

**NAWPA COMMITTEE
MARINE WILDERNESS & PROTECTED AREAS WORKING GROUP**

**CASE STUDY OF MPA ESTABLISHMENT – J.N. “DING” DARLING NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE AND WILDERNESS, FLORIDA, U.S.A.**



Roseate Spoonbills



Manatee



Kayakers

KEY MESSAGE

Public support to protect one set of beloved animals (including egrets, spoonbills, and storks) and their habitat can indirectly result in protection of other important, but less appreciated species and habitats, as well as the continuation of wildlife-dependent uses. Over time, education and interpretation can help the public value less familiar, but ecologically important, animals and ecosystems.

BENEFITS

- Protects habitat for 262 native birds, 60 native reptiles and amphibians, 99 native fish, and 30 native mammals
- Protects 14 Threatened and Endangered species
- Preserves seagrass beds, mangrove swamps, and other coastal wetlands
- Supports high quality opportunities for kayaking, wildlife observation, and recreational fishing for popular fish such as snook, sheepshead, and redfish. In 2004, 44,800 saltwater recreational fishing visits expended \$2,977,000 in the three-county area of the refuge.

CRITICAL STEPS

- Jay Norwood Darling helped block the sale of 2,400 acres of environmentally valuable land to developers on Sanibel Island and urged President Harry S. Truman to sign an Executive Order creating the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge in 1945.
- A land exchange with Florida in 1970 brought approximately 3,000 acres of submerged lands and islands under refuge management.
- The wilderness portion of the refuge was designated in 1976. The MPA was officially designated in 2009, bringing further attention to and international recognition of the marine resources protected by the refuge.
- The creation and expansion of the refuge and designation of the wilderness to prevent development, preserve wildlife habitat, and continue established public uses was supported by:
 - Residents of Sanibel and Captiva Islands and Lee County
 - Florida Governor and the local Congressman
 - Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 - Florida Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund

LESSONS LEARNED

- The desire of local residents to protect their shorebirds and waterfowl from development was a potent force that led to protection of the birds' habitat.
- Recreational anglers and other recreationists were able to recognize that protecting breeding habitat and the food base for the birds would protect fishing and other opportunities for people.

FACT SHEET
J.N. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AND WILDERNESS
FLORIDA, U.S.A.

Name: J.N. Ding Darling NWR Wilderness and Marine Protected Area

Location: The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge is located on the subtropical barrier island of Sanibel in the Gulf of Mexico. It includes about half of Sanibel Island plus most of Buck Key just off Captiva Island in Lee County, Florida. It currently encompasses 6,390 acres of mangrove forest, submerged seagrass beds, cordgrass marshes, and West Indian hardwood hammocks; Congress designated wilderness on 2,619 of the acres in 1976.

Size: 2600 acres

Year Established: Refuge - 1945; Wilderness - 1976; MPA - 2009

Purposes:

- For use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds - *Migratory Bird Conservation Act*
- For (1) incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development, (2) the protection of natural resources, (3) the conservation of endangered species or threatened species - *Refuge Recreation Act*
- For the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions - *Emergency Wetlands Resources Act*
- For the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources - *NWR Fish and Wildlife Act 1956*
- For the use and enjoyment of the American people in ways that will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and for the preservation of their wilderness character - *Wilderness Act*

History:

1926 - A fierce hurricane destroyed the agriculture industry on Sanibel Island

1963 - Construction of the Sanibel Causeway opened the way for tourism on the island.

1945- Lease agreement with Florida under Migratory Bird Conservation Act for 2,392 acres; Executive Order creates the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge

1970 - Land exchange with Florida for submerged lands and islands for 2,956 acres

1976 - Wilderness designated on 2600 acres, providing additional protections for these lands and their marine resources

1991 - Management agreement with State of Florida for the 186 acre Botanical site

1995 - Management agreement with State of Florida for 950 of Tarpon Bay

2000 - Purchase of 243 acre Buck Key

2009 - Management agreement with Lee County and State of Florida for 474 acres of submerged lands and island (Wulfert Flats and Keys)

Public Involvement/Relevance:

Public Support for Refuge Creation: Residents of Sanibel Island and Captiva Island; Lee County; State of Florida.

Public Support specifically for Wilderness Designation: Governor; Congressman; all 11/11 organizations and 3/3 individuals at the public hearing; 128 in support out of 136 written comments (not at hearing) = 114/117 individuals; 10/11 organizations; FL Game & Freshwater Fish Commission; Florida Trustees of Internal Improvement Trust Fund; 4/5 federal agency officials; Florida Governor.