



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Lake Wales Ridge NWR

Southeast Region

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Map not to scale

Welcome to Lake Wales Ridge NWR

The Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge is composed of four units located in two counties. Acreage of the units is approximate. USFWS photo. Click photo for larger map.

County: Polk and Highlands Counties, Florida

Size/Acres: 1,857.58 acres

Highlights of why this refuge is important.

The Lake Wales Ridge NWR is managed as part of the Merritt Island NWR complex located about 100 miles away. The Refuge was established in 1993 as the first Refuge designated for the recovery of endangered and threatened plants. The Refuge contains 23 listed plants, at least four listed animals, and more than 40 endemic invertebrates. The Refuge is part of a network of scrub preserves owned by the state of Florida, The Nature Conservancy, Archbold Biological Station, two water management districts and Polk and Highland Counties.

The refuge is composed of four tracts within Polk and Highlands Counties. Because of the potential impact to the plants and animals, the refuge has not been opened to the public. However, this Refuge is an exciting place where researchers from Archbold Biological Station have conducted important ecological studies. Per acre, the Refuge has a very high density of listed species.

The Refuge is exciting because it contains prime examples of several highly imperiled ecosystems, including Florida scrub and sandhill, as well as over half of the federally listed plant species endemic to the Lake Wales Ridge. Each of the four tracts comprising the Refuge has its own particular merits and value:

- Carter Creek is an excellent example of endemic-rich Lake Wales Ridge sandhill, with nine listed plants; it contains one of only a dozen populations of Florida ziziphus, one of the rarest and most endangered plants in the state;
- Flamingo Villas has 10 listed species and is the only protected populations of Garrett's scrub balm, a woody mint known only from Highlands County;
- Lake McLeod has 11 listed plants and is the only protected site for scrub lupine, another extremely rare plant; and,
- Snell Creek contains one of the last remaining tracts of undisturbed sandhill in northern Polk County.



Credit: USFWS

Lake Wales Ridge NWR 15-Year Comprehensive Conservation Plan is Complete!

We are pleased to announce the release of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge. If you'd like a copy, please contact us – click for [More Information](#)



A typical scrub ecosystem in Florida. Scrub soils are sandy, therefore the water table is deep and unavailable to the plants. USFWS photo



Florida ziziphus, one of the rarest plants in Florida. Ziziphus has been transplanted onto the Carter Creek unit of the Refuge. USFWS photo

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Thanks and please call if you need/have any questions

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