

Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge

Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of several islands, totaling approximately 46 acres. They are surrounded by the spring-fed waters of Kings Bay. Crystal River NWR is one of more than 540 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Especially for Manatees

The Nature Conservancy, a national conservation and land preservation agency, acquired the refuge islands with funds raised in a year-long drive spearheaded by the citizens of Citrus County. These lands were subsequently purchased by the Service, and Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge was established on August 17, 1983. National wildlife refuges

are established for the primary purpose of providing habitat for the protection of all wildlife. Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is unique in that it was established specifically for the protection of the endangered West Indian manatee.

Manatee Management

Management on the Crystal River Refuge is oriented toward preservation and protection of the West Indian manatee and its habitat.

During the winter when manatees concentrate, certain areas in Kings Bay are designated, "Manatee Sanctuary Areas." These sanctuaries provide places for manatees to rest and feed undisturbed in the warmth of the springs.

The refuge also aids in preserving Florida's most significant naturally occurring warm water haven for manatees and provides critical habitat for approximately 20 percent of the manatee population in the Gulf of Mexico. Six hundred million gallons of fresh water flow daily from more than thirty natural springs. The temperature of the water flowing from the springs remains a constant 72 degrees Fahrenheit. Manatees, like people, are susceptible to cold and hypothermia and cannot survive for extended periods when water temperatures fall below 68 degrees Fahrenheit. These warm water springs are essential for manatee survival.

This gentle giant is endangered largely because of alteration and destruction of coastal habitats by man. Refuge islands and surrounding waters provide excellent habitat for a large number and variety of wildlife species. Some of the more common bird species found adjacent to the refuge are herons, egrets, ospreys, laughing gulls, cormorants, anhingas, white ibis and an

occasional bald eagle. Fish, such as mullet, largemouth bass, alligator gar, mangrove snapper, jack crevalle, sheepshead and tarpon, are seen frequently in the winter.

Headquarters

The refuge headquarters office is located on Kings Bay Drive in the town of Crystal River. Office hours are from 8:00am to 4:00pm Monday through Friday. At the headquarters, visitors can obtain information on the wildlife refuges in the area. Exhibits on local wildlife, picnic tables that overlook Kings Bay, and a gift shop are available at this location. No entry fee required.

Manatee Education Center

The Manatee Education Center is located 7 miles south of Crystal River on U.S. Highway 19. The center is located at the Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, a partnership project between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Park Service.



US FWS, Gaylen Rothburn



US FWS, Francois Fournier



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Visitors can become acquainted with the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Complex. A 900-square foot exhibit area is accessible to the disabled,

providing many interactive displays for all ages. Manatee Education Center hours are 9:00am to 5:30pm daily.

Manatee Watch Volunteer Program:

The Manatee Watch Volunteer Program began in 1983 and focuses on interpretation and education by providing the public (boaters, snorkelers, and fishermen) with information about the refuge, manatee sanctuaries, speed zones, proper interaction with manatees, and what constitutes manatee harassment.

Manatee Watch Volunteers utilize kayaks and canoes to access the refuge during periods of peak visitation. They represent an important link in the chain of manatee education by providing an "on the spot" presence in areas of the bay frequented by both people and manatees. Their field observations assist refuge staff with manatee sanctuary maintenance and the planning of refuge law enforcement patrols.

Manatee Watch Volunteers attend a mandatory annual orientation and refresher training and must contribute a minimum of eight hours per month during the peak of the manatee season to remain active in the program. For more information about this unique volunteer program, contact the Volunteer Coordinator at the address listed below.

If you would like more information about this refuge, the refuge system, or if you would like to volunteer your services, please contact:

Refuge Manager
1502 SE Kings Bay Dr.
Crystal River, FL 34429
Phone: 352/563 2088
Fax: 352/795 7961
E-mail: Chassahowitzka@fws.gov
Internet: www.fws.gov
<http://chassahowitzka.fws.gov>



USFWS, D.J. Yorros



Protecting Manatees

By swimming, boating, or diving in Florida's inland waterways, you may be endangering the life of the West Indian manatee which is protected by federal and state laws. The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 make it illegal to harass, capture or kill any marine mammal-including the manatee. In addition, the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act states:

"It is unlawful for any person, at any time, by any means, intentionally or negligently, to annoy, molest, harass, or disturb any manatee."

Manatees can be observed and water related activities can be accomplished without violating the provisions of these three acts. The following guidelines are designed to help you better understand these regulations and explain how you can have a memorable experience while protecting the manatees.

1. Do not enter designated/posted sanctuaries for any reason.

2. Operate boat at idle/no wake speed when in areas known to have manatees present or when observations indicate manatees might be present.

Note: Observations which indicate manatees might be present in the area include: observing a swirl at the surface of the water, observing the back sticking out of the water and/or observing the snout of an animal or hearing the animal exhale when it surfaces.

3. Avoid harassing manatees. Harassment is defined as any activity which alters the animal's natural behavioral characteristics: Examples of harassment include the following:

- approaching a manatee before the animal first approaches you.
- actively pursuing/chasing (swimming after) or cornering a manatee while swimming or diving.
- poking, probing, stabbing a manatee at any time with any object. This includes but is not limited to a person's hand and /or feet.
- any activity which would separate a cow from her calf or an individual from a group.
- any attempt to snag, hook, hold, grab, pinch, or ride a manatee.
- any attempt to feed a manatee.
- touching or disturbing a resting manatee.

4. King Spring (Main Spring) and swim corridor are closed to all activity from 7:00pm – 7:00am.

Watch for these signs

There are a few things you should remember while visiting Kings Bay. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other law enforcement agencies monitor boat speeds and sanctuary restrictions specifically for protecting the endangered manatee. These restrictions also give additional protection to divers in the area. Your cooperation is needed to help protect manatees and divers.

IDLE SPEED MANATEE AREA
Idle speed: Minimum speed that will maintain the steerage of a motorboat.

SLOW SPEED MANATEE AREA
Slow speed: The speed of a motorboat when it is completely off plane, is settled into the water, and is producing no wake or minimum wake. A motorboat operated with an elevated bow is not proceeding at slow speed.

WARNING! ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK
King Spring: Parts of this cavern are potentially unstable. Falling rocks can cause death. Avoid small passages beneath fractured rocks. Obtain cavern diving training before entering.



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

Signs to Remember



This sign marks the refuge boundary. Public access is limited to designated access routes.



These buoys mark manatee sanctuaries in Kings Bay. There is no fishing, boating, swimming, or public use allowed in these areas from November 15 to March 31.

