



Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge

Welcome to Laguna Atascosa NWR

We hope you enjoy your visit! We have recorded more species of birds than any other national wildlife refuge, provide habitat for several endangered species including the ocelot and aplomado falcon, and welcome visitors from around the world to discover the great diversity of birds, plants and wildlife found only in deep south Texas. Walk a trail, attend a tour, explore the exhibits, or bike our over 70 miles of trails. There's something for everyone!

Important Visitor Information

To enter the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, visitors can pay entrance fees by cash or check at the Visitor Center, or with exact change or check at the self-pay station when the visitor center is closed. Entrance fees are applicable whether visitors are walking, driving or bicycling on the Refuge. All vehicles must display a valid Daily Entrance Pass—either issued by the Visitor Center staff or from the self-pay envelope.

Help Us Protect the Refuge

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

Be watchful for wildlife on roads—especially the endangered ocelot.

Please stay in the designated public areas (i.e., drives and trails) for your own safety and to protect the habitat.

Keep dogs on a leash, and do not allow them to drink or enter water bodies due to the presence of alligators.

Pack out your trash.

Do not disturb or remove wildlife, plants or historic objects. Disturbance is caused by getting too close to wildlife, playing recorded bird/wildlife calls, feeding wildlife, or throwing objects at wildlife. Metal detectors are not allowed.

No fireworks, fires, or alcohol.

Camping is allowed only at Adolph Thomaie Jr. County Park (entrance and camping fees apply for this area, call 956/748-2044 for information).

For your safety and comfort

Avoid chiggers, ticks and rattlesnakes by staying on trails.

Be prepared with insect repellent, water and sunscreen.

Plan to hike or bike during the cooler hours of the day (March–November).

Use a map to plan your trip when venturing out on trails.

Take a cell phone in case of an emergency.

Wear comfortable, sturdy shoes with closed toes.

Watching Wildlife

For better observation of wildlife, keep noise to a minimum, move slowly, use your vehicle as a blind, try staying in one place and be patient. Most wildlife are active early or late in the day. For your safety and to avoid disturbing wildlife, stay at a safe distance. Feeding wildlife is illegal on the refuge as it causes animals to lose their natural fear of humans and they can become dangerous.

For More Information Contact

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge
 22817 Ocelot Road (Mailing)
 22688 Buena Vista Road (Physical & GPS)
 Los Fresnos, Texas 78566
 956/748-3607, ext 111 (Visitor Center)
www.fws.gov/refuge/laguna_atascosa
www.facebook.com/LagunaAtascosaNWR



Designated Public Areas

Laguna Atascosa Unit: Visitor Center Area

There are several short, loop trails that visitors may walk (see map insert). These trails are accessible and offer several wildlife viewing areas, native plants, and are great for seeing butterflies and forest birds. The Mesquite Trail is a 1.5-mile loop dirt trail that passes by historic El Granjeno Cemetery

Lakeside Drive—1.5 miles, paved and gravel, pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles

Follow this road to reach our 3,500-acre freshwater lake, Laguna Atascosa. In the fall, this shallow lake can have more than 20 species of wintering waterfowl, egrets, herons, pelicans and shorebirds that feed and rest on the lake. Osprey Overlook features a covered kiosk to browse the lake for wildlife.

Bayside Drive—14.2 miles (1 mile-gravel, 13.2 miles-paved), Currently pedestrians, bicycles and Refuge tour vehicles only, {plan to reopen to private vehicles after construction completed} This loop winds through thornscrub forest, coastal prairies, freshwater wetlands and along the Laguna Madre shoreline. Plover Point Boardwalk allows you to view the Laguna Madre and is a great place to see shorebirds. Redhead Ridge Overlook gives you a 360 degree view, including Bayside Lake and Laguna de los Patos. Wildlife sightings may include aplomado falcons, white-tail deer, Texas tortoise, osprey, great blue heron, roseate spoonbills, reddish egret, crested caracara, Harris' hawk and non-native nilgai antelope. One mile south of Redhead Ridge Overlook is the 1.7 mile Moranco Blanco Trail which offers hikers and bikers a great view overlooking the Laguna Madre. Guided tours of the Bayside Drive are available seasonally.

Hiking and Biking Trails Open All Year (except during refuge hunts)

Gator Pond Trail—3.3 miles (.3 miles-paved; 3 miles- dirt) White tailed hawks and aplomado falcons can be seen here. When accessed from the Osprey Overlook parking area, the first .3 miles of this trail is accessible (paved). It follows the shoreline of Laguna Atascosa (lake), leading to a viewing platform on Alligator Pond that hosts alligators during wet years. The dirt trail continues for another 3 miles mostly through prairie, ending at FM106.

County Trail—5.75 miles, gravel

Accessed from Lakeside Drive, this trail is the primary route to access most of the northern hiking and biking trails. It is adjacent to the neighboring Buena Vista Ranch and passes through thornscrub, savanna, prairie and former agricultural lands that are being restored to thornscrub. Visitors can get to Crossing #2 on the Cayo Atascosa on gravel trails if you follow County Trail to Last Gate Trail and go north on Center Line Trail.

Luttess Camp Trail—3 miles, gravel

This trail connects the County and West Lake Trails.

Last Gate Trail to Centerline Trail North—2 miles, gravel.

These trails connect County and Upper West Lake Trails.

Prairie Trail—4.1 miles, gravel and dirt

Prairie Trail Parking Area is located on FM106 just west of San Roman Rd, 5.8 miles from the visitor center. An information kiosk, bike rack and entrance fee station are located here. From the

Prairie Trail Parking Area visitors can enter Prairie Trail and the southern ends of West Lake Trail and Gator Pond Trail, leading to the network of hiking and biking trails. Prairie Trail traverses coastal prairie and thornscrub, and in wet years has several ponds. There are also views of the Cayo Atascosa—the water that feeds into Laguna Atascosa. American alligators can be present in the freshwater.

Lower West Lake Trail—6 miles, gravel

The lower end of West Lake Trail is one of the most scenic trails on the refuge. It takes you through coastal prairie, the western shoreline of Laguna Atascosa lake, two brushy lomas and numerous freshwater wetlands during wet years. Great for water birds and raptors.

Hiking and Biking Trails Open Fall/Winter Only (except during hunting seasons)—all are dirt

Upper West Lake Trail—6.3 miles

The upper end of West Lake Trail follows the northern Cayo Atascosa.

Kidney Pond Trail—2.5 miles, dirt.

Passes by a small pond that generally has an alligator.

Giant Palm Trail—.3 miles

Island Fields Trail—2 miles

Mud Trail—.5 miles

Scum Pond Trail—1.9 miles

South Boundary Trail—.8 miles

Eva Thompson Trail—1.2 miles

Horse Island Trail—3.7 miles

North Point Trail—3.5 miles

Bahia Grande Unit

Highway 48 Viewing Area—From Highway 100, follow Highway 48 south of Port Isabel. There is a parking area pull-out on the right side of the road before you get to the main water channel to Bahia Grande. This is a great place to see wading and shore birds. The refuge also offers birding tours of the Bahia Grande Unit seasonally.

South Padre Island Unit

Visitors may enjoy the refuge tracts along the beach north of Public Access 6 off Padre Blvd. Activities include beachcombing, fishing, bird watching, horseback riding, swimming and primitive camping. The dunes and tidal flats, however, are closed to public activities as they are sensitive wildlife habitats. These tracts are many miles from the public access and are generally accessed by 4-wheel drive vehicle.

Hunting

The refuge conducts seasonal archery and firearm hunts for white-tailed deer, nilgai antelope (exotic) and feral hog. This allows us to maintain a healthy deer population as well as keep exotic animals in check. These hunts take place between November and January. Hunting areas will be closed to visitors during hunts. To apply go to tpwd.texas.gov/drawn hunts.

Fishing

The refuge offers fishing opportunities and boat access on the Arroyo Colorado at Adolph Thomae Jr. County Park in Arroyo City (the county has an entrance fee for this area, call 956/748-2044 for information). The beaches of the South Padre Island Unit are great for surf fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. San Martin Lake (part of the Bahia Grande Unit) can be accessed at the Jaime Zapata Memorial Boat Ramp, Fishing Pier and Kayak Launch south of Port Isabel on State Highway 48. Please keep our waters clean and properly dispose of your trash and fishing line. If you are using a boat in shallow waters with seagrass, remember to Lift, Drift, Pole or Troll to avoid uprooting the seagrass.

Bicycling

Riding a bike on the refuge is a great way to connect with nature. You can cover more distance than on foot, and explore the far reaches of the refuge away from the hustle and bustle. It is important to be prepared before starting your trip. The following are recommended guidelines for bicycling on the refuge.

Wide tires work best on the dirt and gravel trails.

Carry extra tire tubes and a repair kit—our vegetation is thorny!

Slime and tube shields are recommended for your tires to avoid flats.

If your bike breaks down, you must be prepared to walk it back to your vehicle.

Yield to hikers, always give pedestrians the right of way.

When on roads, ride with the flow of traffic.

Check the forecast. High winds will make pedaling more challenging and weather can change quickly.

Picnicking

There is a designated picnic area with tables off the parking area at the Visitor Center. No grills are allowed. Please put all trash in receptacles.

Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge

The Friends of Laguna Atascosa Refuge is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to advocate for and support the mission and goals of the Refuge. They are comprised of a board of directors, a part-time nature store manager, and there are opportunities to become members and volunteers. This nonprofit group operates and receives all proceeds from the nature store located in the Refuge visitor center. The Friends also sponsor the Save Texas Ocelots specialty license plate, and offer an Adopt-an-Ocelot



program. Funds raised through these programs are used to protect ocelot habitat, for research and monitoring of ocelots and to raise the public's awareness of endangered ocelots. For more information visit: www.friendsoflagunaatascosa.org or call 956/748-3607 x112.

Alligator Safety

1. Always keep a safe distance from alligators and do not approach an alligator.
2. If you encounter an alligator, back away slowly and make no sudden moves.
3. Do not feed alligators. If fed, they can become aggressive toward people. You could receive a fine for this action.
4. Alligators are typically found in freshwater, but they can move over land.
5. Keep a close eye on pets and small children.

