

Lower Rio Grande Valley

National Wildlife Refuge



**Lower Rio Grande Valley
National Wildlife Refuge**
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[http://fws.gov/southwest/texas/
santaana.html](http://fws.gov/southwest/texas/santaana.html)

Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge Facts

- Established: February 2, 1979
- Acres: 90,441 (2008 figure) in more than 125 units located in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties, Texas. The Refuge is approved by Congress to pursue an acquisition goal of 132,500 acres by purchasing fee title lands or conservation easements from willing sellers.
- Location: the Refuge office is located at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge on Highway 281, 7.5-miles south of Alamo, TX, ¼-mile east of FM 907 (Alamo Road).
- Responsible for managing 1,658 acres of former Wildlife Management Areas for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.
- In partnership with the City of Roma, the Refuge operates the Roma Bluffs World Birding Center, part of a network of nine unique birding sites set along a 120-mile historic river road from Roma to South Padre Island, Texas.
- The Refuge manages two inland natural salt lakes in Hidalgo and Willacy counties.
- More than 515 species of birds have been recorded in the lower Rio Grande Valley, the most productive birding area in the United States and Canada. The Refuge is recognized as an Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy.
- Refuge tracts in Hidalgo County are managed for wintering shorebird populations of Long-billed Curlew and Wilson's Phalarope, and are part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.
- The Battle of Palmito Ranch – the last land battle of the Civil War - took place on May 12-13, 1865 on what is now Refuge property east of Brownsville.

- Recognized as one of the ten most endangered national wildlife refuges by the Defenders of Wildlife in their 2007 Refuges at Risk report.

- Responsible for negotiating with oil and gas industry for mineral exploration/extraction.

Natural History

- Considered one of the most biologically diverse in the entire National Wildlife Refuge System, the Refuge has identified 11 unique biotic communities in the lower Rio Grande Valley to guide land acquisition efforts.
- There are approximately 776 plant species, 50 mammal species, 29 freshwater fish species, and 65 reptile and amphibian species that can be found on the Refuge.
- Major habitat types include Clay Loma/Wind Tidal Flats, Coastal Brushland Potholes, Sabal Palm Forest, Mid-Valley Riparian Woodland, Mid-Delta Thorn Forest, Woodland Potholes and Basins, Upland Thorn Scrub, Barretal, Upper Valley Flood Forest, Ramaderos, and Chihuahuan Thorn Forest.
- Located at the intersection of the Central and Mississippi migratory flyways, the Refuge provides nesting, feeding and loafing areas for millions of migratory and resident songbirds, shorebirds, waterfowl species and water birds.
- The Refuge manages habitats supporting 19 federally threatened and endangered species, and 57 state protected species.

Long-billed Curlew

Photograph by Sanford

Red-billed Pigeon

Photograph by Larry Ditto

Aplomado Falcon

Photograph by Sanford

- The Refuge provides habitat for two federally listed endangered cat species, the ocelot and jaguarundi. Kemp's Ridley sea turtles, the most endangered sea turtle species in the world, nest on beaches of the Boca Chica Tract each year.

Financial impact of Refuge

- Annual visitation is approximately 65,000 visitors. Major visitor components are avid bird watchers and nature tourists, hunters, local residents, and Winter Texans.
- 16-person staff.
- Current year budget (FY 2008) \$1,263,371.

Refuge Objectives

- Continue to pursue land acquisition goal of 132,500 acres.
- Restore 400 – 600 acres of native habitat annually through cooperative farming program.
- Acquire, protect and enhance Refuge habitat for the protection of endangered species.
- Assist and collaborate with partners in the achievement of a contiguous river wildlife corridor.
- Improve Refuge water quality and water delivery systems, and protect and enhance wetlands.
- Provide wildlife-oriented recreation.
- Provide interpretive and environmental education opportunities.

Management Tools

- Moist soil management
- Cooperative farming
- Water level/water quality programs
- Exotic game species management
- Prescribed burning
- Wetland restoration/management
- Mechanical/chemical control of exotic and noxious plants
- Law enforcement
- Research partnerships
- Volunteer/student intern program
- Education/interpretation
- Partnerships/challenge grants

Public Use Opportunities

The following Refuge tracts are open to the public daily from sunrise to sunset. These remote and unstaffed units of the Refuge have no public facilities. Visitors should bring maps, water, food, and protection from weather and insects. Stay on trails or roads to avoid venomous snakes. Off-road vehicles are prohibited. Do not block gates, and please park vehicles in parking lots or other safe areas.

Boca Chica Tract (Cameron County)

- Loma/tidal flats/coastal dune habitats
- Wildlife observation, photography, beachcombing
- Information kiosk

East Lake/La Sal Vieja Tracts (Willacy County)

- Inland hypersaline lakes
- Hiking/walking trails (accessible by foot only)
- Hunting offered seasonally, permit required
- Birding and wildlife observation
- Parking lot, information kiosk

La Sal del Ray/Schalaben Tracts (Hidalgo County)

- Inland hypersaline lake thorn scrub habitat
- Hiking/walking trails (accessible by foot only)
- Birding and wildlife observation
- Nature photography, interpretive tours (seasonally)
- Parking lot, information kiosk

Monte Christo Tract (Hidalgo County)

- Woodland potholes habitat
- Dove hunting offered seasonally, permit required
- Birding, nature photography
- Hiking/walking trails (accessible by foot only)

Yturria Brush Tract (Hidalgo County, west of La Joya)

- Upland thorn scrub habitat
- Birding and butterfly watching, nature photography
- Hiking/walking trails (accessible by foot only)
- Parking lot, information kiosk

La Grulla Tracts (Starr County)

- Dove hunting offered seasonally, permit required

La Puerta Tract

(Starr County, east of Rio Grande City)

- Semiarid barretal habitat
- Hiking/walking trails (accessible by foot only)
- Nature photography, birding and wildlife observation
- Parking lot, information kiosk

Roma Bluffs World Birding Center (Starr County)

- Westernmost unit of the 9-site World Birding Center
- Visitor center, exhibits, nature store
- Interpretive and educational programs
- Guided Rio Grande canoe trips
- Birding information center

Salineño Tract (Starr County)

- Small upper Valley flood forest habitat
- Birding and butterfly watching
- Access to Rio Grande
- Information kiosk, walking trail

Calendar of Events

January: Youth and adult big game hunts

May: International Migratory Bird Day

June – July: Youth Conservation Corps summer student job program

August: Big game hunt applications accepted for fall/winter hunt program

September: Dove hunting season opens

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week
Rio Reforestation public planting event

November – January: Archery and shotgun/muzzleloader big game hunting

December: Christmas Bird Count

For further information

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