



Vieques National Wildlife Refuge becomes the largest refuge in the Caribbean



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Aerial photo of Puerto Mosquito in eastern Vieques

Expansion of the Vieques NWR:

Approximately 15,500 acres of the former Navy bombing range in eastern Vieques will be added to the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. The Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act of 2001, Public Law No. 106-398, as amended by Public Law No. 107-107, requires the Navy to transfer these lands to the Department of the Interior to be managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a National Wildlife Refuge. This transfer is proposed for May 1, 2003. This addition will increase the area currently managed as a National Wildlife Refuge on Vieques to about 18,100 acres and make the area the largest National Wildlife Refuge in the Caribbean. The area harbors beaches used by threatened and endangered sea turtles for nesting, subtropical dry forest, mangrove lagoons, salt flats and bioluminescent bays.

Who is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the public. The Service manages the 95 million acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which is comprised of more than 540 national wildlife refuges. The Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge complex comprises a total of nine Refuges. Five are in Puerto Rico: Cabo Rojo, Laguna Cartagena, Desecheo, Culebra, and Vieques. Three others are in the US Virgin Islands: Sandy Point, Buck Island and Green Cay. Another, Navassa Island is located off the coast of Haiti.



Peter Dutton

Leatherback sea turtle

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts.

What is the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System?

The mission of the System is to administer a national network of land and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations. Refuges provide habitat for threatened and endangered species, migratory and resident birds, and other wildlife and offer outstanding wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Refuges also provides economic opportunities to the community through nature-based, activities while retaining the unique ecological integrity of the land.



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Tri-colored heron in a mangrove lagoon

How will the Fish and Wildlife Service manage the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge once the land in eastern Vieques is transferred?

All National Wildlife Refuges on the System are administered according to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. The Service is committed to providing public access to as much of the Refuge as is safely possible. While the presence of unexploded ordnance will result in limiting public access to certain areas until clean-up is complete in order to provide for public safety, we do know that at a minimum the beaches at Bahia Corcho (also known as Red Beach) and Bahia de la Chiva (also known as Blue Beach) will be open to the public upon the transfer of the land.



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Refuge manager Oscar Díaz examines one of many unexploded ordnance



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The Navy will transfer the former bombing range to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on May 1, 2003.

Because we are trustees of this natural heritage for the public, our highest priority will be to work with Federal, Commonwealth and Municipal government, and the public towards obtaining a clean and safe refuge.

Upon the transfer of the land, activities that may be considered compatible in the Refuge include fishing, hiking, biking, photography, wildlife observation, among others. Nevertheless, the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act requires the preparation of a Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan in which public involvement is a requirement. During the planning process we will request the input and assistance from the public in the establishment of our management priorities and in the development of opportunities for nature-based, recreational activities. Restoration of degraded habitats through reforestation, reestablishment of hydrology, and the removal of exotic species will be a priority.

How can you help in the protection, management and restoration of the resources in eastern Vieques?

Volunteer and support conservation efforts and projects to ensure that the Refuge is managed for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Visit the Refuge and the office to obtain information on the Refuge and its natural habitats. Share this information with your friends and family. Work with the Service to restore habitats so that they may be enjoyed by you and future generations.

For more information, contact

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