

Island Bay

National Wildlife Refuge

photo: Steve Alvarez



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1908.
- Acres: 20.
- Location: Island Bay NWR is located in the Cape Haze area of Charlotte Harbor, FL— southwest of Punta Gorda.
- Administered as part of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Natural History

- Located in a vast complex of mangrove islands and brackish bays, Island Bay NWR consists of six undeveloped and roadless tracts of land. These tracts of land do not include entire islands but rather occupy the higher portions of several islands and mangrove shoreline.
- The refuge is protected from the Gulf by barrier islands and is directly influenced by the tides. Thus, the surrounding waters are very brackish. The bay bottom supports an abundance of vegetation such as shoal grass, widgeon grass and various marine algae. The wetland portion of the islands is dominated by red and black mangroves. Cabbage palms dominate the higher ridges with tropical trees such as gumbo limbo, sea grapes and strangler fig.
- The beaches and shores of the Refuge provide loafing and feeding sites for shorebirds, gulls and terns. The surrounding shallow bays provide valuable feeding areas for wading and water birds. Other animals known to use the refuge or surrounding area include raccoons, marsh rabbits, manatees and sea turtles.

Refuge Objectives

- To protect and provide suitable habitat for endangered and threatened species including the West Indian manatee, wood stork, eastern indigo snake, American crocodile and bald eagle.
- To implement sound wildlife management techniques to provide feeding, nesting and roosting habitat for a wide diversity of shore birds, wading birds, waterfowl, raptors and neo-tropical migratory species.
- To provide wildlife oriented recreation compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

Management Tools

- Law enforcement.
- Wildlife population surveys.
- Partnerships.
- Education/interpretation.
- Chemical and mechanical control of invasive exotic plants.

Public Use Opportunities

- Saltwater fishing.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildlife photography.
- Boat access only.

Questions and Answers

Where is Island Bay NWR?
Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge is located in the Cape Haze area of Charlotte County, Florida. The refuge is located on the north side of Charlotte Harbor in Turtle Bay. The refuge currently includes portions of five islands and is 20 acres in size. The nearest population centers are Port Charlotte, lying approximately 15 miles to the east, and Fort Myers, which is about 23 miles southeast.

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How do I get there?

Access to the islands that makeup the Island Bay NWR is by boat only. Boaters should consult navigational charts and tide schedules before attempting to visit any of the refuge islands. Numerous oyster bars and shallow back bay/estuary waters are difficult to navigate and damage to fragile seagrass beds is common due to boaters running aground.

Where is the refuge closed to public uses?

The Island Bay NWR receives little public use. Occasionally, boaters visit some of the islands with uplands such as Bull Key but mosquitoes are usually so numerous that visiting any of the islands is extremely uncomfortable.