

Hints for Enjoying your visit

-  Bring your binoculars for a close-up view without creating a disturbance.
-  Bring field guides to help identify our native plants, birds, and wildlife.
-  Start early and stay late. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times to see wildlife.
-  Observe carefully. Look up in the trees and sky, as well as in shrubbery, grasses, and pools.
-  Bring bug spray, snacks, and plenty of water if you plan on walking the trails; it may get buggy and hot.
-  Collecting plants, animals, artifacts, or property and disturbing or feeding wildlife is against the law.
-  Share the road. Pull off to the right when stopping and follow the speed limit at all times.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
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 Website: www.fws.gov/refuge/st_marks

Photos: Egret by Lou Kellenberger, Lighthouse by Craig Kittendorf

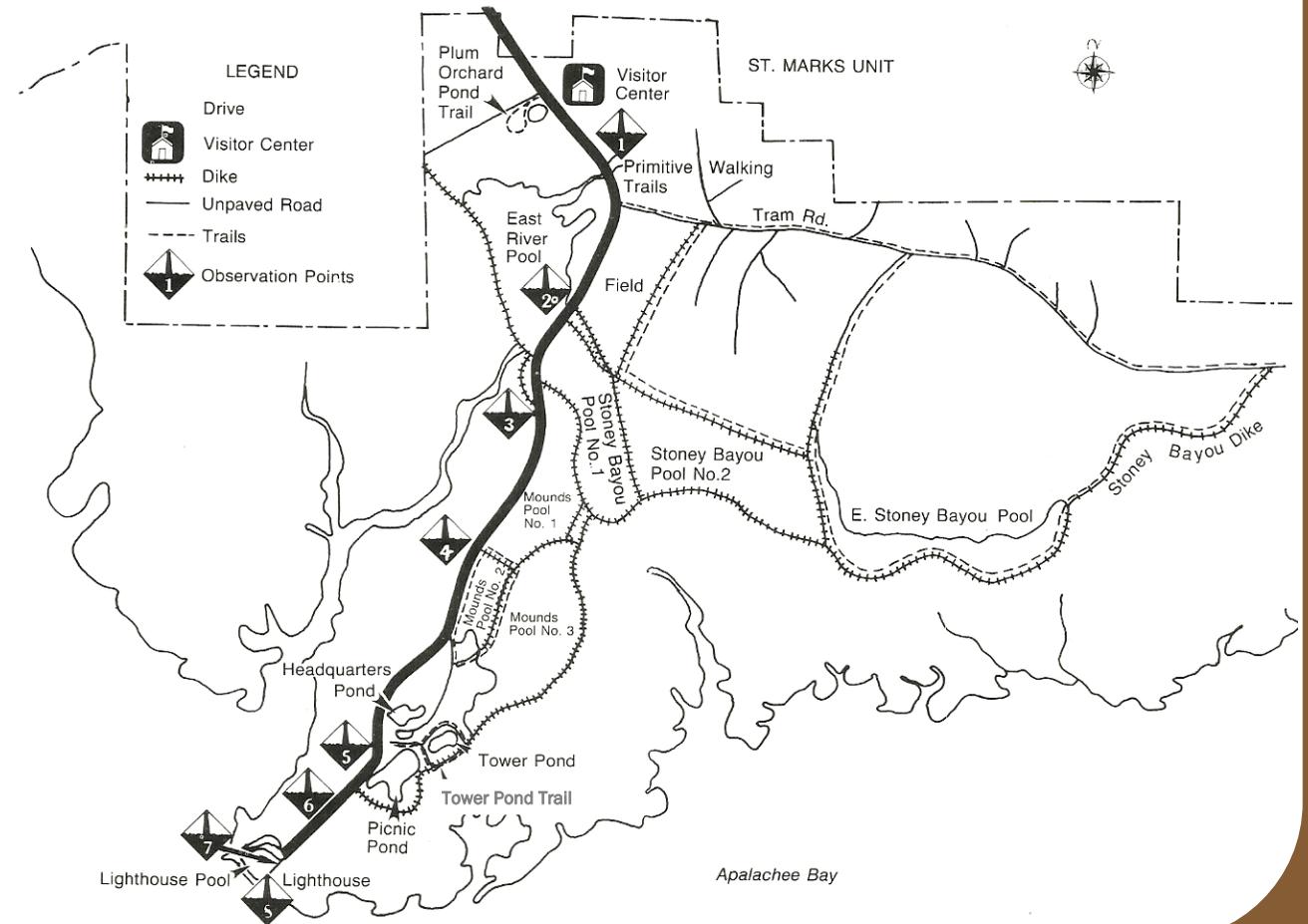
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Lighthouse Road Drive Guide



Welcome to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge! This brochure is a self-guided tour of the 6.7-mile Lighthouse Road beginning at the Visitor Center and ending at Apalachee Bay.

There are 8 stops and 2 viewing areas along the tour, but feel free to pull over on the road shoulder to view our many native wildflowers and wildlife protected by the refuge. We hope you enjoy the refuge and visit again!





Hardwood Swamp

On the way to the first stop the road passes through a slash pine forest that was planted shortly after the refuge was established in 1931. At the double bridges, the habitat changes from pines to a hardwood swamp. This is a pleasant fishing stop and a good place to hear songbirds calling.

Water gauges in each impoundment along the road help the refuge biologist determine water levels in the pools. Water flows under the bridges into the East River Pool, the next stop.



Impoundments

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) constructed the levees to create impounded water for migratory waterfowl. East River Pool, on the west side of the road, is a source of freshwater, other than rainfall, that can be moved through canals and gates to other pools during dry periods. The pools offer year-round fishing for people and for wading birds, shorebirds, and waterfowl.

Ahead on the left (east) is Stoney Bayou Pool #1, a brackish (salt water mixed with freshwater) water lagoon. Wildlife species vary with the seasons and water levels.



Marsh View

On the right (west) is a black needlerush / cordgrass salt marsh. The rich diversity of the plants and animals in the marsh provides food and shelter for mice, otters, marsh rats, and birds. The marsh's thick grasses and heavy soils buffer the coast from strong storm surges and winds. Salt marshes on both sides of the road are part of more than 17,000 acres of designated Wilderness Area on St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.



Mounds Pools

The Mounds Pools began as one large pool that was later divided into three sections to make water management easier.

Take a walk around the short levee to the side of Mounds Pool #3 where eagles, alligators, ducks, and wading birds might be seen. The best time to see bald eagles is November to March. Please observe the closure signs protecting migratory waterfowl and/or eagle nests.

Salt water intrusion from Hurricane Dennis in 2005 killed many of the pines on the left just before Headquarters Pond. Eagles and other birds love to perch on the snags.



Headquarters Pond

Headquarters Pond, named for its proximity to the second refuge headquarters, and Picnic Pond were once tidal ponds that are now managed as fresh or brackish pools.

An accessible trail leads from the restroom parking lot to the observation deck. Purple gallinules breed in summer. Wading birds and alligators can be seen at any time of year. Sometimes night herons roost here.

Duckweed, a small three-leaved plant floating on the water's surface, is food for wintering ducks.

Tower Pond Trail passes an old shell mound where a fire tower is situated. No longer used as a fire lookout, the tower supports various communication lines. This 1-mile trail traverses pine flatwoods, an oak ridge, and saltwater marsh. Migrating songbirds are attracted to the abundant food sources of these habitats.



Salt Marshes

Our Wilderness Area lines both sides of the road along this section. Many pine islands dot the salt marsh. Salt pans, areas where the salt is so concentrated that nothing can grow, are a unique feature of the marshes.

Shorebirds and wading birds enjoy the protected waters that harbor an abundance of shrimp, crabs, and fish.

In the fall, monarchs and other butterflies nectar on saltbush, Bidens, and goldenrod blooms.



Lighthouse Pool

Lighthouse Pool is the last man-made pool along the tour. Rain is the only fresh water source. West of the pool is the saltwater boat ramp and parking lot. Lighthouse Levee Trail leads to a covered picnic table and a rock jetty, a popular spot for fishing.

Alligators may be sunning on the shore. Sago pondweed, marsh grass, and widgeon grass provide cover and food for rails, bitterns, ducks, herons, egrets and ibises and other species.

The contrast between the open marsh and the managed pool can be seen from the observation tower. Shorebirds often rest on the sandflats behind the lighthouse.



The Lighthouse

The refuge will preserve this National Historic Site. Pilings in the bay are the remains of the keeper's boathouse. Until Lighthouse Road was built by the CCC in the 1930s, the keeper used a boat to get supplies from the town of St. Marks.

Brown pelicans cruise just above the water's surface and dolphins hunt fish. Loons, redhead ducks, and horned grebes feed in the bay in winter. Egrets, herons, and shorebirds stalk fish and crustaceans as the tide ebbs and flows. The fragile seagrass beds provide food and protection for many marine species.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is here to be enjoyed by you and future generations.