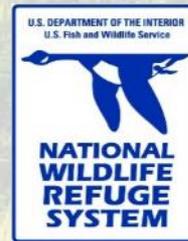
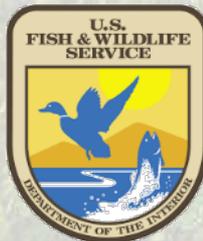


Arthur R. Marshall

Loxahatchee

National Wildlife Refuge

Visitor Services Plan
SFWMD Recreational Forum
June 17, 2019



Steve Henry
Deputy Project Leader



Visitor Services Planning Process

- Wildlife-dependent recreation
- Step-down from Comprehensive Conservation Plan
- 14 Standards (goals, objectives, and strategies)
- Public involvement
- Public use and compatibility
- Facilities and maps





Planning Process

April 2018- Scoping

- ❖ Intergovernmental scoping meeting
- ❖ Two public scoping meetings

September 2018- Public Comment

- ❖ 60-day public comment period with public meeting
- ❖ 441 comments received

May 2019 – Plan Approved by SE Refuge Chief



Visitor Services Standards

1. Visitor Services Plan
2. Welcome and orient visitors
3. Hunting
4. Fishing
5. Wildlife observation and photography
6. Environmental education
7. Interpretation of key resources and issues
8. Other recreational uses
9. Outreach
10. Work with volunteers, Friends, and other partnerships
11. Recreation fees
12. Concessions
13. Commercial Use
14. Wilderness (not applicable at Lox)



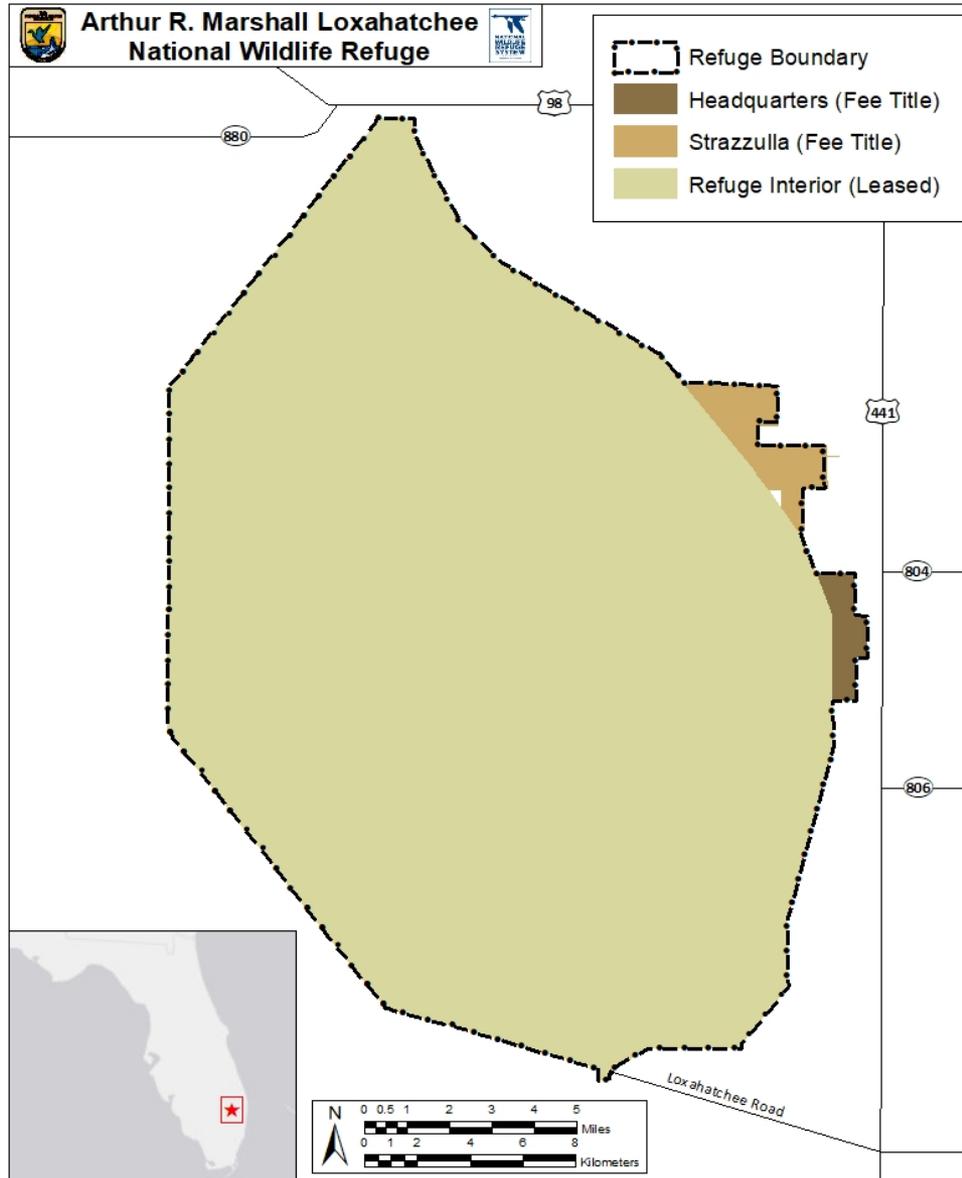


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Services Plan Development

Refuge map

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service





Welcome and Orient Visitors

Refuge Hours

Lee Road/Headquarters/Visitor Center hours remain same (5 AM to 10 PM). Remainder of the Refuge will be open 24 hours/day.

Signs, Kiosks, and Publications

Update and replace all signs, kiosks, and publications consistent with USFWS Sign Standards and USFWS Graphic Standards.

Access-Designated Entry Points

Existing entrances are at Loxahatchee Road, Lee Road, and 20 Mile Bend. Additional access points will be established on the L-40, L-39, and L-7 levees and Strazzulla. Designated access points may be identified over the life of the plan.



Hunting Opportunities

- For hunts, only one watercraft per permit **though non-motorized vessels can be used in conjunction with a motorized vessel per hunting permit.**
- Certain quota permits will be determined by population surveys and Refuge carrying capacity, and will be subject to change.
- No hunting from Refuge structures or within 1/2 mile of canoe trails, **campsites** or boat ramps.
- **Non-toxic ammunition is required for all hunts.**
- **Once hunter's limits has been reached, the hunter shall promptly leave the hunting area.**
- **Motorized vessels, including airboats, used for hunting in the Refuge Interior is permitted only to provide a means of transportation in support of the priority wildlife-dependent public use.**
- **There will be no overlap in deer hunting/waterfowl hunting or alligator hunting/deer hunting, as other uses will be closed during the Refuge Interior Deer and Hog Special Hunt.**

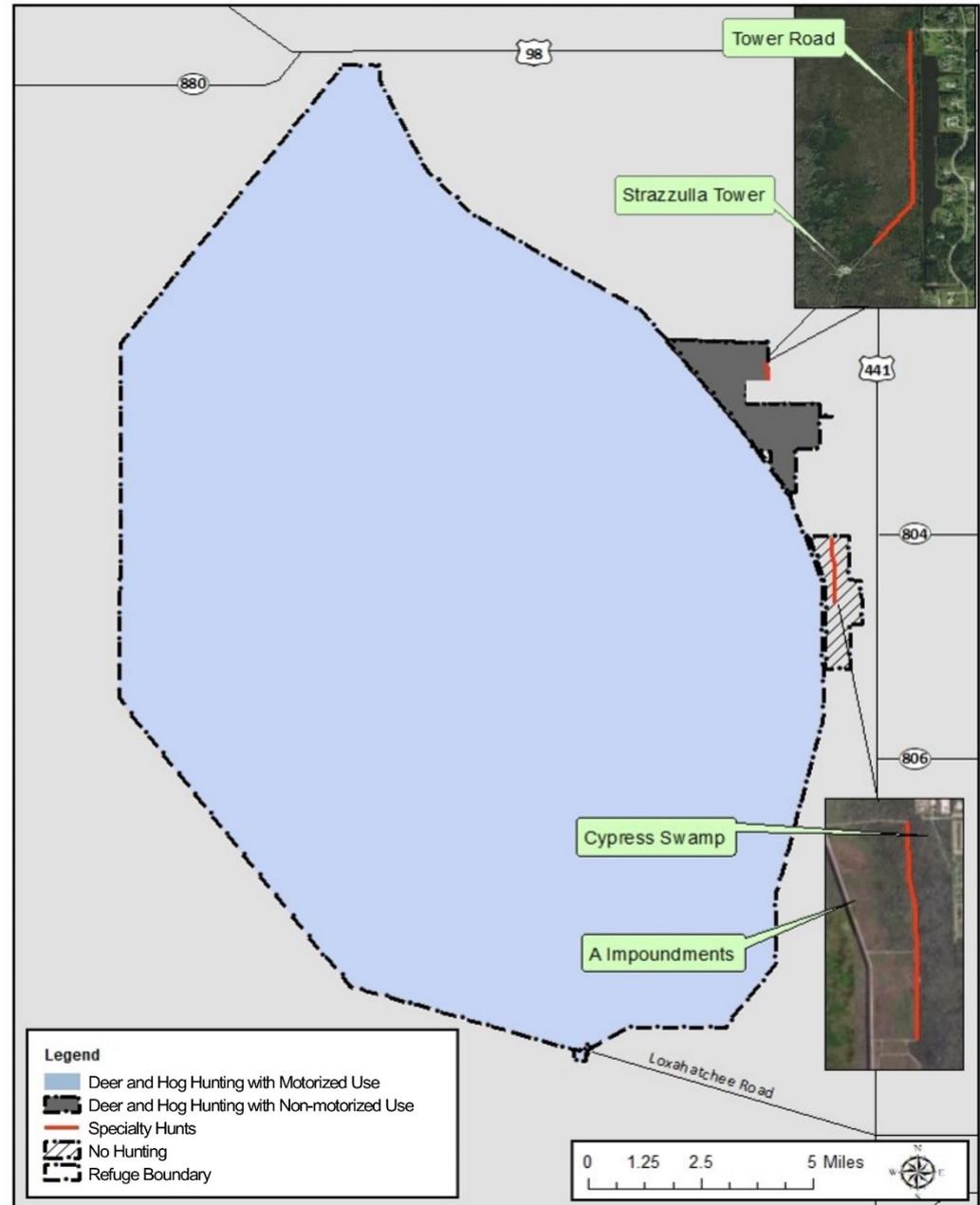
Deer in Interior

- Hunts will be 0 to 16 days. Archery, crossbow, air gun, shotgun, and centerfire rifle.
- Quota permit deer hunt with non-motorized and airboat access permitted for permittees only. Only one deer per permit.
- Maximum of 20 airboat permits, less than 10 permits to start.
- Airboat must be in place and stopped one hour before sunrise and not move until 1 hour after sunrise. No forward movement and airboat shutoff/idle for 15 minutes before shooting.

Standard 3 - Hunting



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Deer and Hog Hunting



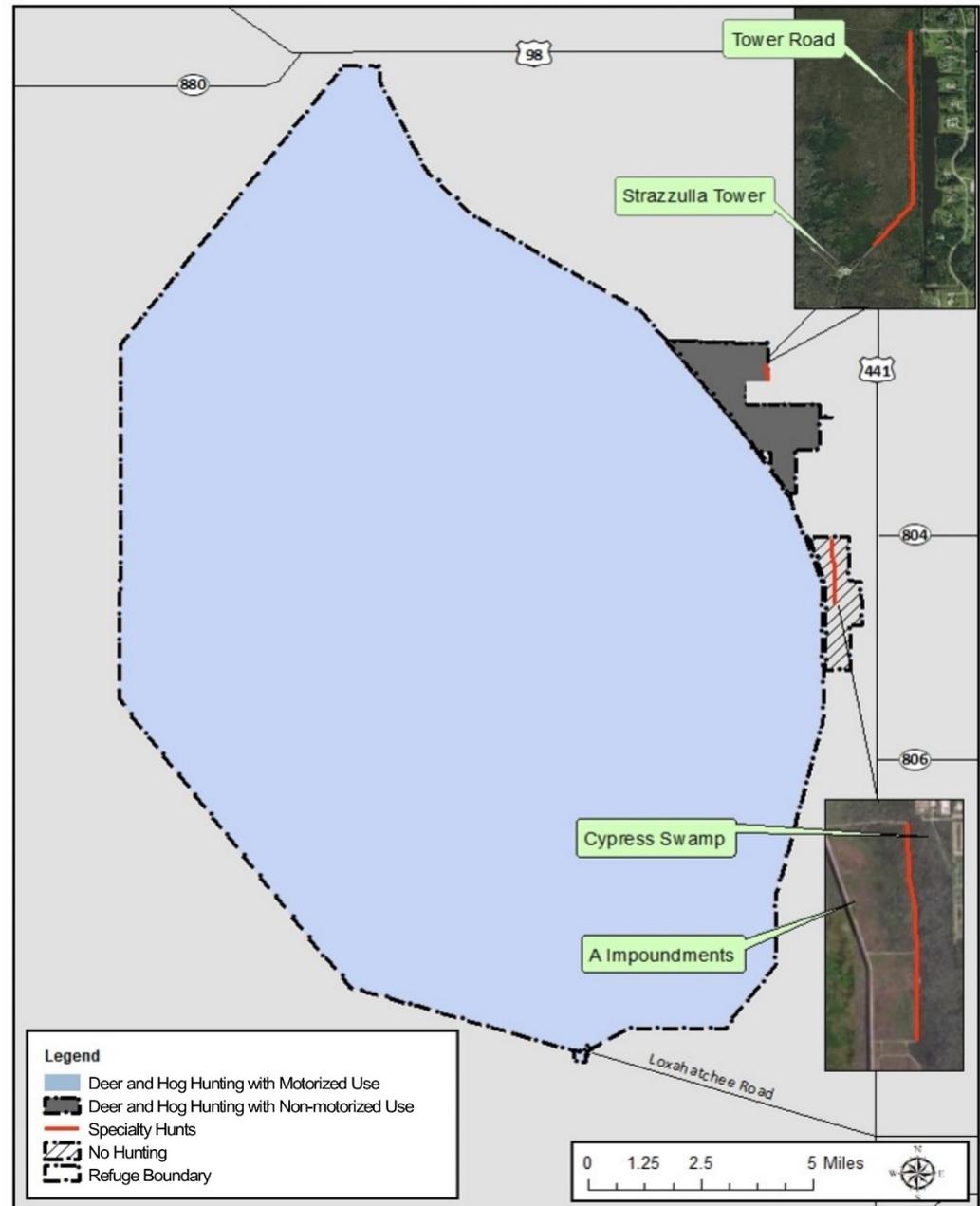
Continued : Deer in Interior

- Airboat permit required.
- Refuge interior closed to public and staff during hunts.
- Dogs will be prohibited **except for blood trailing.**
- **Buck only, two or three point antler restriction will be implemented to have management flexibility after deer survey data is received, except for those approved for Specialty Hunts.**
- **Free roaming or unrestricted airboat travel that is not directly associated with hunting is prohibited.**

Standard 3 - Hunting



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Deer and Hog Hunting

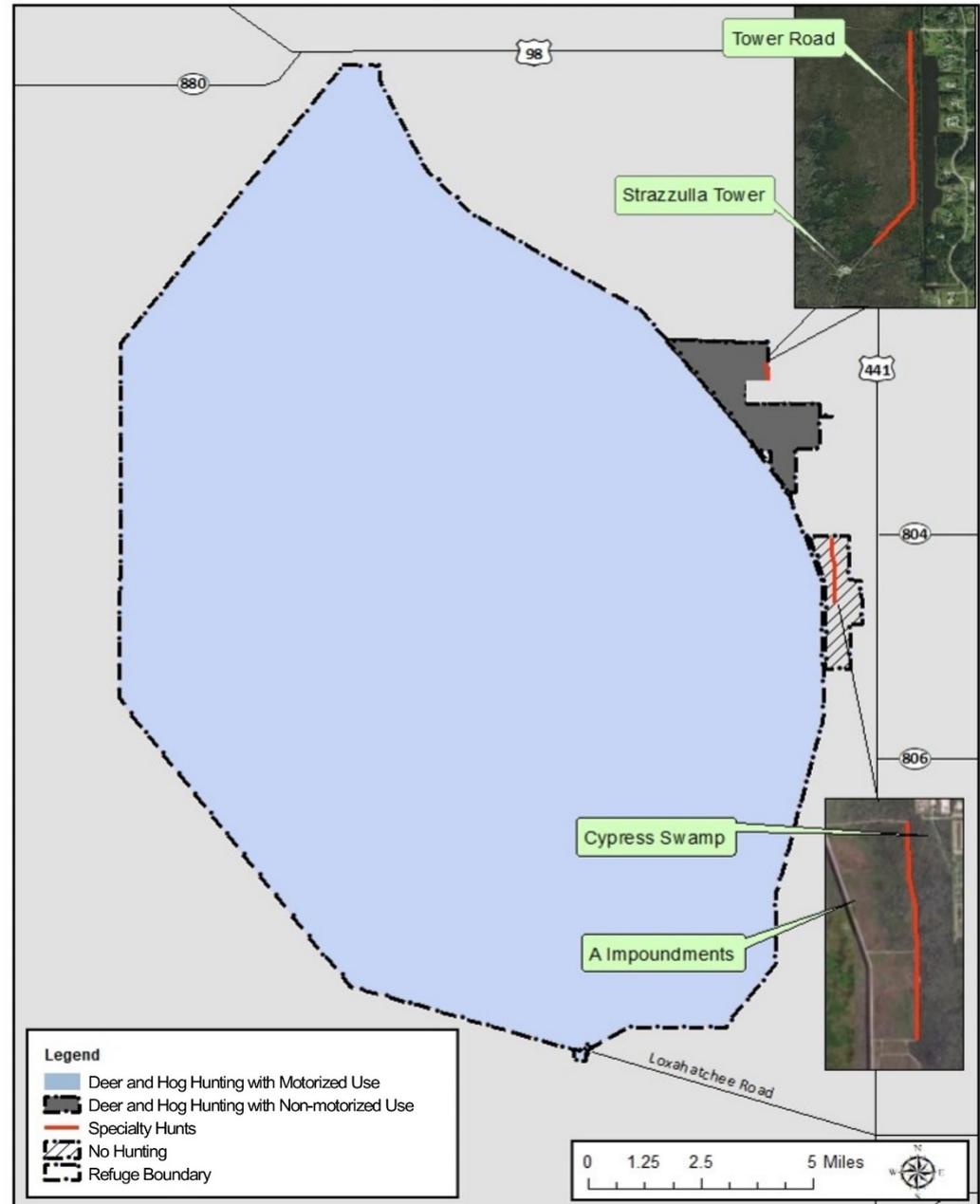


Deer in Strazzulla



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Deer and Hog Hunting

- Archery and crossbow only.
- Hunts will be zero to 16 days dependent on population data.
- We will start with two 3-day hunts; one in early season and one in winter.
- Incidental take on hogs.
- No limits or size restrictions for hogs.
- 300 foot buffer from private property.
- Dogs will be prohibited except for blood trailing.



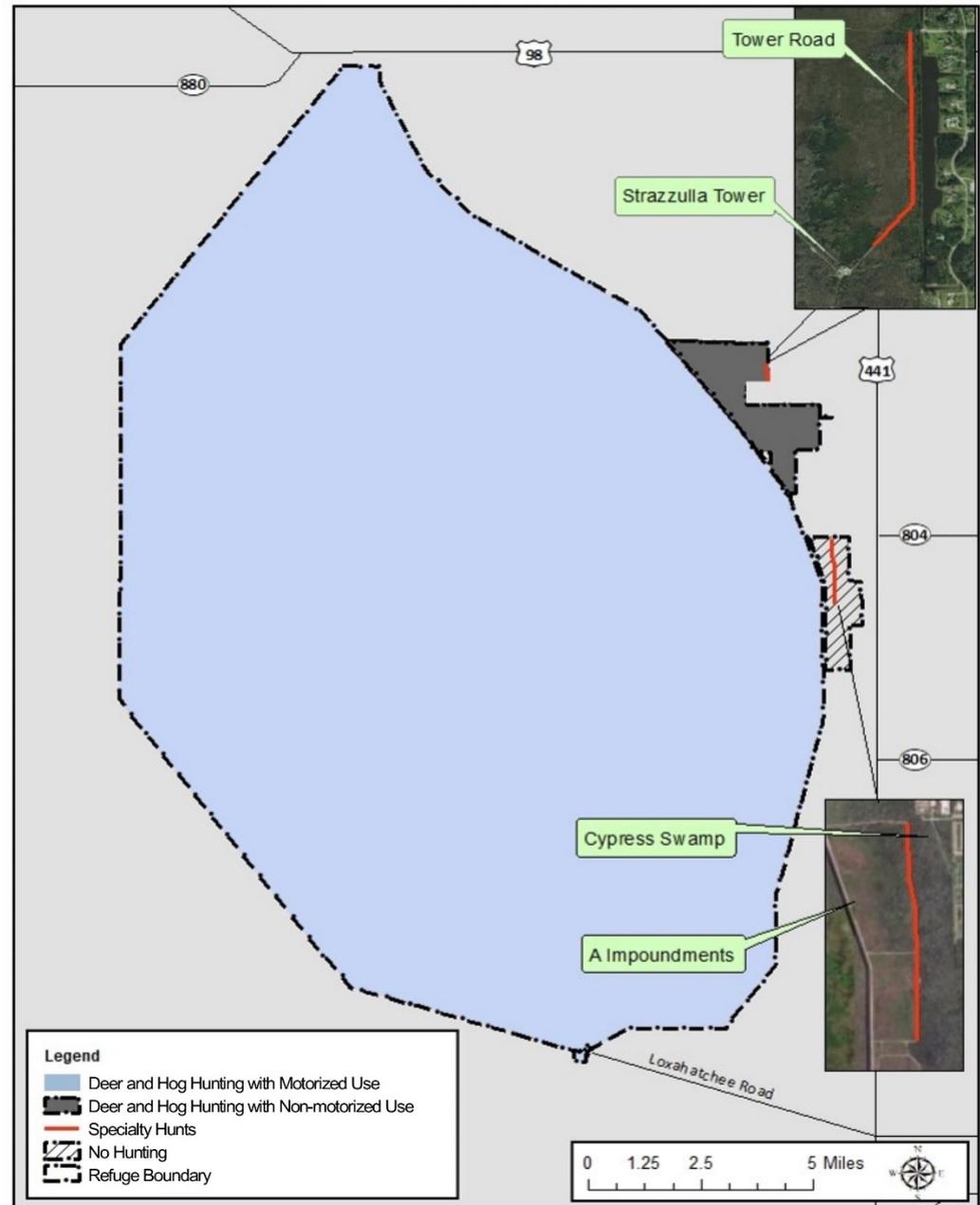
Standard 3 - Hunting

Continued: Deer in Strazzulla

- Bucks only with two to three or more points on one side may be harvested (to have management flexibility after survey data is received), except for those approved for specialty hunts.



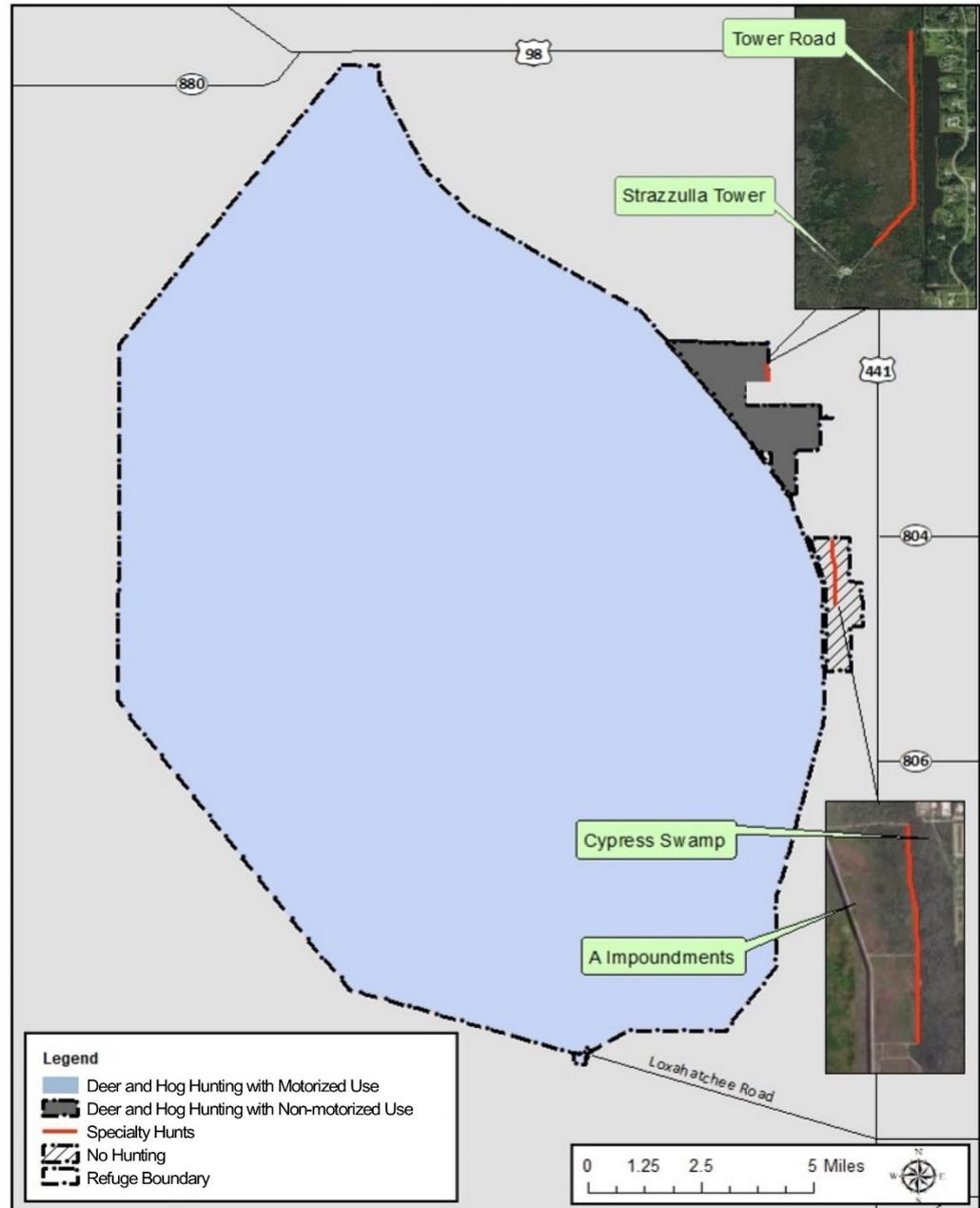
A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Deer and Hog Hunting



Specialty Hunts, Cypress Swamp and Strazzulla



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Deer and Hog Hunting



- Archery, crossbow, air gun, shotgun, and centerfire rifle.
- Hunts will be one or two days per year, with hunt area closed to other uses during the hunt.
- Incidental take on hogs.
- No limits or size restrictions for hogs.
- Only one deer per permit may be harvested.
- 300 foot buffer from private property.
- **Dogs will be allowed for blood trailing only.**
- Any deer can be harvested during this hunt.

Alligator

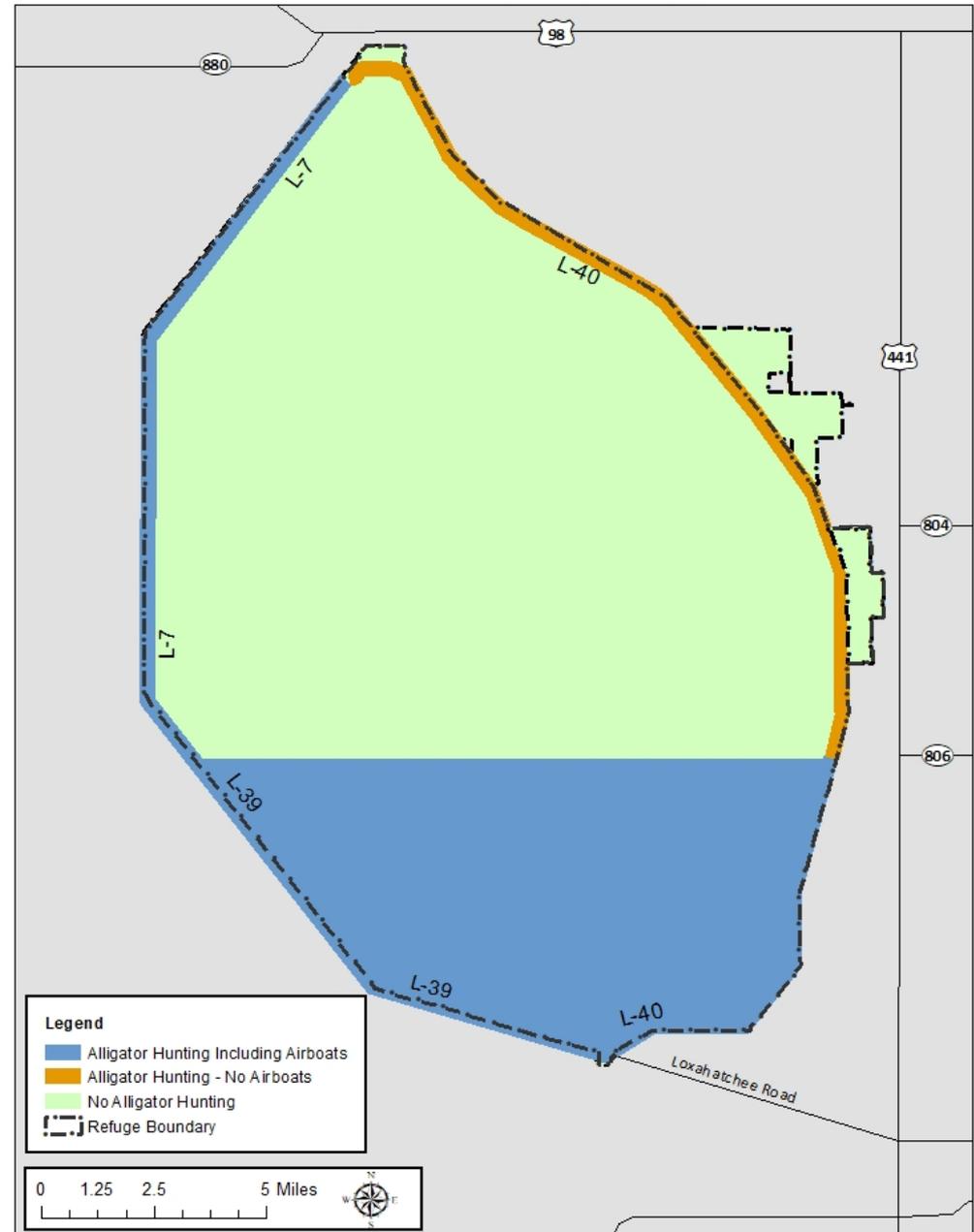
- Airboating allowed for alligator hunting in L-7, L-39, entire motorized zone.
- Maximum of 20 airboat permits at any time. Less than 15 permits to start.
- Increase permits as population surveys allow.
- Hunting from levees, **campsites**, and those areas posted as closed is prohibited.
- Hunting on the Refuge is allowed 1 hour before sunset on Fridays through 1 hour after sunrise on Saturdays, and 1 hour before sunset on Saturdays through 1 hour after sunrise on Sundays.

Standard 3 - Hunting



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

Alligator Hunting



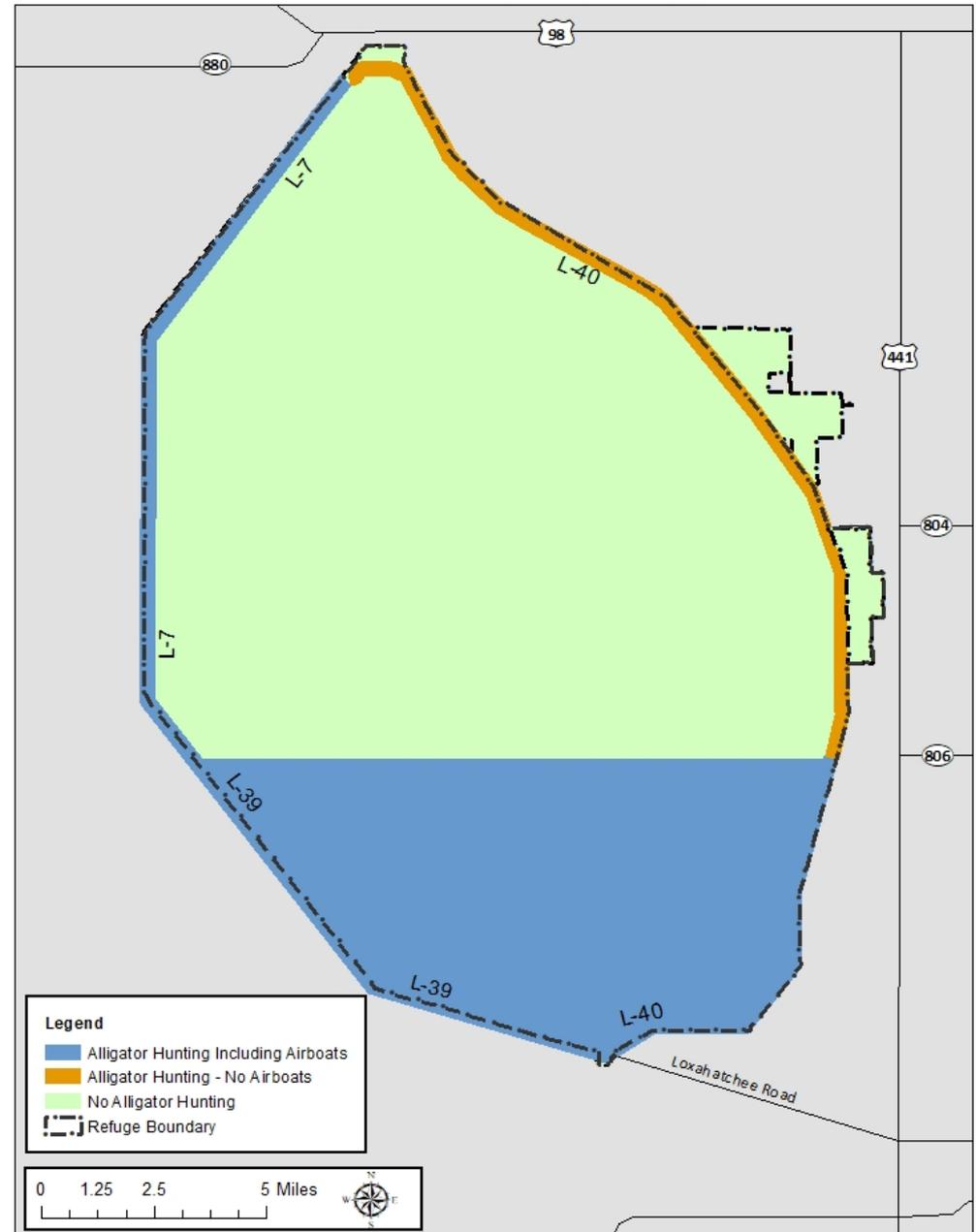
Continued: Alligator

- Alligator hunting will be permitted the first 2 weekends during Harvest Period 1 (August) and the first 2 weekends during Harvest Period 2 (September). Following the close of Harvest Period 2, the remaining weekends in October will be open for unused tags.
- Taking of alligators using baited hooks or baited wooden pegs is prohibited.
- Allow bang sticks with nontoxic ammunition for taking alligators.

Standard 3 - Hunting



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Alligator Hunting

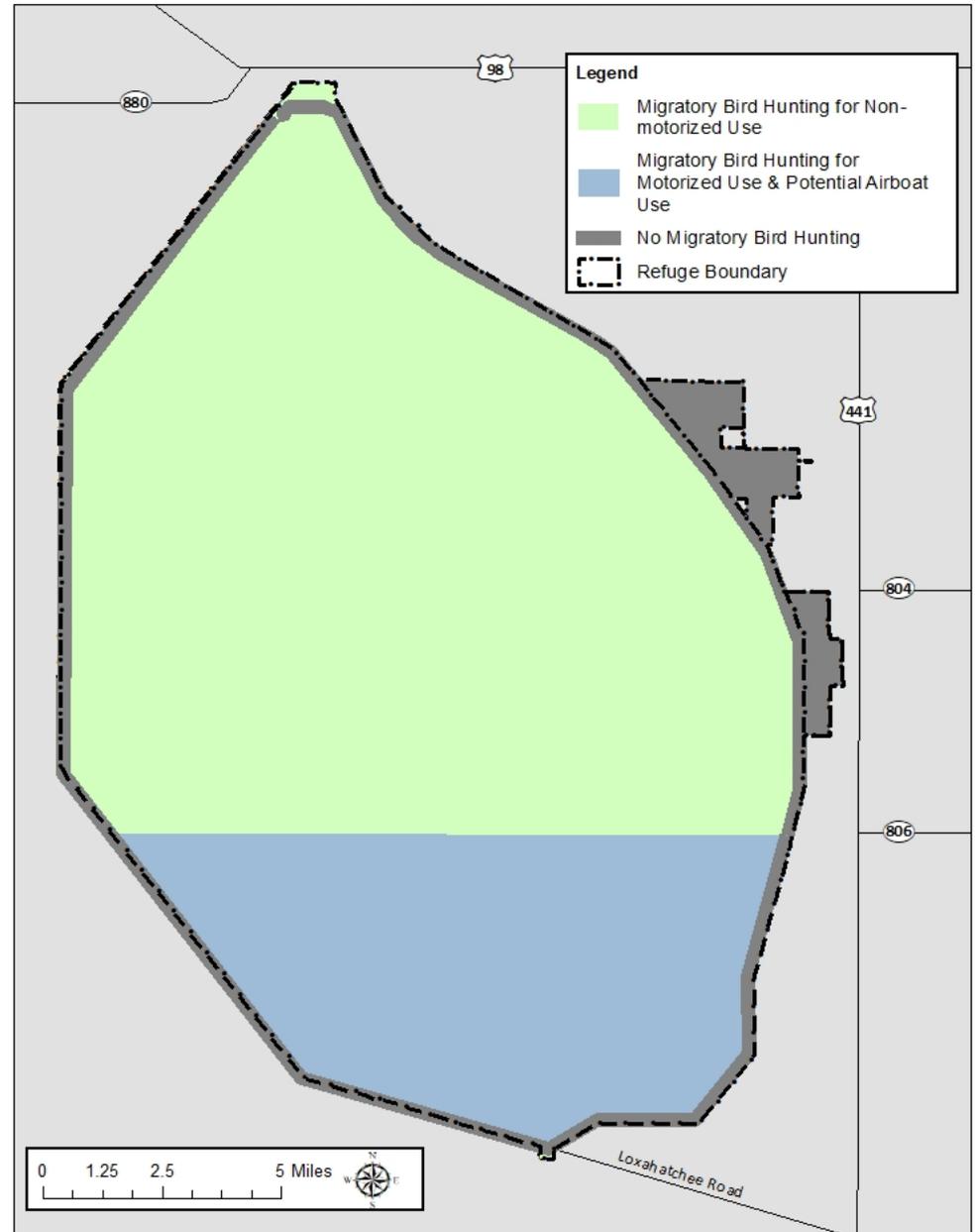


Migratory Birds



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

Migratory Bird Hunting



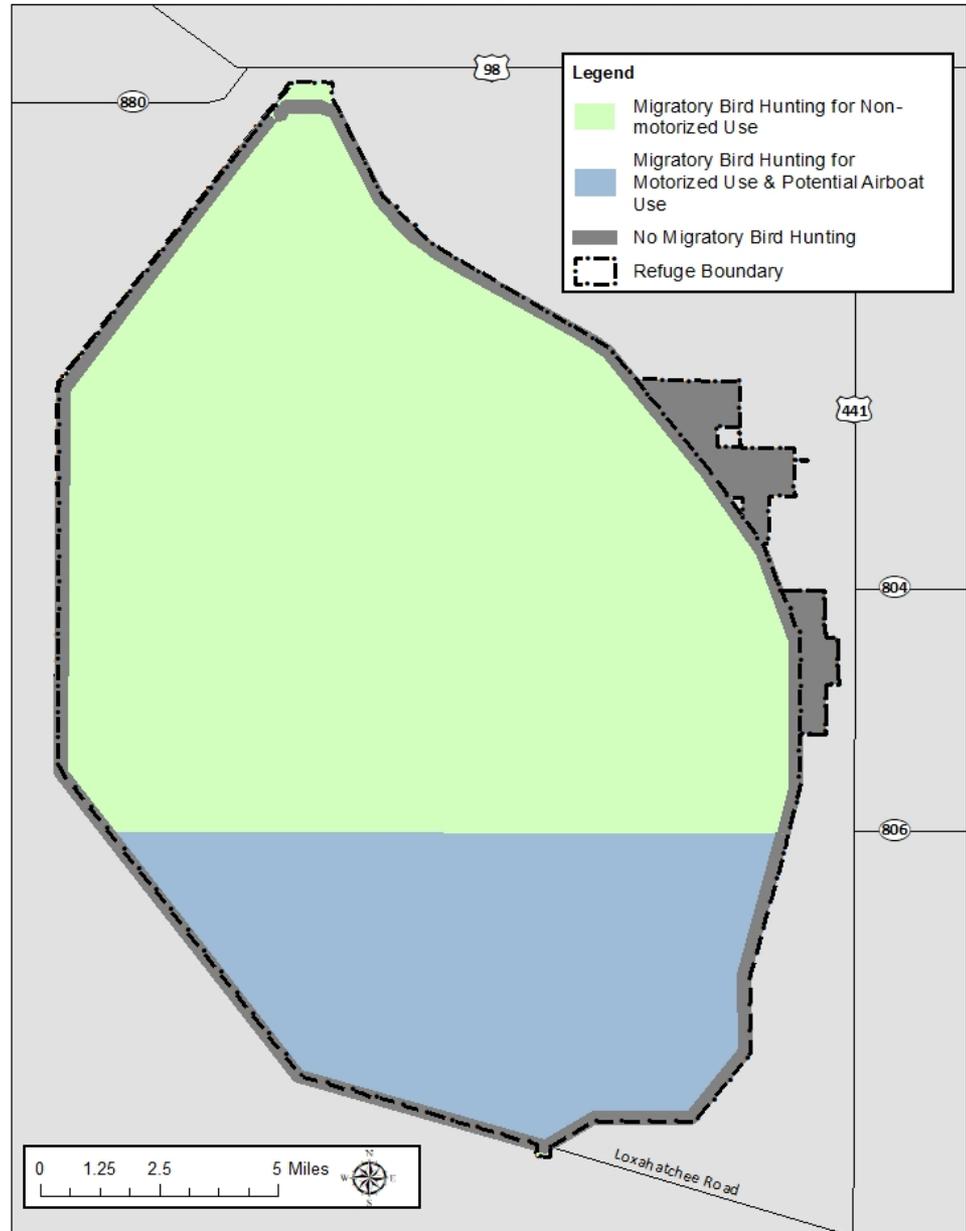
- Migratory bird hunting is being proposed for the entire Interior including the Motorized and Non-motorized Zones.
- Open during state hours and no longer close at 1:00pm. Hunt days will match state regulations. Waterfowl hunting will be open 7 days a week and on Christmas Day.
- Strazzulla and A, B, and C Impoundments are closed.
- Allowing Moorhen, Snipe, and Rail **only after the population status of rail has been determined on the Refuge.**

Continued: Migratory Birds

- No hunting from the canal or within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of boat ramps, **campsites**, and canoe trails.
- Airboats will be allowed in Phase 2 of the State waterfowl season by quota permit only; other motorized and non-motorized access allowed in designated area during the hunt.



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Migratory Bird Hunting

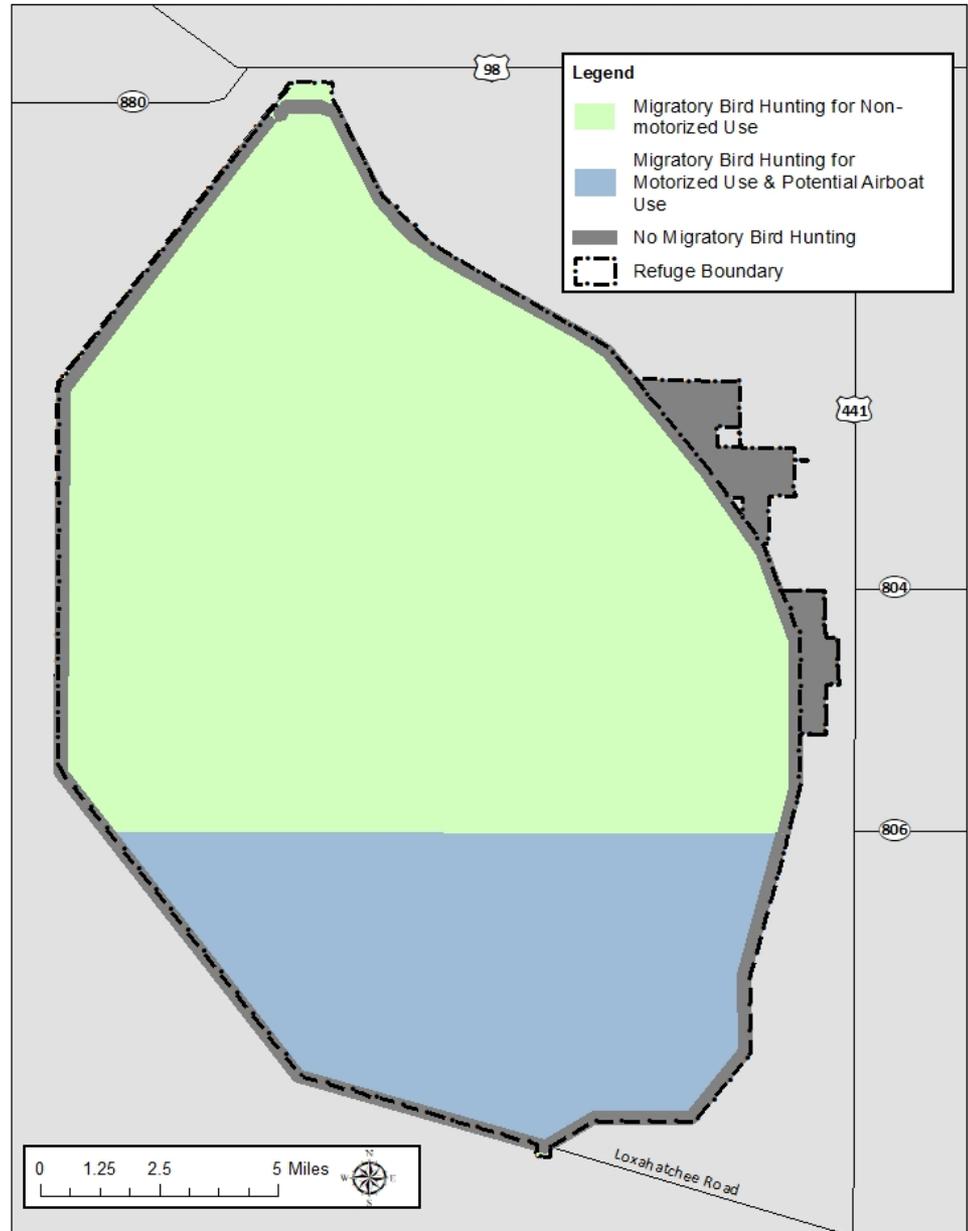


Continued: Migratory Birds

- Motorized vessels must be in place and stopped one hour before sunrise and not move until one hour after sunrise. No forward movement will be permitted and watercraft must be turned off for a period of 15 minutes before shooting. Airboat permit required.
- Maximum of 20 airboat permits at any time. Less than 15 permits to start.



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Migratory Bird Hunting



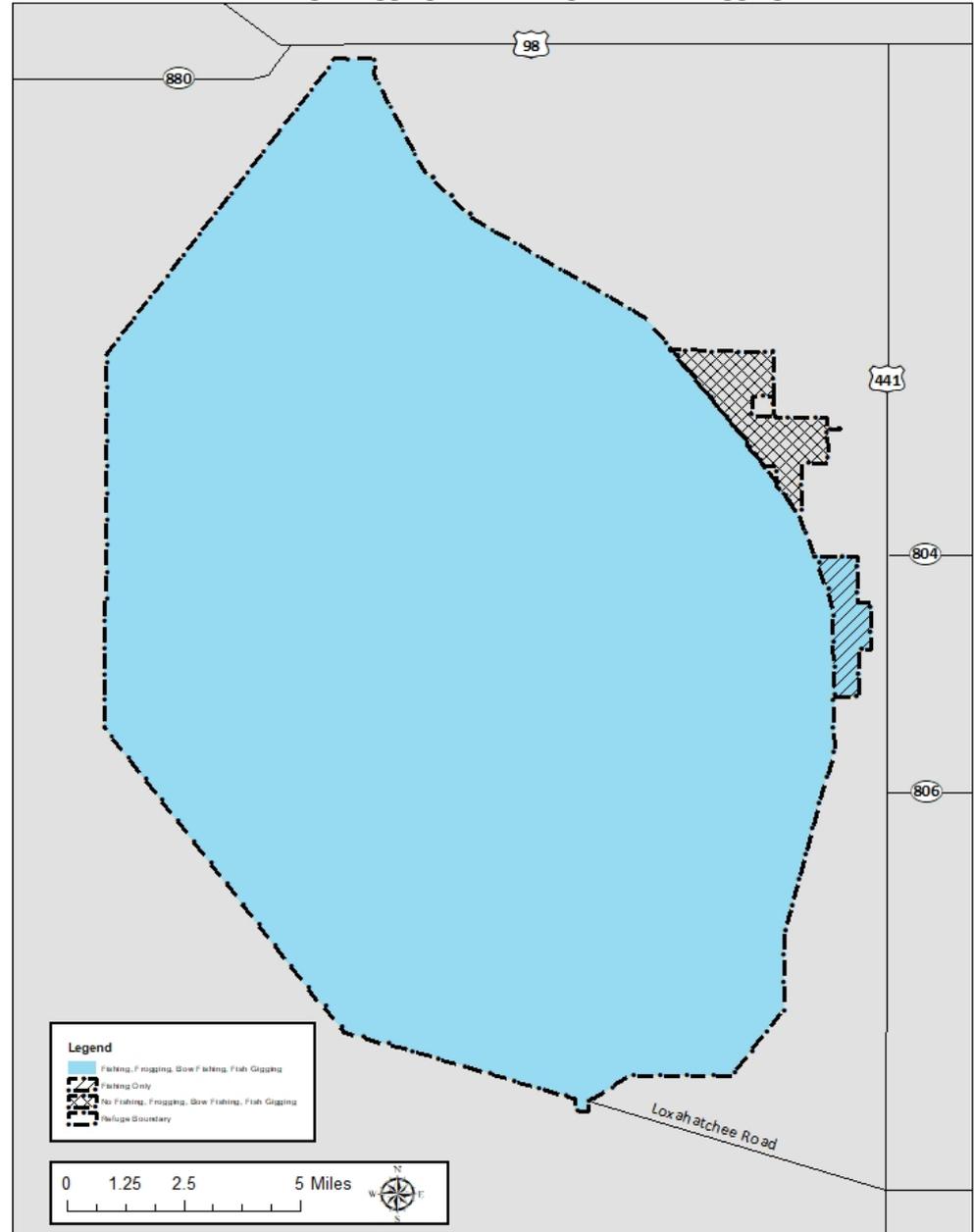
Bowfishing, Fish gigging, Frog gigging

- Allowed anywhere fishing is allowed except Strazzulla and the A, B, and C Impoundments.
- Fish gigging and bowfishing will be permitted every day throughout the year.
- Frogging will be permitted from July 16 through March 15. Bag limit of 50 frogs per boat or party/day.
- Frogging from an airboat limited by permit to the area open to non-hunting airboats.
- No frogging, fish gigging, or bowfishing from Refuge structures or within 1/2 mile of canoe trails, **campsites** or boat ramps.



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

Fishing, Frogging, Bowfishing, and Fish Gigging



Standard 4 - Fishing

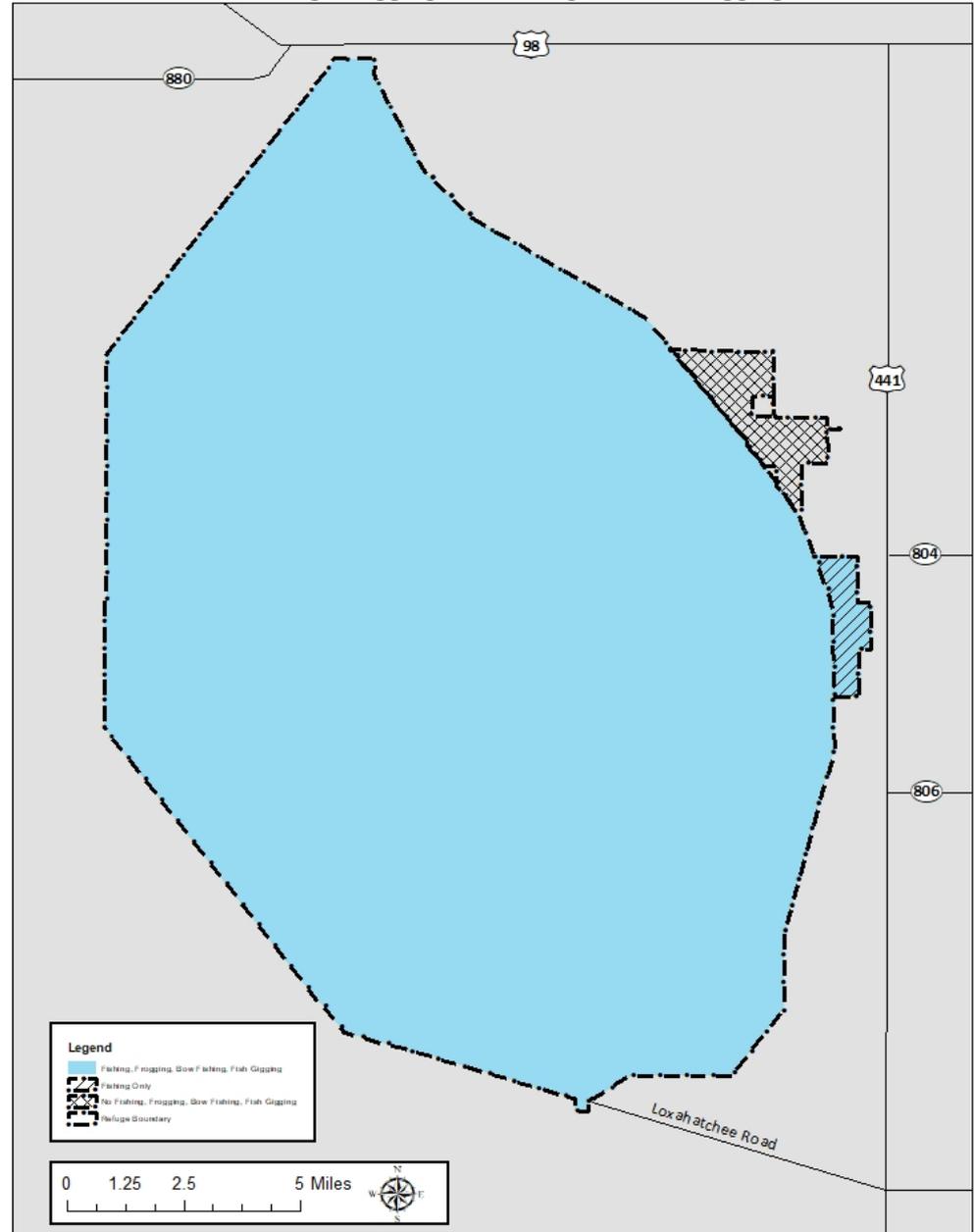
Bowfishing, Fish gigging, Frog gigging

- No-entry and/or limited activity buffer zones will be created and imposed for threatened or endangered species and other trust species. A minimum of 500 ft. (150 meter) no-entry and 1,640 ft. (~500 meter) limited activity zone is recommended for snail kites nests, and a 500 ft. zone is recommended for wood storks and other trust species nests.



A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

Fishing, Frogging, Bowfishing, and Fish Gigging



Standard 4 - Fishing



Wildlife Observation and Photography

Observation Towers

- 2 at Strazzulla, 1 in the Cypress Swamp

Photo Blinds

- 1 in Strazzulla

Boardwalks

- 2 in Strazzulla, 1 in the Cypress Swamp

Live Cams

- Install live-feed bird camera.

Impoundment Conversion

- will evaluate conversion of up to three of our impoundments and improve habitat for wading bird nesting as resources allow.



Environmental Education

Construct an additional educational facility at Strazzulla





Interpretation

Exhibits

- Development of a Visitor Center exhibit geared towards youth pre-K through 3rd grade.

Interpretation

- Recruit and train volunteers to lead interpretive programs in Spanish, French, Haitian Creole, and other languages.

Events

- Incorporate additional Everglades-related events as staff and budget allow.



Other Recreational Uses

- Trails
- Motorized and non-motorized watercraft access
- Leashed or confined pets
- Ceremonies
- Instructor-led small group activities
- Camping
- Horseback riding
- Provisional non-hunting airboating



Trails

- Route trail north up Florida Power & Light (FP&L) right-of-way then west on an unimproved levee through Cypress Swamp.
- Expanding hiking and biking opportunities by adding an additional 18 to 20 miles.
- Construction of a canoe trail on the south end of Refuge.



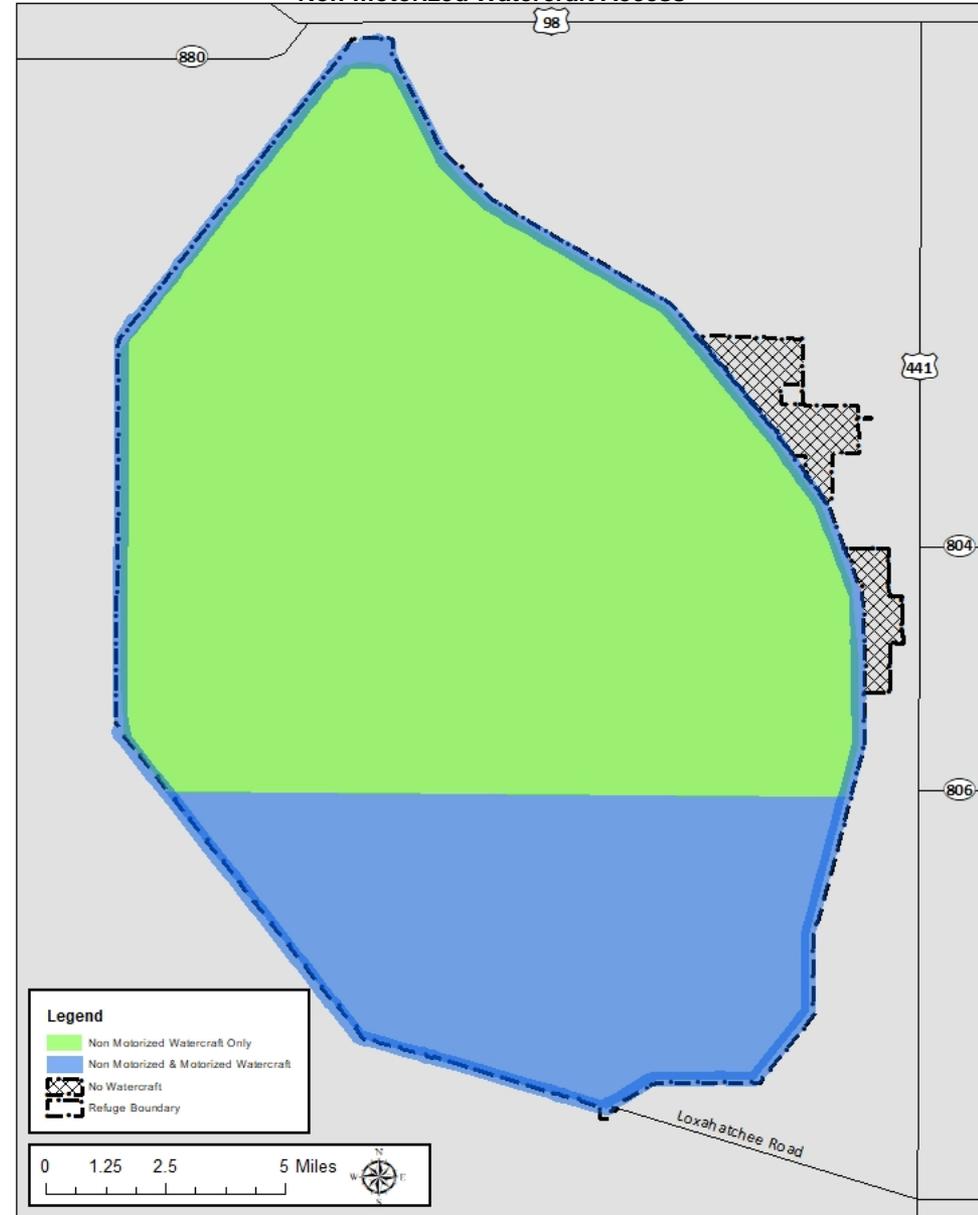
A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

Motorized Watercraft (not including Airboats) &

Non-motorized Watercraft Access

Motorized and Non-motorized Watercraft access

- Open the entire Refuge for non-motorized watercraft, excluding the A, B, and C Impoundments and Strazzulla.
- The designated Hunt Zone will be referred to as the Motorized Watercraft Zone (except certain airboating) vs. Non-motorized Watercraft Zone.
- **Non-motorized vessels can be used in conjunction with a motorized vessel.**





Leashed Pets

- Leashed or confined pets will be allowed in vehicles and watercraft, at Lee Road Boat Ramp and parking lot, 20-Mile Bend Boat Ramp and parking lot, Hillsboro Area Boat Ramp and parking lot, and on the L-40, L-39, L-7 perimeter levees only.
- Leashes will be no longer than six feet in length.
- Visitors with pets will be required to immediately bag and remove their pet's waste and dispose of it in the proper trash receptacles.
- Pet walkers will be limited to a maximum of two animals.
- Organized training or competitive events will be prohibited.
- Pets may be restricted at Refuge-sponsored events (i.e. kids fishing days, Everglades Day, NWR Week).



Ceremonies by Special Use Permit

- Locations may include the C-6 pavilion or open grassy areas on Refuge lands.
- No portion of the Refuge will be closed to accommodate ceremonies.
- Props like archways and aisle runners will not be allowed.
- Music will be limited to unplugged instruments of 5 or less pieces or hand-held players.
- Activities or practices that could be hazardous to visitors, wildlife, vegetation, or facilities will not be allowed. Such activities include, but will not be limited to, candles, incense, sacrifices (animal or otherwise), or scattering ashes.
- All event activities will meet the standards of public decency and will not violate any animal or human rights.
- Up 2 events may be permitted per month not to exceed 4 hours in duration. Maximum of 50 people.



Ceremonies by Special Use Permit

- Decorations and other activity-related materials need to be approved prior to the event.
- All activities will be conducted in such a manner as to minimize disturbance to wildlife, Refuge resources, and the visiting public.
- No bird seed, rice, confetti, balloons, similar products, or release of any animal .
- No food or beverages will be allowed unless part of a religious practice or ceremony.

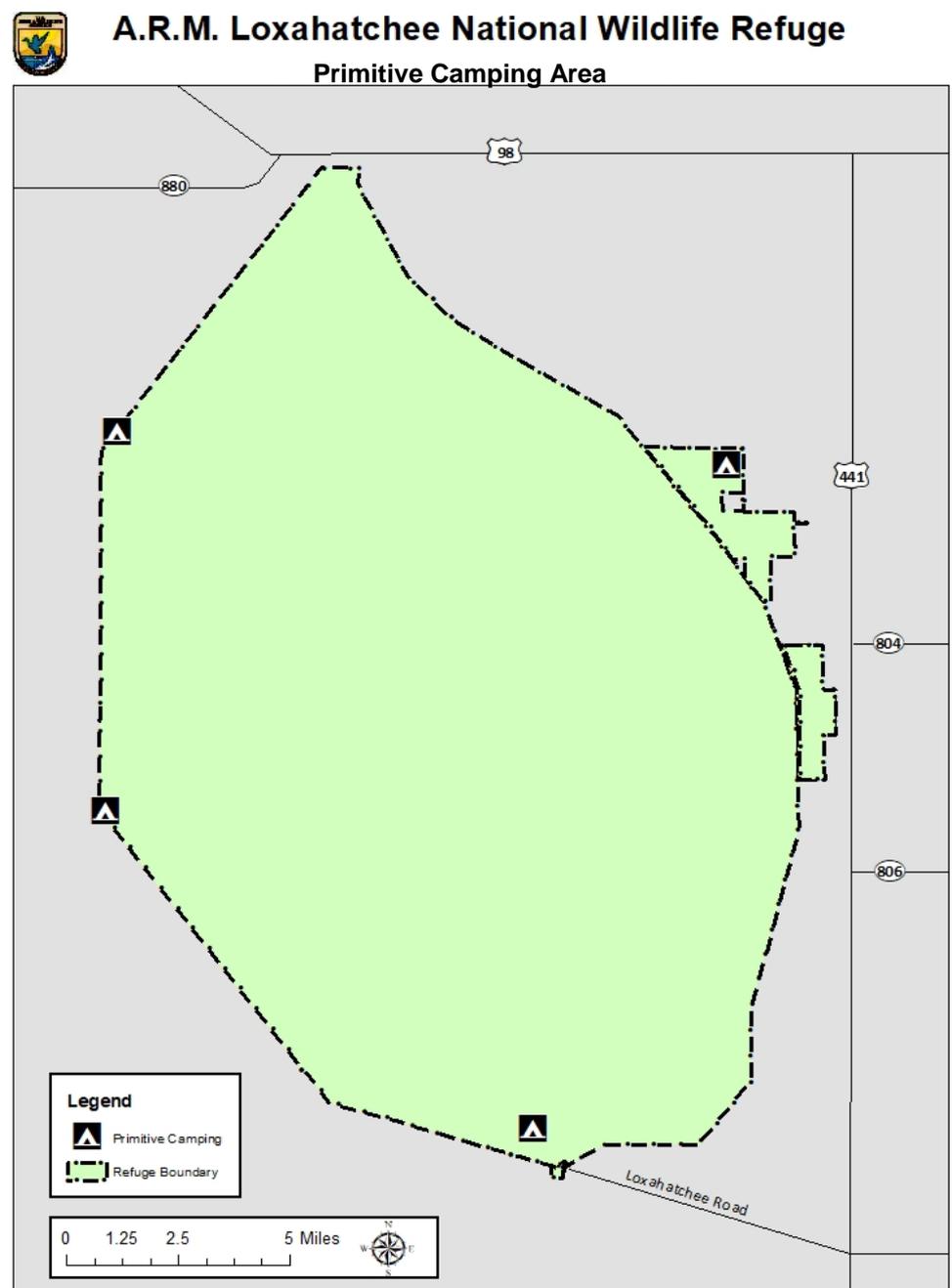


Instructor-led small group activities by Special Use Permit

- Locations may include the C-6 pavilion or open grassy areas on Refuge lands.
- Up to two (2) activities may be permitted per month.
- Less than two hours in duration.
- A maximum of 50 participants may be permitted for one-time activities, and a maximum of 20 participants may be permitted for recurring activities.
- All activities will be conducted in such a manner as to minimize disturbance to wildlife, Refuge resources, and the visiting public.
- Maximum of 50 people.

Camping

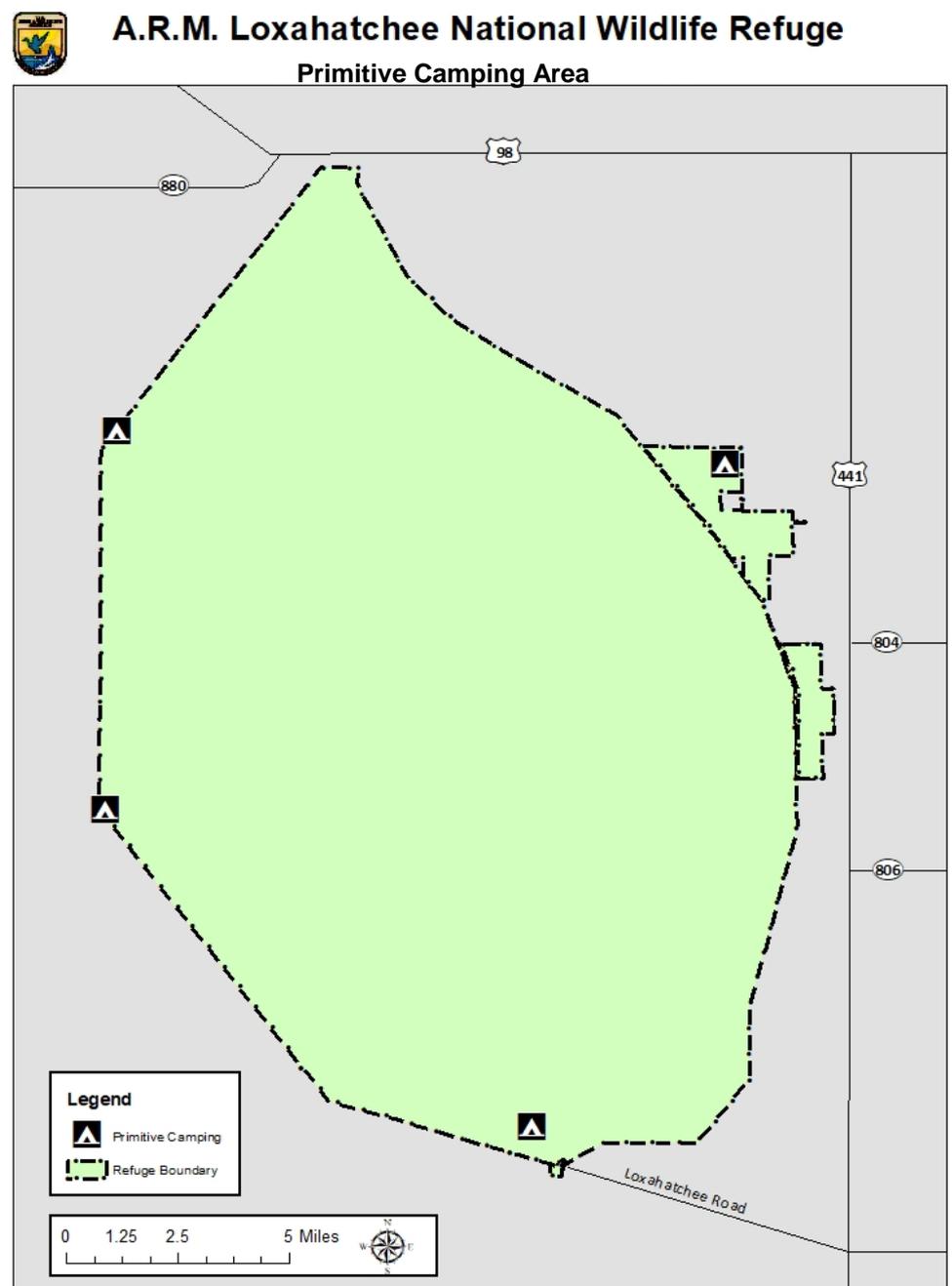
- Limited, permitted, fee-based, overnight primitive camping opportunities.
- Camping will be allowed only at designated campsites.
- All trash and waste must be carried out and properly disposed off-site.
- The sites will be available on a first-come basis by reservation.
- The maximum length of stay will be two nights.
- **Half-mile buffers during hunting and fishing.**



Camping

L7 Levee: Campsites on the L7 will be for hiking, biking, and boat access only.

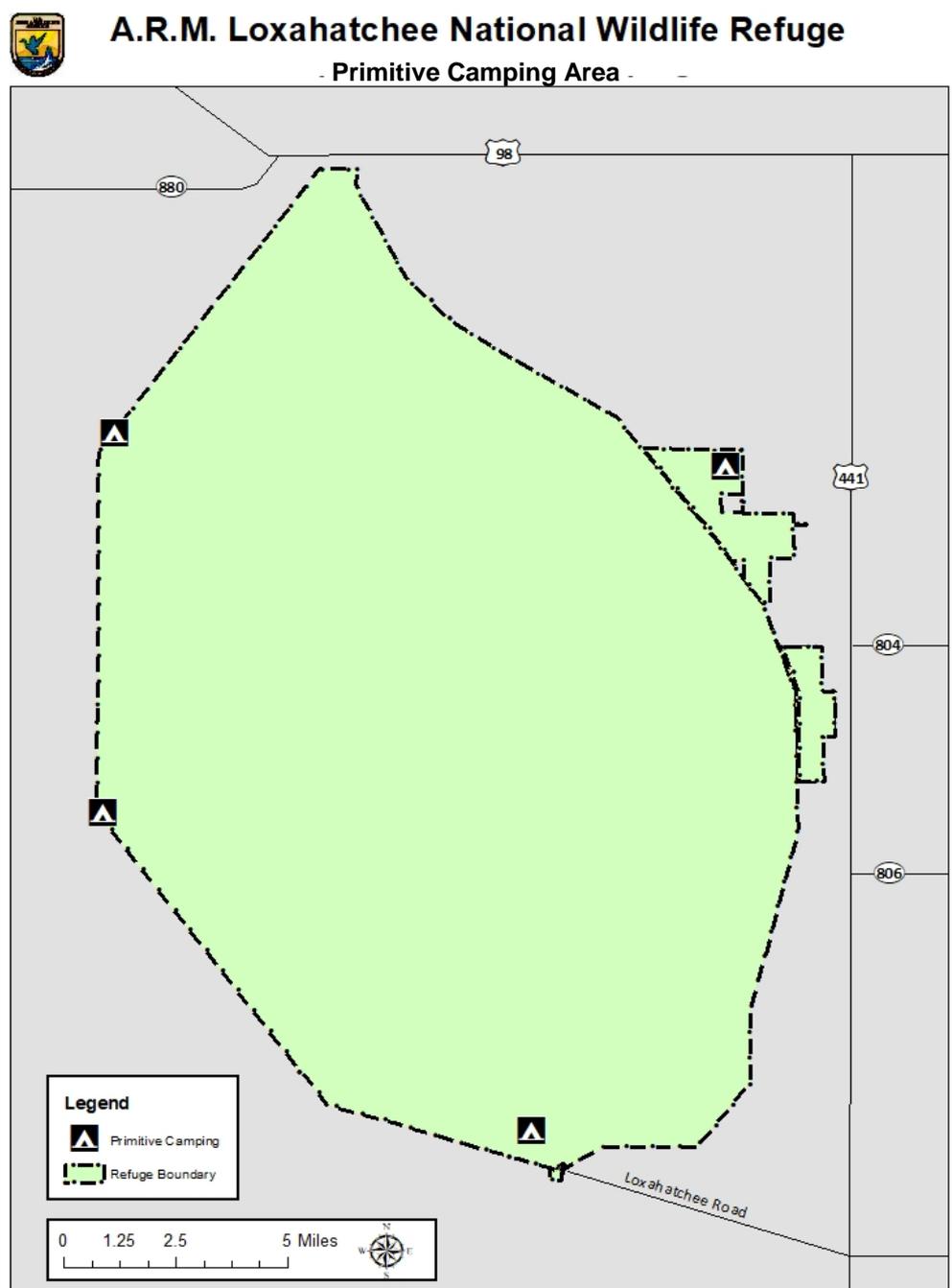
- The maximum number of people occupying a levee site will be 20.
- No boat landing facilities will be constructed at the L-7 campsites.



Camping

Canoe Trail Platforms on Southern Canoe Trail - Canoe and Boat access

- The maximum number of tents 2, maximum number people 6.
- Only one motorized boat will be permitted at a canoe trail platform at a time.
- **Strazzulla:** Special groups by permit only.



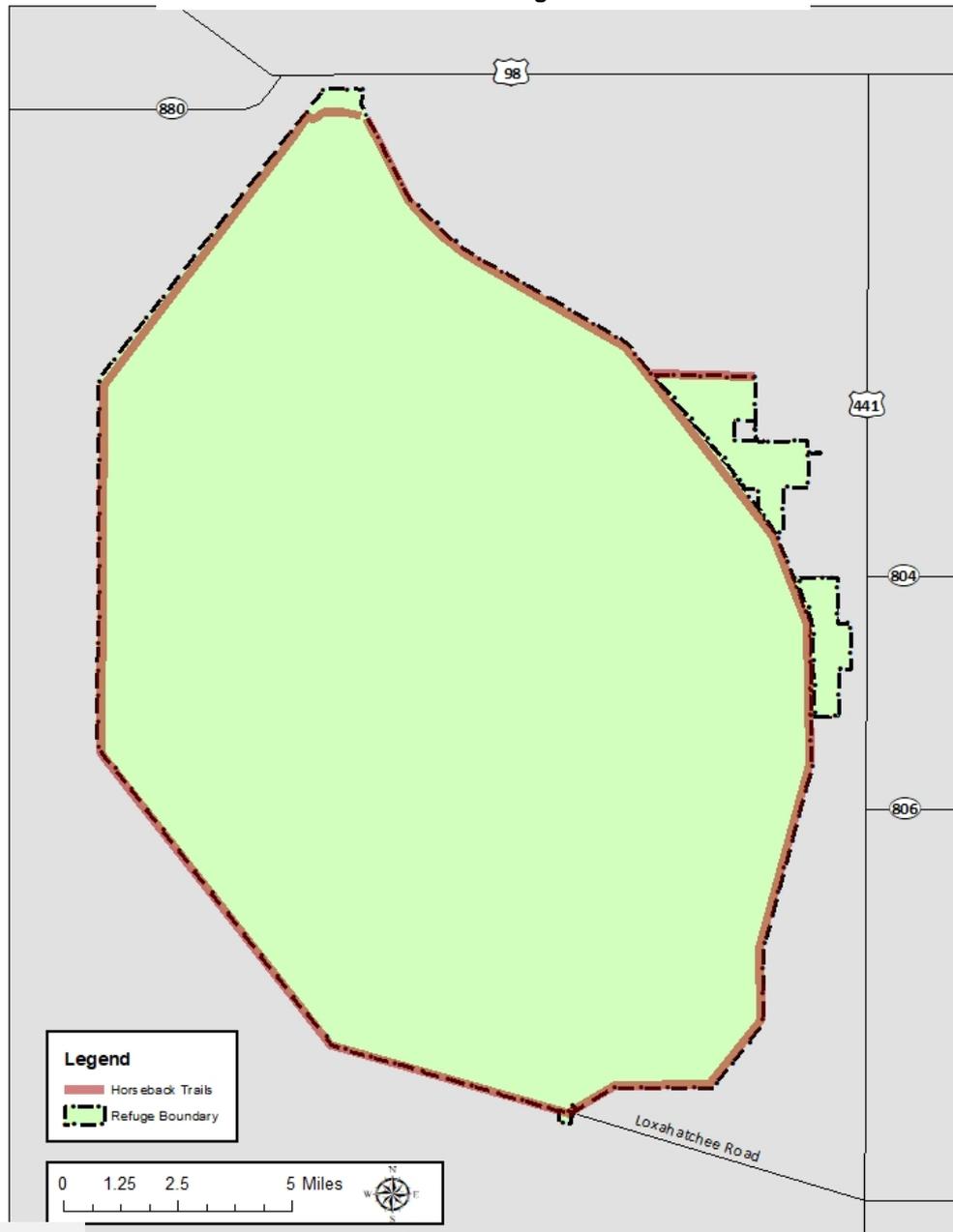
Horseback Riding

- Horses will be required to wear manure bags and riders will be responsible for removal of all horse waste.
- Each visitor may ride/walk one horse at a time.
- Groups consisting of more than five horses will require a Special Use Permit.



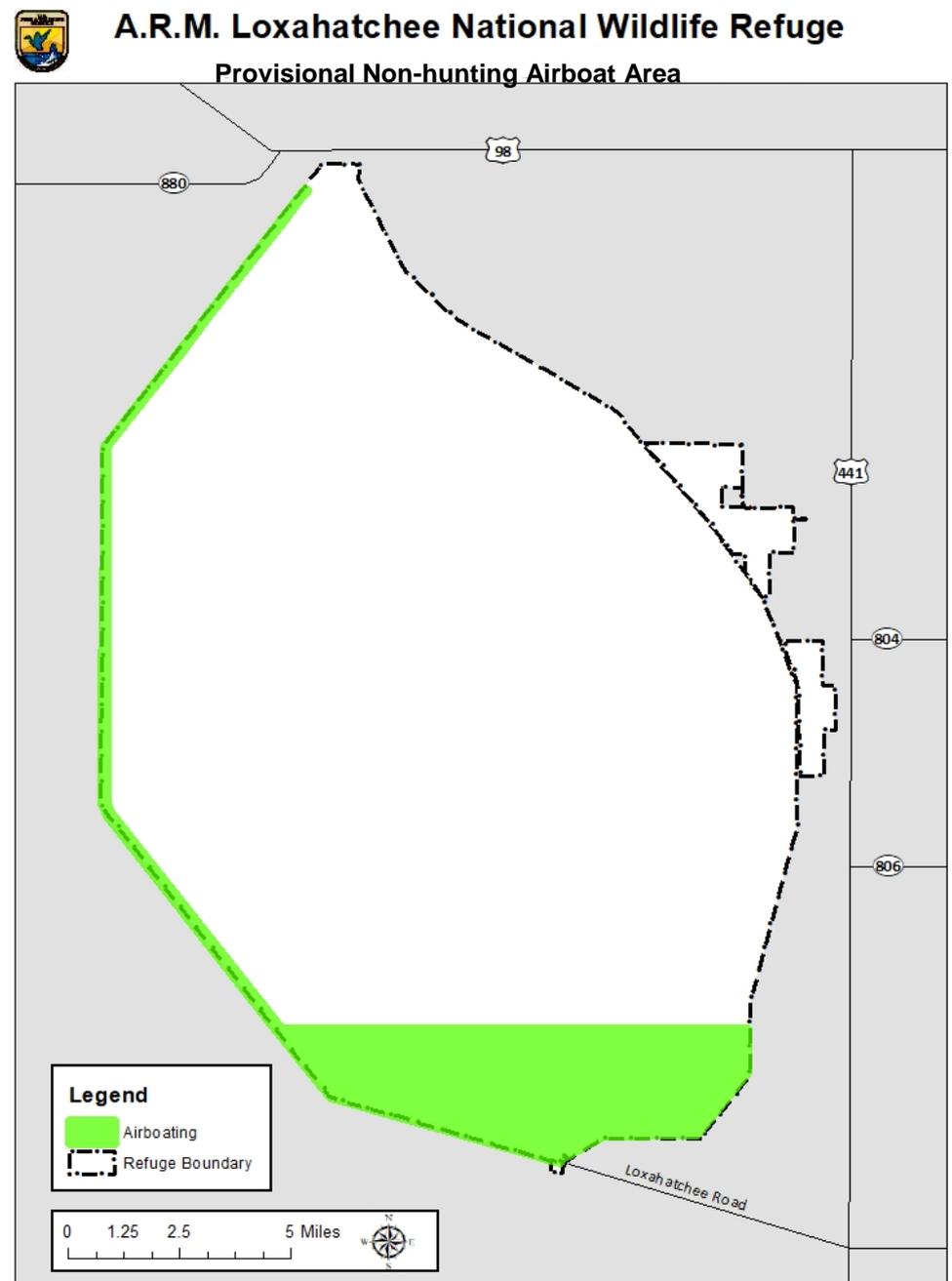
A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

Horseback Riding Trails



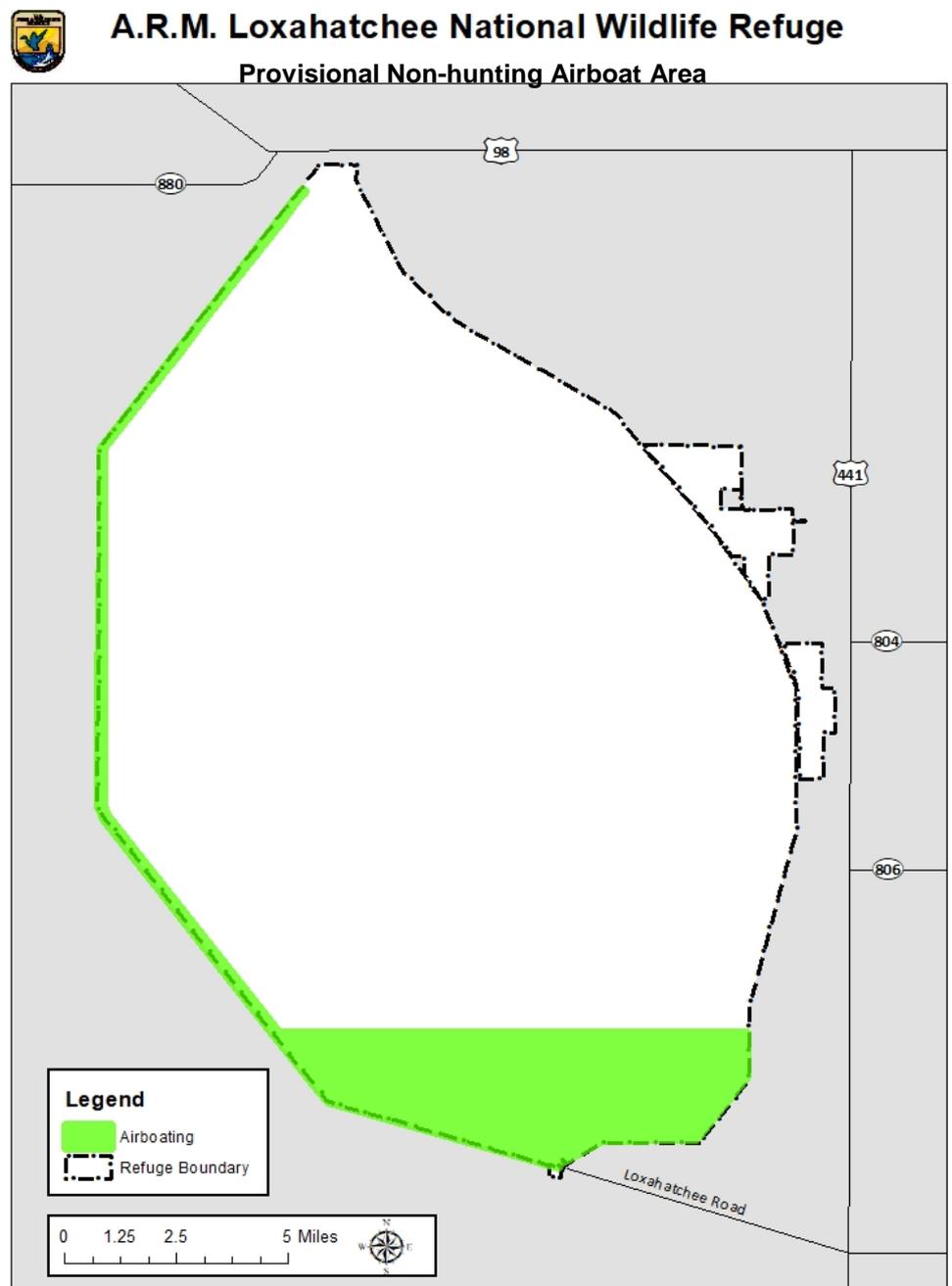
Provisional Non-hunting Airboating

- Limited airboating by permit in 13,900 acre portion of the motorized zone.
- Limited quota of 0 to 20 boats per year. Start with ~15.
- Annual boat permit by lottery once a year.
- Mandatory orientation.
- Water level restrictions.
- Required to use navigation system, tracking route taken.
- **Non-motorized vessels can be used with motorized vessels.**



Provisional Non-hunting Airboating

- Monitor and re-evaluate in 3 to 5 years.
- The use of non-hunting airboating will only be permitted on weekends (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) from July-November.
- Non-hunting airboating will be restricted during deer & waterfowl seasons.
- Airboaters will be required to follow refuge boating regulations.





Communicate Key Issues (Outreach)

Planning meetings

- Will consider annual meetings with other governmental agencies, stakeholders, and city councils.

Outreach plan

- Will develop an outreach plan that articulates communications strategies and schedules.

Off-site events

- Will expand relationships with local leaders and media, host “town hall” events, and develop specific programs.

Informational resources

- Will update and expand outreach information.



Volunteers, Friends, and Partnerships

Volunteer Program

- Will develop new strategies to recruit volunteers.

Friends Program

- Will expand the Friends group.

Partnerships

- Will expand partnerships.

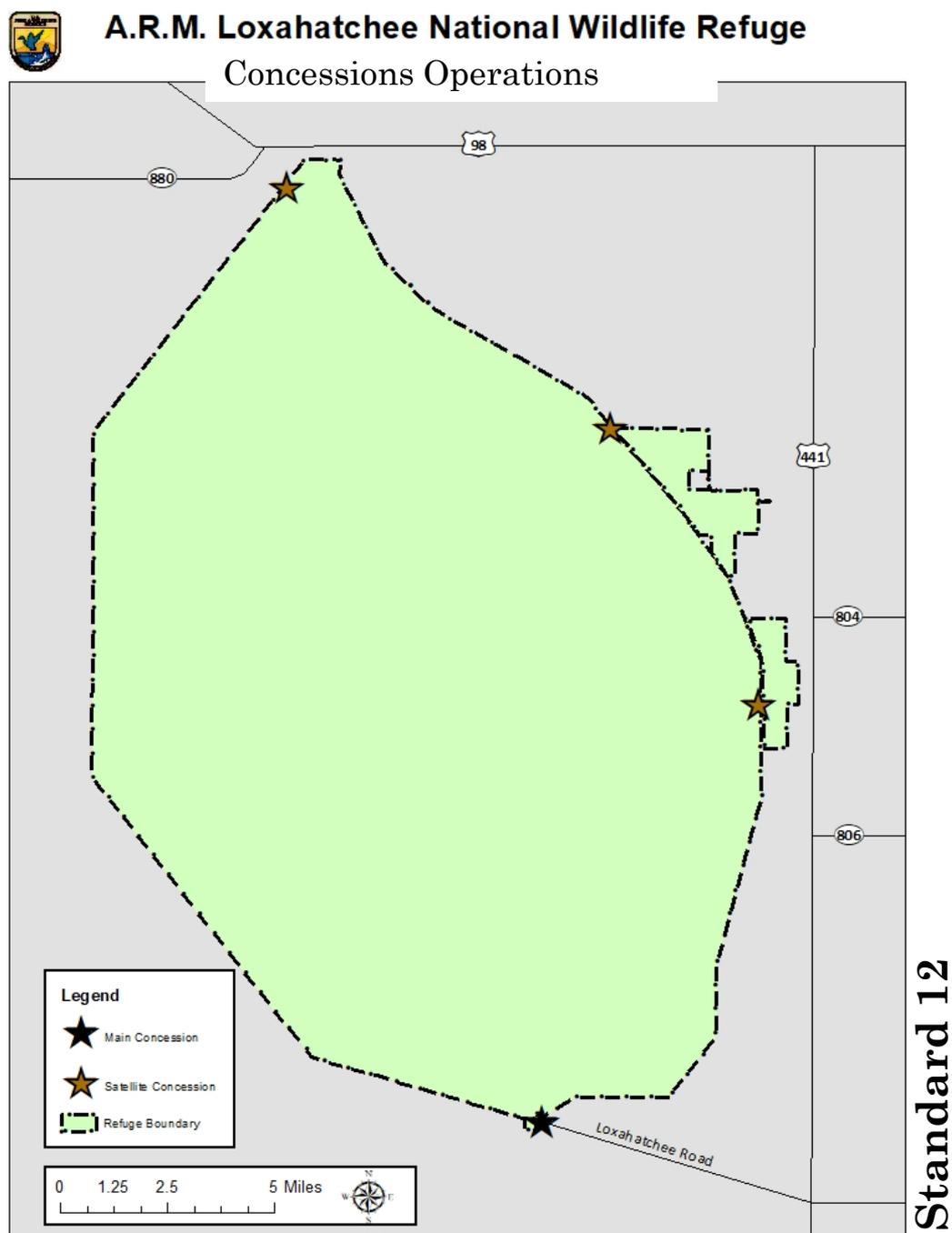


Recreation Fee Program

- Fees for camping (\$10), hunting (\$25), and airboats (\$50).
- Eliminate pedestrian and bike fee (\$1).
- Increase annual pass fee from \$12 to \$25 to match the Federal Duck Stamp.

Concessions

- Concession operations at Loxahatchee Road
 - Limited sale of food, fishing gear, bait, etc.
 - Visitor contact station with staff offices.
 - Airboat tours (max capacity 6 people)
 - Boat, bike rental, & fishing gear rentals
 - Guided tours by pontoon boat & boat shuttle to Lee Road & Strazzulla
 - Tram tours in the Impoundments
- Possible satellite operations at Lee Road and 20-Mile Bend



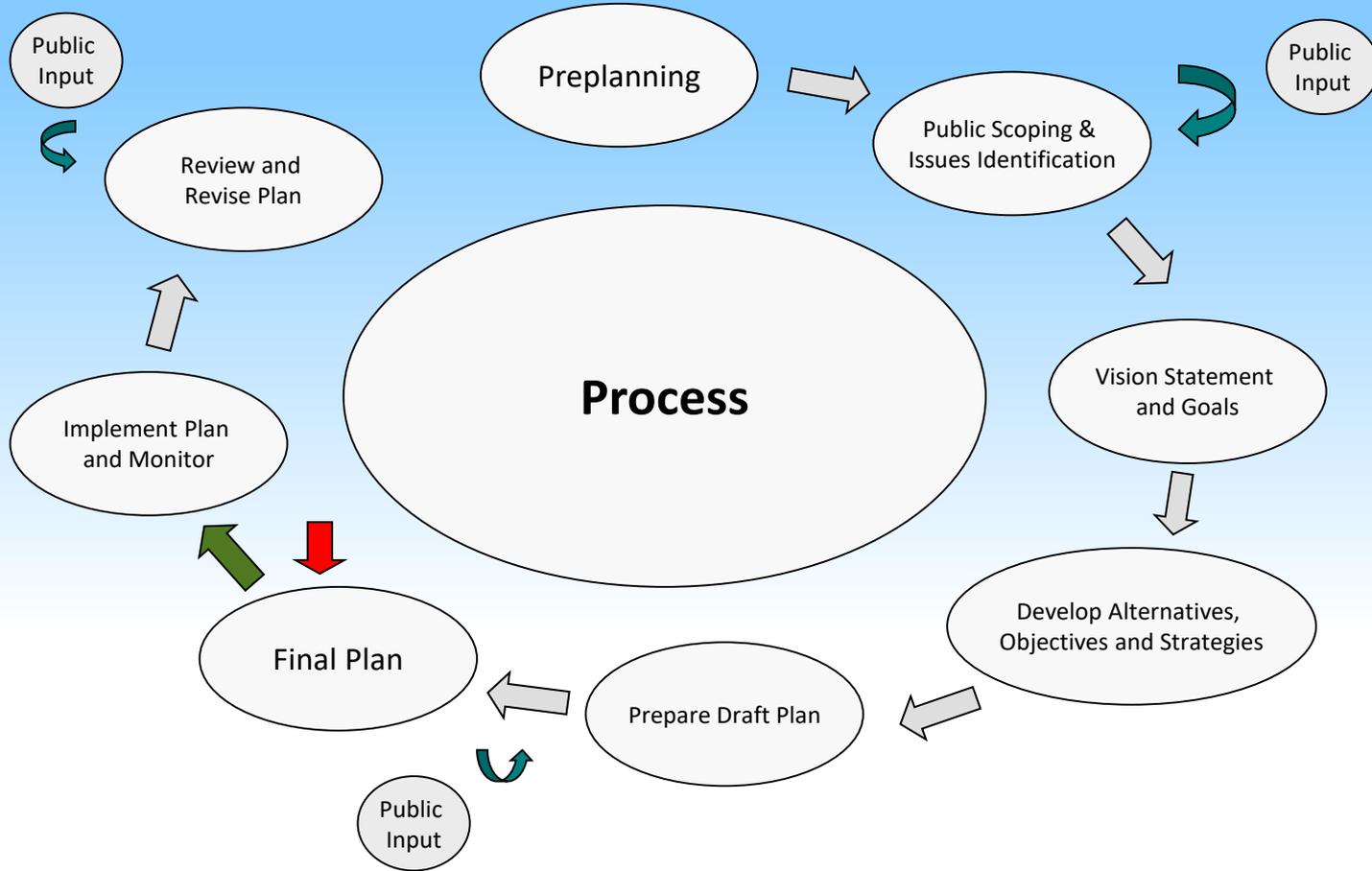


Commercial Use

- Guided interpretive tours for the public in various locations within the Refuge, utilizing a pontoon boat, trams, airboats, canoes, and/or kayaks.



Planning Process





U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Services Plan Development

Questions?