marshes; below:
great egret
preparing to
catch a shrimp.



Stringer of
Redfish

Refer to SW LA NWR Complex fishing and hunting brochures for fishing, crabbing, cast netting, and boating regulations.

Interior refuge canals and marshes are only open from March 15 to October 15, except for permitted hunting. Boat launching and travel is permitted one hour before sunrise until one hour after sunset.

Year Round Activities

Designated roadside areas only.

- Wildlife observation
- Photography
- Hiking
- Fishing
- Crabbing
- Paddling (canoe, kayak, pirogue)
- Boat launching

Seasonal Activities

- Motor boating- March 15 to Oct 15
- Cast netting for shrimp- LA inshore Shrimp season only.
- Waterfowl hunting- LA waterfowl season

Prohibited Activities and Items

- Presence on the refuge before sunrise and after sunset, except boat travel
- Boat travel prior to 1 hour before sunrise and after 1 hour past sunset
- Littering, including crab string
- Feeding and harassing wildlife
- Disturbing or collecting plants, animals, or artifacts
- Pets without a leash
- Swimming or wading
- Overnight parking
- Camping
- Firearms or weapons
- Glass containers/bottles
- Portable grills, campfires, and cooking fires