

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex Waterfowl Hunt Modification Highlights 2016

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR/ Refuge) is a premier waterfowl hunting area that provides unparalleled opportunities to the public during the early teal and regular season, as well as a special youth hunt. As the numbers of hunters have increased significantly over the last few years, hunters have complained the quality of hunting has been negatively affected and may continue to decline if the same level of use continues on the Refuge. Following meetings and conversations with Refuge waterfowl hunters, the Refuge drafted several options to help address some of the challenges associated with increased hunter participation on the Refuge. Those recommendations were published for public comment and the changes for 2016 were adopted based on the responses received from Refuge hunters.

The primary concerns are for hunter safety because of overcrowding issues which occur during the January open season. Modifications to the hunt program will assist in providing a safer environment for all refuge visitors. Early teal season, the youth waterfowl hunt, and hunt area 2 and 3 will continue to be open for public hunting with no changes as per State and Federal regulations.

The Refuge waterfowl hunt plan modifications for 2016-2017 are:

1. Limited entry/ quota permits are now required for area 1 and 4 during November, December, and January.
2. The Refuge has removed the required \$5.00 application fee and increased the Refuge limited/ quota waterfowl hunting fees from \$15.00 to \$25.00 per permit. There is still a state administrative fee of \$2.50 for these permits; therefore the total cost of a Refuge limited/ quota waterfowl hunt permit is \$27.50.
3. Internal combustion engines are restricted to the outside perimeter impoundment ditch, at all times, to reduce habitat degradation and damage to the marsh. Vessels may be propelled within the impoundment perimeter ditches by push-poles, paddles, or electric motors only. Internal combustion engines must be shut off while inside impoundments past the perimeter ditch. All scouting must remain within the impoundment perimeter ditches.
4. The Indian River within the Refuge boundary is closed to hunting. Access to impoundments is prohibited from the open water.
5. You must report all hunting activities at one of the two Refuge check stations, including both successful and non-successful hunts, prior to leaving the Refuge.

These highlights are the major changes for the Refuge's 2016 hunt programs; however, please be sure to review all regulation changes in the Refuge hunt brochure. Non-compliance with state or federal regulations may result in loss of Refuge hunting privileges.

**Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
Big Game Hunt Modification Highlights ~ 2016**

The Refuge offered its first annual Archery Big Game Hunt in October 2015 which included white-tailed deer and feral hog. This was a single weekend (3-day) hunt allowing 30 limited-entry/ quota permitted hunters plus youth hunters.

The Refuge big game hunt plan modifications for 2016 are:

1. During the 2016 season the Refuge will offer (2) 3-day hunts (one in October and one in December).
2. The Refuge has increased the Refuge limited/ quota big game hunting fees from \$15.00 to \$25.00 per permit. There is still a state administrative fee of \$2.50 for these permits; therefor the total cost of a Refuge limited/ quota big game hunt permit is \$27.50.
3. We allow legally permitted hunters to scout within their permitted zones up to 7 days prior to their permitted hunts. You must carry your valid Quota Hunt Permit identifying the permitted hunt zone while scouting. In addition to the Refuge quota permit, you must be in possession of all other required hunting permits and licenses.
4. We prohibit hunting with dogs; however, we are allowing the limited use of trained tracking dogs but only with prior authorization by a Federal Wildlife Officer. Federal Officer can be contacted through the deer check stations. Dogs must remain on a leash and be equipped with a GPS tracking device.
5. Hunters must park along SR3 but are not allowed to block or park on access roads or fire breaks.
6. Hunters must report all hunting activities at one of the two Refuge check stations, including both successful and non-successful hunts, prior to leaving the Refuge.

These highlights are the major changes for the Refuge's 2016 hunt programs; however, please be sure to review all regulation changes in the Refuge hunt brochure. Non-compliance with state or federal regulations may result in loss of Refuge hunting privileges.