Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge

Premier Birdwatching Destination

An impressive 400+ species of birds have been recorded at this Refuge, more than any other National Wildlife Refuge in the United States. Several tropical species reach their northernmost range here. Birders travel to see South Texas specialties like the green jay, groove-billed ani, ringed kingfisher and buff-bellied hummingbird.

A Growing Refuge

Since the 1990s, the Refuge has more than doubled in size to almost 90,000 acres, adding the sizeable Bahia Grande and South Padre Island Units. The nearby Santa Ana NWR and the network of tracts composing the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR also protect the remnants of a rich ecosystem.

Lending a Hand for Wildlife

Bringing back water
Irrigation and drainage outside the Refuge have sharply depleted the fresh water supply that once fed lakes, ponds and resacas. The Refuge is restoring wetlands by collecting rainfall, installing pumps and water delivery systems, and creating ponds.

Keeping habitats connected
Fewer than 30 ocelots are estimated to live on the Refuge. Losing even one animal is a blow to recovery. Piecing together corridors of protected habitat and creating road underpasses for ocelots benefit other wildlife, including bobcats, coyotes, and many reptiles and amphibians. Connecting habitat helps wildlife find food, shelter and water and travel safely between larger protected areas.

Restoring Shorelines, Beaches and Bays
Protecting the natural dune system, tidal flats, and mangrove lagoons serves the needs of fish, wildlife and people. These wetlands form natural buffers from storms, absorb floodwaters, and filter pollutants. Undisturbed beaches help the survival of four species of endangered sea turtles—Kemp's ridley, loggerhead, hawksbill, and green—that nest on Refuge beaches.

For More Information Contact

Laguna Atascosa
National Wildlife Refuge
22817 Ocelot Road
Los Fresnos, Texas 78566
956/748-3607
956/748-3609 Fax
www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/laguna

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Visitor Center Trails

We also offer seasonal tram, kayak, and van tours of the Refuge. For more information and a schedule, visitors can call 956/748-3607 or www.friendsofsouthtexasRefuges.org.

Kiskadee Trail
1/8-mile loop
This short, shaded trail encircles a pool in wet years when it may harbor an alligator. Watch the treetops for great kiskadee, warblers and green jays.

Mesquite Trail
1-mile loop
Trees shade parts of the figure-eight loop trail that winds through grassy savannas, across two small ponds (in wet years) and past a historic family cemetery.

Bayside Drive Tour Roads and Trails

Bayside Drive
15-mile loop
This mostly one-way loop takes you through thorn forest, coastal prairies and out to the Laguna Madre. Stop at the numerous pullouts to watch and photograph wildlife.

Moranco Blanco Hike/Bike Trail
3 miles
Take plenty of water with you on the out-and-back trail that starts just past Redhead Ridge. Head across the prairie, up onto a long ridge and past a brushy area where a Refuge "guzzler" provides fresh water for wildlife.

Lakeside Drive Tour Roads and Trails

1 1/2 miles each way
Follow this short road to reach Laguna Atascosa, the 3,100-acre lake that gives the Refuge its name. Atascosa is the Spanish word for muddy, a good description for the shallow lake on windy days. More than 20 species of wintering waterfowl, egrets, herons and pelicans feed and rest here.

Alligator Pond
1/2 mile
The paved, accessible trail near Osprey Overlook leads to a viewing platform overlooking a pond that typically may host one or two alligators and in wet years can have up to two dozen.

Hunting

A limited number of Refuge permits are available for archery and firearms hunts of white-tailed deer, feral hog and nilgai antelope in late fall and winter on specific Refuge units. To apply, contact the Refuge in early summer.

Fishing

Fishing opportunities on the Refuge are available at Adolph Thomae, Jr. County Park along the Harlingen Ship Channel, along the Gulf beaches of the South Padre Island Unit, and at San Martin Lake of the Bahia Grande Unit. Please contact the Refuge for current fishing information.

Meeting Your Needs

Visitor Center hours
8 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, except on major holidays; call 956/748-3607 in advance of your visit for Refuge information and current hours of operation.

Entry permit
Obtain at Visitor Center: $3 per car or $1/person for large groups. Fee waived for those with valid federal interagency passes, Federal Duck Stamp, or Annual Refuge Pass. Scouts and school groups are free.

Camping
The Adolph Thomae, Jr. County Park (northern part of the Refuge) offers RV and tent camping. There's camping near Port Isabel to the south, and on South Padre Island.

For your safety and comfort
Avoid chiggers, ticks and rattlesnakes by staying on the trails. Bring insect repellent or purchase it in the Visitor Center to deter mosquitoes.

Prepare for hot days—hike or bike during cooler hours. Bring plenty of water, wear sunscreen and a hat.

Alligators and other wild animals can be dangerous. Stay back, do not approach them or feed them. Keep a close eye on small children and pets.

Photographs from left to right,
Blue Metalmark. © Ellie Thompson
American alligator. © Bill Hubick

Enjoying wildlife watching.
Kemp's ridley sea turtle hatchlings.
Altimira oriole. © Steve Bentsen
All other photographs / USFWS

Help Us Protect the Refuge

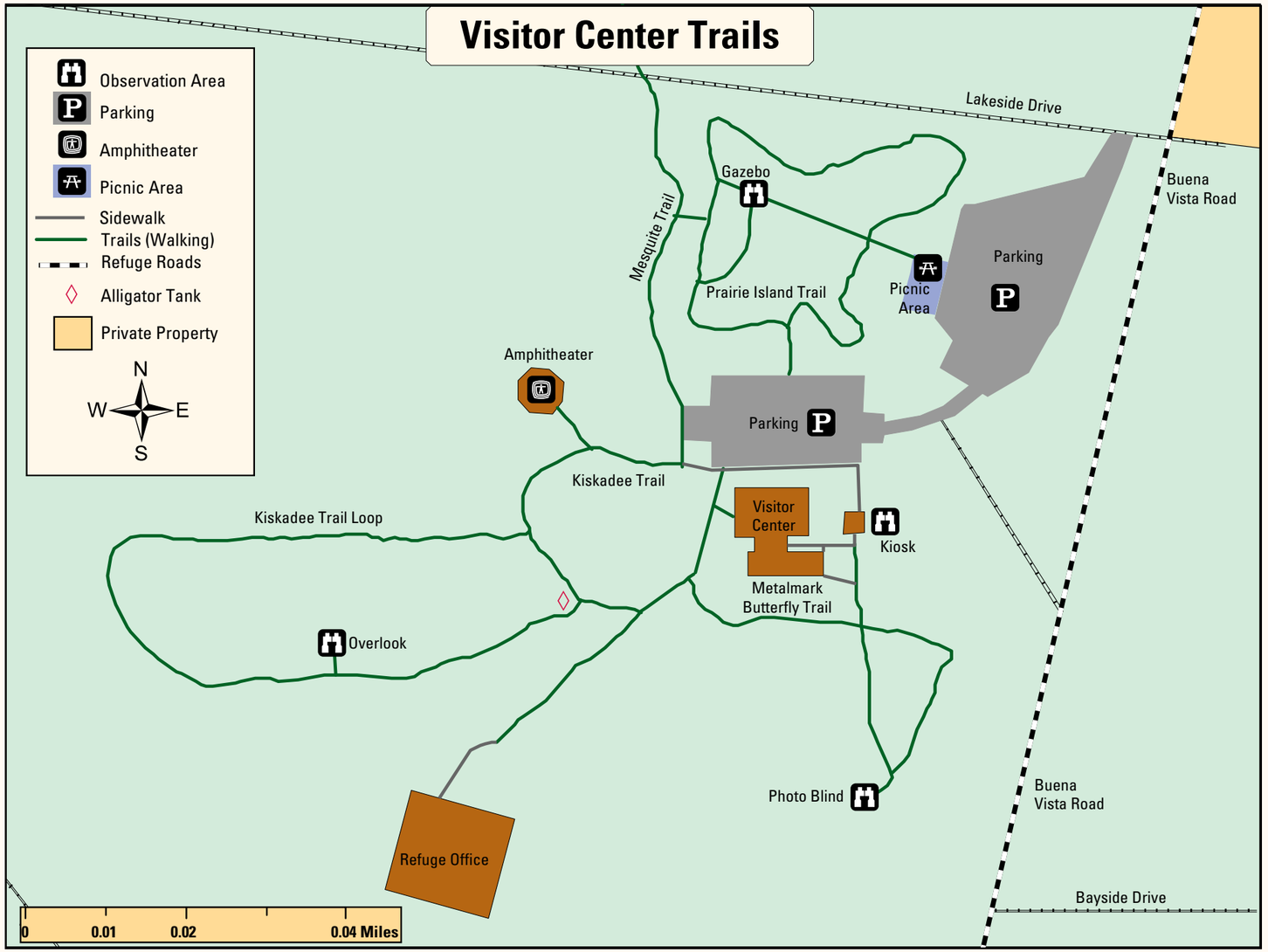
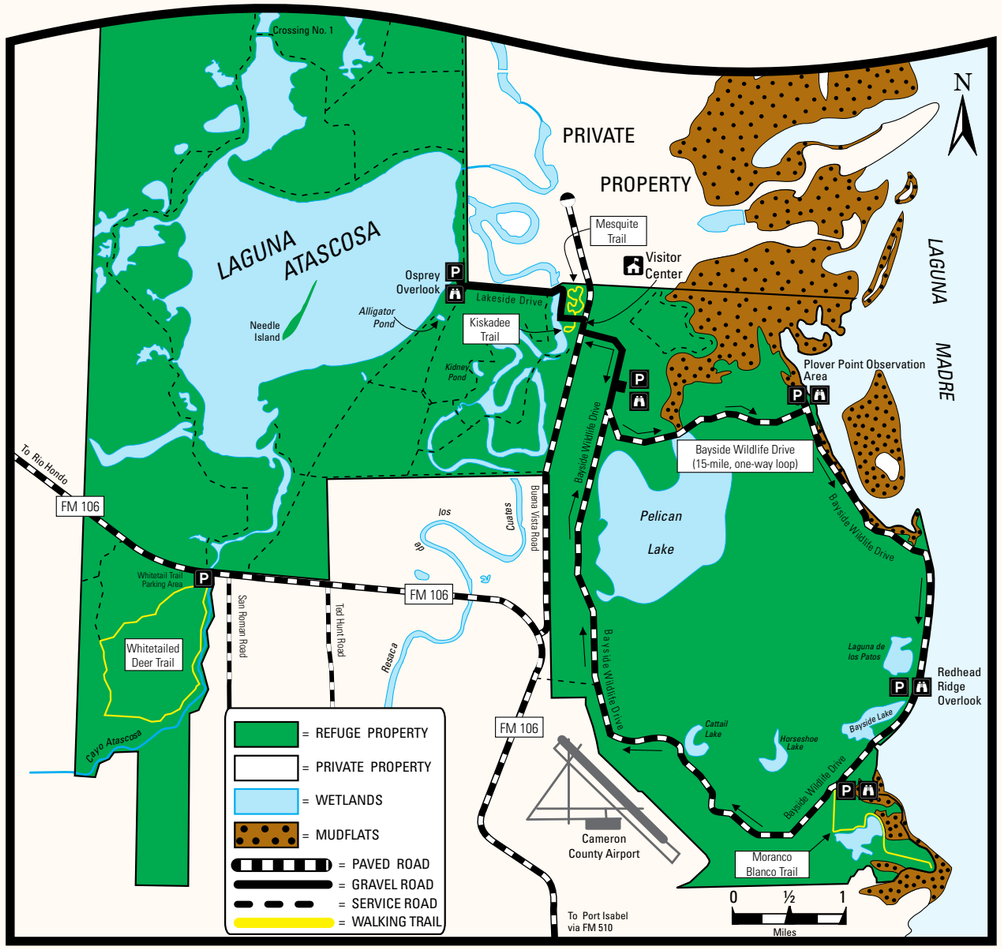
You can keep this Refuge special for wildlife and people by following all Refuge rules:

- Drive only on tour roads. Observe the posted speed limits.
- Stay on trails when hiking and biking.
- Keep pets on leash.
- Help protect wildlife by not feeding wild animals.
- Do not disturb or remove wildlife, vegetation or historic objects.
- No fireworks, campfires, or alcohol.

Friends of Laguna Atascosa NWR

Join the Friends and support conservation and education projects on the Refuge, including the Adopt-an -Ocelot program. To join the Friends or adopt an ocelot, contact:

Friends of Laguna Atascosa NWR
22817 Ocelot Road
Los Fresnos, TX 78566
956/748-3607
www.friendsofsouthtexasRefuges.org

Visit us on our social media websites
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Southwest Region
www.fws.gov/southwest

Ocelot. © Larry Ditto