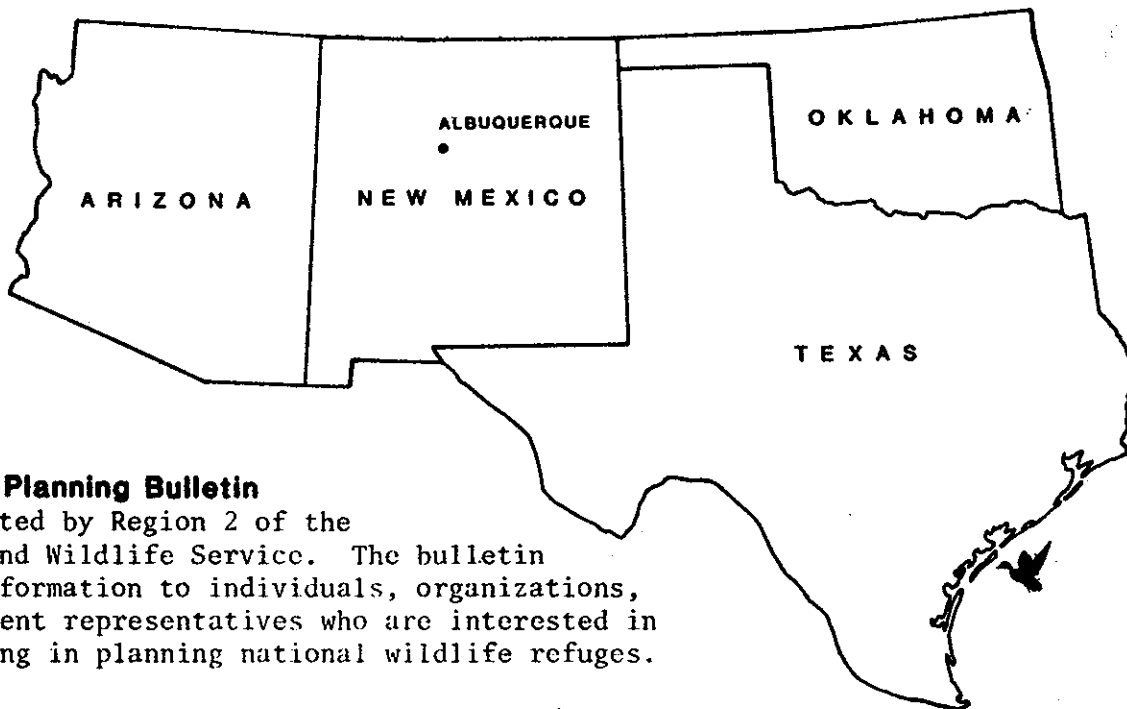


Refuge Planning Bulletin

Matagorda Island...Edition 1

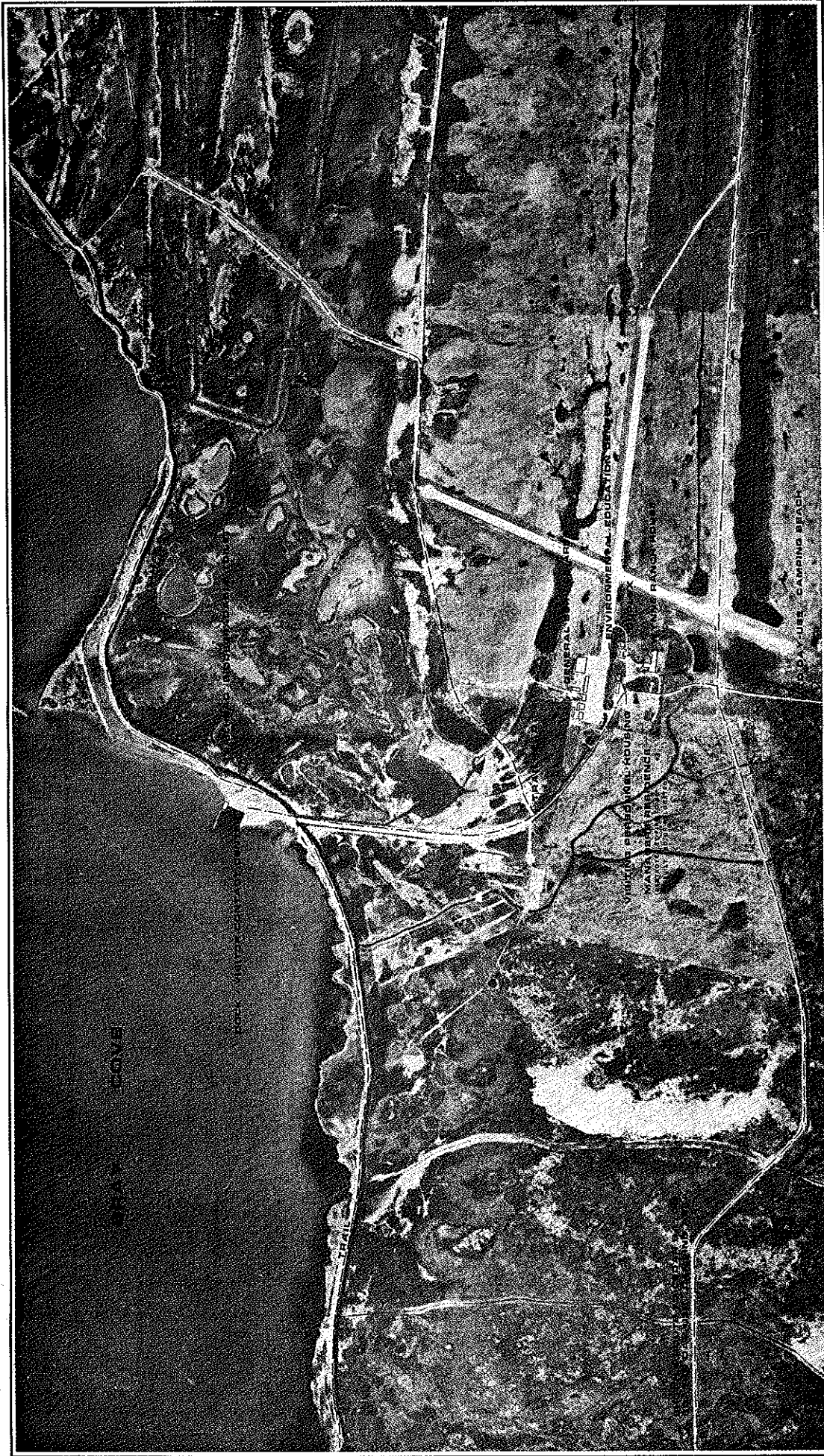


The **Refuge Planning Bulletin** is distributed by Region 2 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The bulletin provides information to individuals, organizations, and government representatives who are interested in participating in planning national wildlife refuges.

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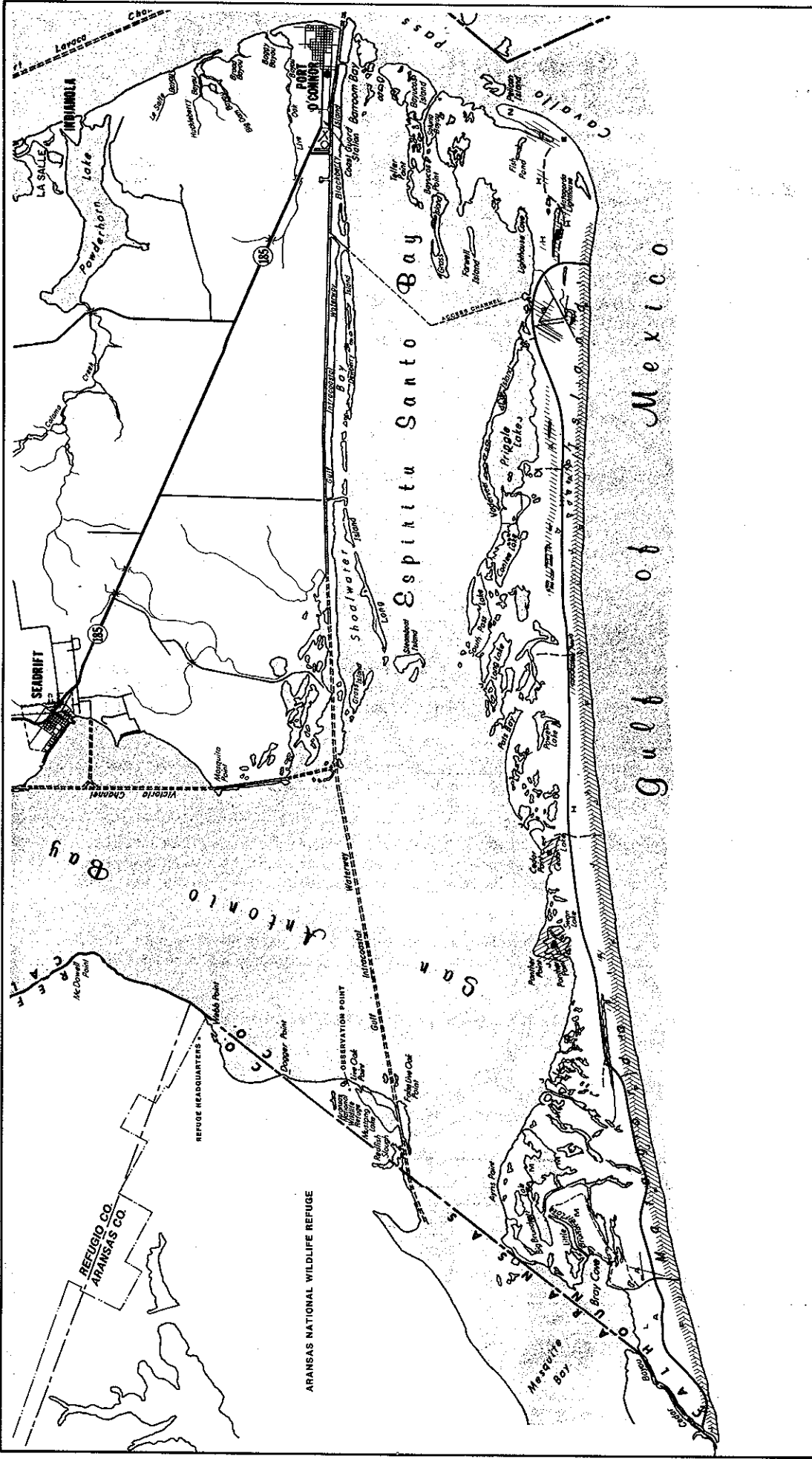
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MATAGORDA ISLAND

ZONE MAP C ISLAND SUPPORT FACILITIES





MATAGORDA ISLAND

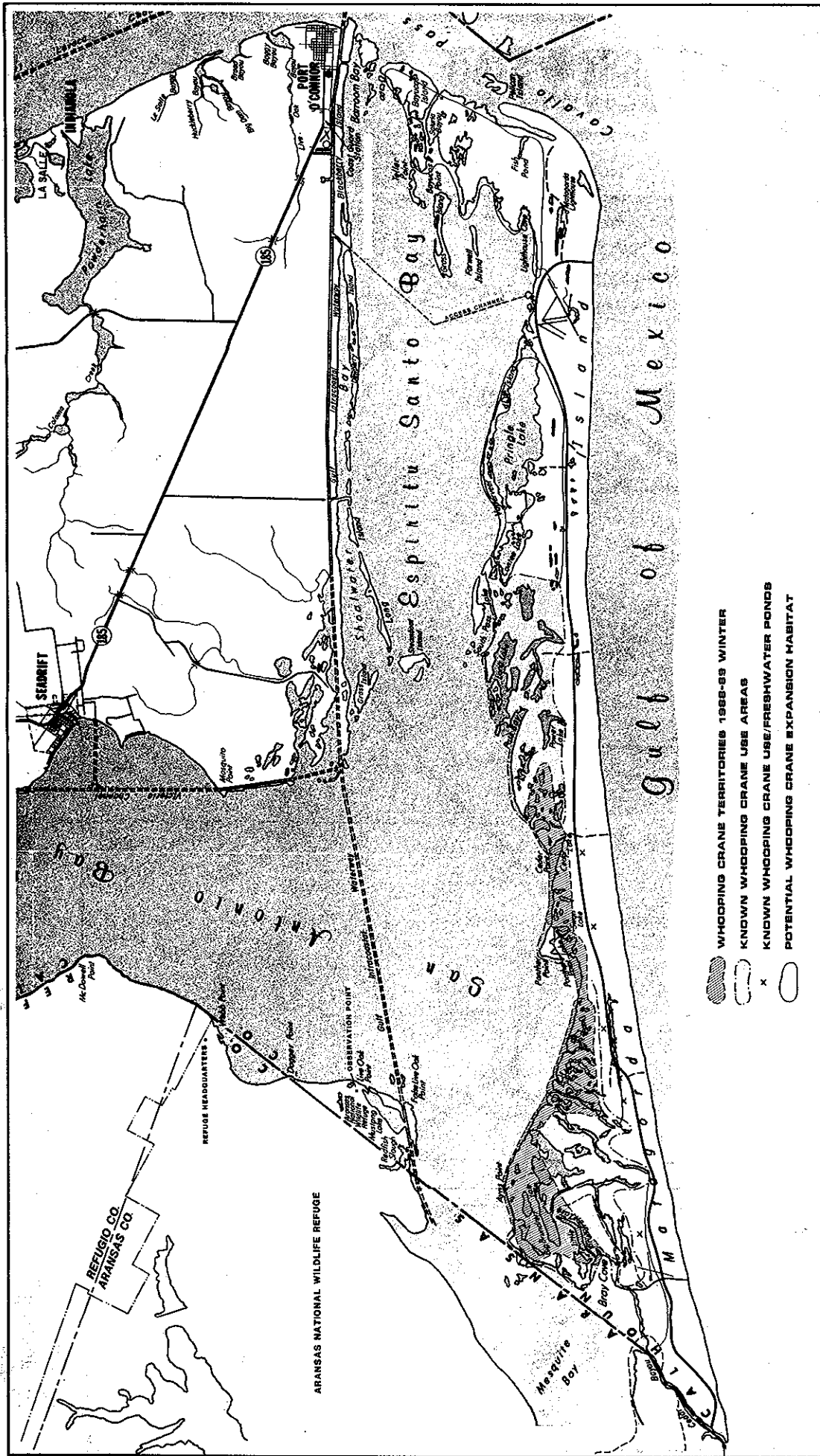
ENDANGERED, THREATENED AND/OR SENSITIVE WILDLIFE SPECIES



AREAS OF MATAGORDA ISLAND EXHIBITING CONCENTRATED USE
BY ENDANGERED, THREATENED, AND/OR SENSITIVE WILDLIFE SPECIES

LEGEND:

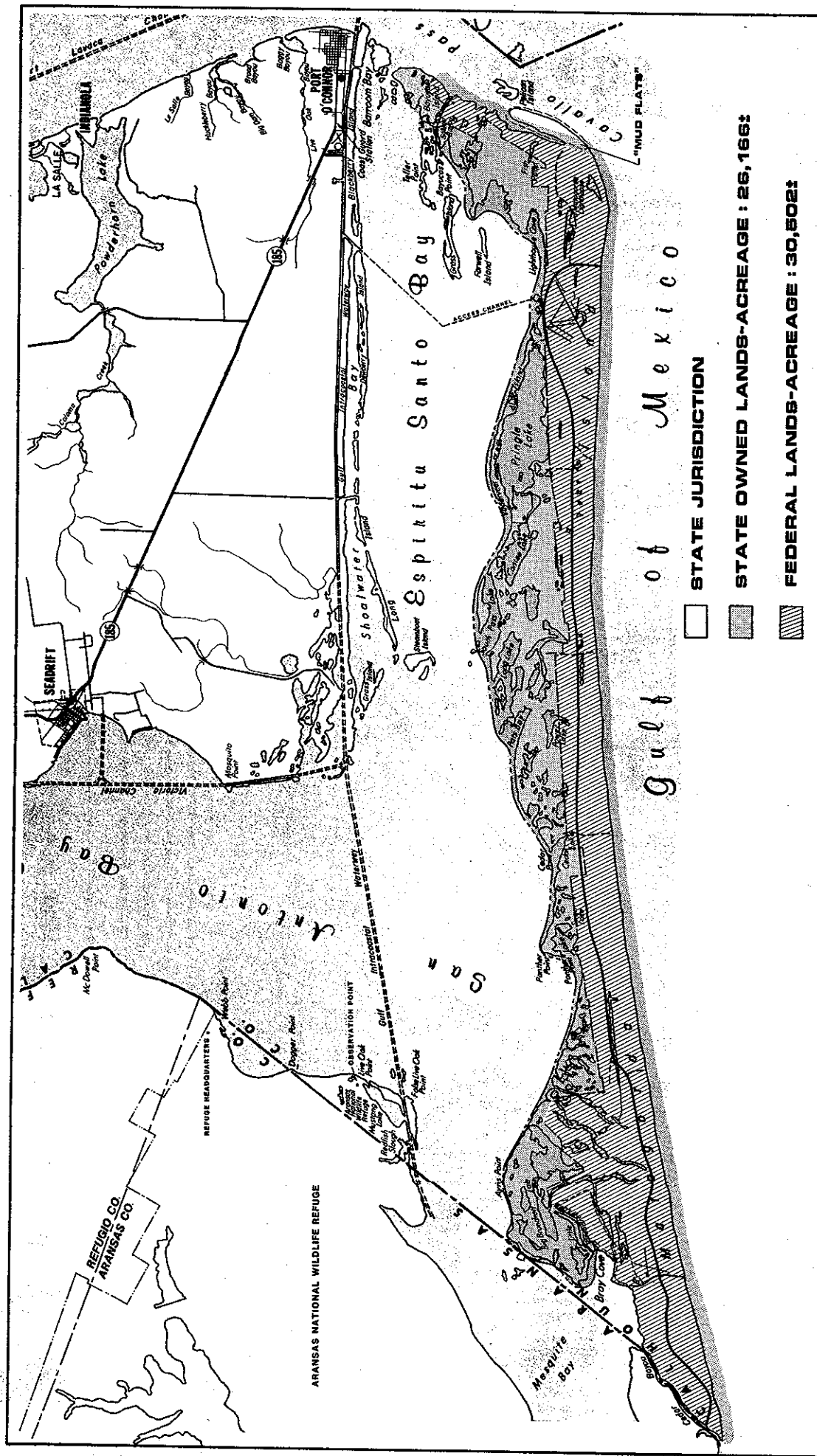
- A Alligators and many migratory birds are found in association with the many scattered inland freshwater ponds and freshwater marsh areas. Infrequently, alligators have been observed on the gulfside beaches and in the surf.
- B Exposed shell beds at Panther Point and Cedar Point are heavily utilized as feeding and resting areas by white and brown pelicans, black skimmers, least terns, and various shorebird species.
- C Redheads congregate in large flocks on inland marshes.
- D The protected backwater slough in the "3-Hook" sand spit at the mouth of Cavallo Pass is heavily utilized as a feeding and resting area by white pelicans, cormorants, and reddish egrets.
- E White sand flats located between the lighthouse and the mouth of Cavallo Pass are used for nesting by least terns, black skimmers, and black-necked stilts.
- F Peregrine falcons exhibit a preference for gulfside beaches during stopovers in migration; however, these birds have been observed throughout the Island in association with structures suitable for use as hunting perches.
- G The concrete apron and northwestern portion of concrete runways at the defunct airfield and adjacent sand flats are used for nesting by least terns.
- H Isolated stands of salt cedar and mesquite are heavily utilized for roosting and resting cover by a multitude of avian species including black-crowned night herons, barn owls, and great blue herons.
- I The drift line debris between primary and secondary dunes provide valuable cover for numerous reptiles including a protected milk snake.
- J The Gulf beach, fore-dune, and bayside marshes are used by piping plovers.
- K Franklin gulls use islands in Pringle Lake for nesting.
- L Inland pond used as roost for sandhill cranes.
- M Shallows and flats within the levees are heavily used for feeding by large concentrations of herons, reddish and other egrets, shorebirds, roseate spoonbills, gulls, and terns.
- N Gulf passes and adjacent shoreline are heavily used as feeding areas by herons, reddish and other egrets, brown and white pelicans, and shorebirds.



MATAGORDA ISLAND

WHOOPING CRANE HABITAT/USE MAP

3



Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge and State Natural Area

aside where even naturally occurring wildfires will be suppressed so that a no-burn control area is available.

There are no areas on Matagorda Island which would qualify for review as wilderness.

3. Economic Uses

A number of outstanding mineral, oil, and gas reservations occur on the Island (refer to page 4. for a list of these permits). Requests for seismic surveys, drilling, pipeline rights-of-way, etc., will be referred to the appropriate agency. (On lands owned by FWS, the Albuquerque Regional Office, and on lands owned by the State of Texas, GLO will handle these requests.) FWS, TPWD, and GLO will work with mineral and energy companies to minimize potential adverse impacts on wildlife through the design of infrastructure, timing of operations, mitigation, etc.

There are currently no permits for economic uses such as bee-hives, haying, etc. The only economic uses of the Island which would be allowed might be concessions for the operation of the shuttle and bicycle rental. No sale concessions will be allowed on the Island. Ferry operators will be encouraged to sell Island essentials (such as sun block, insect repellent, water) on the boat or at their mainland facility. Cattle grazing by permittee would be considered if a need to manage habitat through grazing were ever identified. As with other management techniques, habitat management by grazing would only be considered if it could be demonstrated to benefit endangered or threatened species or migratory birds, as well as the Island ecosystem. See the "Economic Uses ODR," page 7.59, for more information.

Waterfowl (ducks and Canada geese) hunting and fishing will be allowed in the bay and marsh, subject to season and bag limits. Water borne and land-based entry into critical whooping crane use areas will be monitored. Especially sensitive sites may be seasonally or temporarily closed if necessary. Routine waterfowl hunting and fishing are not expected to cause significant deleterious disturbance to whooping cranes. All public uses will be monitored to minimize conflicts. Increased efforts will be made to educate the waterfowl hunting community about the presence of whooping cranes in waterfowl hunting areas on Matagorda Island.

Hunting for deer, doves, quail, and hogs will be continued in areas designated by TWPD and FWS, and will be evaluated annually to determine the extent of opportunity available. The public will be advised of the hunting program to be offered each year through information provided by TPWD. FWS will also make this information available. Hunters will be required to attend a hunter orientation to advise them of limitations on hunts required to protect other wildlife species. Hunting programs will be monitored to ensure that the activity will not adversely affect Federally listed species or other public uses.

If it becomes necessary to reduce the deer herd in the environmental education/interpretive zones, certain public use activities within these areas may be curtailed temporarily to allow for a controlled hunt. These exceptions will be detailed in the annual operations plan.

G. Administration

1. Cultural Resources

All Island archeological sites will be "preserved in place" and protected from vandalism. Matagorda Island has a number of historic sites on the north end of the Island (described in section "III. Refuge Description"); which will be protected. The Matagorda Lighthouse and other aspects of Island history will be interpreted for the public.

2. Special Status Lands

The provisions of this Plan are that the entire Island will be under a "minimal tool" habitat management approach. Areas will be reviewed for nomination as Research Natural Areas. At a minimum, one beach-to-bay area currently called the "Conservation Area" will continue to be set aside where no manipulation will be implemented and only natural processes will be allowed. This area will be considered for formal Research Natural Area designation. It will provide a control area to compare to manipulated areas, both on and off the Island. An additional area will also be set

Island's environmental education or research programs. The Wynne Ranch House may also be used for conservation-oriented meetings and meetings of State or Federal agencies. The Nature Conservancy will also assist in rehabilitating and maintaining the Wynne Environmental Education/Research Center for use by TPWD, GLO, and FWS in providing public interpretation and environmental education programs. In return for providing these services, The Nature Conservancy will be allowed to use the Wynne Ranch House for fund raising activities in support of their on-going conservation efforts and as a small retreat center in order to recover some operating costs. (For more details about the agreement, refer to the environmental education Objective Documentation Record and to the cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy and FWS, TPWD, and GLO.)

2. Recreation

Access to various public use destinations will be via the TPWD shuttle, hiking, boat, and bicycles. No private motorized vehicles will be allowed on the Island.

The Island offers a variety of quality recreational opportunities, including wildlife observation, fishing, hunting, camping, and photography. Designated and maintained camping areas on the beach and inland will include toilet facilities. Outdoor rinse showers may be provided at selected locations. Primitive camping and backpacking will be permitted in designated areas.

Public use in all areas will be monitored and adjusted to minimize impact to the Island's natural (especially endangered species) and cultural resources. Trail access from the south dock to Cedar Bayou will be improved. Trails, observation structures, and a scheduled shuttle system will enhance opportunities for wildlife observation and photography. TPWD will work with FWS and potential concessionaires or business ventures to provide an agreeable and suitable passenger ferry system between the mainland and the Island.

Designated portions of the Island will be open for hunting and fishing in accordance with the annual operations plan. With the exception of bayside waterfowl hunting, all hunting programs on the Island will be conducted through a central control point. No recreational hunting will be allowed on the two environmental education/interpretive zones. Deer hunters, and waterfowl hunters wishing to hunt upland ponds, will be required to register for assigned blinds and/or hunting areas. The annual operations plan will detail appropriate hunting areas, target harvest goals, and support facilities to be provided.

coastal barrier island ecology. Visitor contact points, the shuttle day use, and overnight facilities will be accessible by the disabled where feasible.

No fees will be charged for entrance on the Island. Fees may be charged, however, to defray actual expenses for special programs and services. TPWD may charge reasonable fees for on-Island shuttle services or other special services provided.

Critical habitat areas for whooping cranes may be considered for closure to given activities during the period of October through April (when cranes are present), if necessary to protect this bird. The decision to close the area would be based on the findings of the public use monitoring program.

1. Interpretation and Environmental Education

The FWS & TPWD will work cooperatively to provide interpretation and environmental education activities on Matagorda Island with TPWD having the overall lead for these activities. A visitor contact point(s) on the mainland will provide information concerning Island activities and wildlife species. Docking facilities on the north and south ends of the Island will be available to operational staff and visitors. A visitor center on the north end will include administrative office space, exhibits, and interpretive information. A visitor contact station on the south end will be constructed near the expanded dock facilities. These contact points will inform the visitor of activities available, rules, locations, and important interpretive facts. Visitors will obtain access to various areas on the Island through a shuttle and trail system originating from these visitor contact point(s). The Matagorda Lighthouse area and marshland levee system will be targeted initially for self-guided interpretive trails. Two environmental education/interpretive zones have been designated. These two zones will be reserved for non-consumptive recreational activities.

Environmental education will be emphasized on Matagorda Island. The Island's environmental education program will provide a structured course of study, involving hands-on field activity and/or classroom instruction. TPWD will have the lead in designing the program, developing the curriculum to be used in the program, and in encouraging schools and other groups to participate in the program. FWS will help with developing the program and curriculum, and will teach some workshops. In addition, through an innovative agreement with a private organization, The Nature Conservancy will help in program and curriculum development, and will host environmental education workshops. The Nature Conservancy will also rehabilitate and maintain the Wynne Ranch House and Duplex (old staff quarters). The Duplex will be used for The Nature Conservancy staff housing. The Wynne Ranch House may be used by groups participating in the

F. Public Use Management

A visit to Matagorda Island will be a special experience provided through a cooperative effort by TPWD, FWS, and in some cases The Nature Conservancy, with TPWD having the lead for public uses of the Island. The unique nature of this Refuge and State Natural Area will be apparent immediately, as access is by boat only. No causeway, highway, bridge, vehicular ferry, public airport, or similar mode of transportation providing land access to the Island is permitted. Currently, public access to the Island is dependent upon private individuals who own boats and private charter boats. Passenger ferry service to the Island could provide additional access. The existing channels are adequate for shallow draft boats.

A scheduled, on-Island shuttle service, foot travel, and bicycles will provide visitor access to important environmental education, interpretation, and recreational sites. Visitors will not be allowed to use personal motorized vehicles on the Island. The intent is to provide programming and facilities which provide a balance of active and passive outdoor interpretive nature study and environmental appreciation, as well as meeting recreational need for water-oriented activities.

Activities available to the public will include: a mainland visitor center(s); a visitor contact center and a visitor contact station on the Island; guided walking tours; environmental education workshops; a shuttle system on the Island, accompanied by a guide who will explain the coastal barrier ecosystem; self-guided interpretive trails; camping with limited facilities and primitive camping; bike riding on designated trails; hiking and backpacking by permit; fishing; hunting; and shelling. The educational/interpretive activities themselves, and information provided for an activity, will be oriented toward the unique features of the coastal barrier island ecosystem.

All activities and facilities will be designed to protect the Island's natural resources. Public uses will be continually monitored to determine their magnitude and impact on whooping cranes, migratory bird use, and other Island wildlife.

Materials for public activities will be designed cooperatively and produced by TPWD. All staff involved in conducting public activities will be trained in

E. Population Management

In general, management of wildlife on Matagorda Island will center on surveying population numbers and/or distribution, and protecting wildlife from undue deleterious disturbance. Deleterious disturbance factors will be limited by educating the public, directing most public use to designated trails, providing guided tours, and designating some important use areas closed seasonally to public use. A 1-year study will be initiated to study the impact of airboats on wildlife species. No direct manipulation of most wildlife populations, such as providing nest structures, etc, will be done. Exceptions are noted below.

In general, the habitat management approach outlined above is expected to have the following impacts on Matagorda Island's existing wildlife populations:

Federally listed endangered and threatenend species are expected to maintain current population numbers or increase. All population numbers of Federal and State endangered and threatened species will be monitored. If monitoring indicates population declines in Federally or State listed species, management steps to meet Plan objectives would be discussed and agreed to by FWS and TPWD.

Those species which are naturally major components of the coastal barrier island ecosystem--wintering waterfowl, and resident and wintering raptors, shorebirds, songbirds, and mammals (such as coyotes and hispid cotton rats) will maintain roughly current numbers.

There may be a decrease in the population numbers of those wildlife species which either do not naturally occur on a coastal barrier island or are found naturally on barrier islands in relatively low numbers. For example, turkeys (which did not occur naturally on the Island) and quail (which was not a major component of the Island ecosystem) numbers may decline somewhat over time. The turkey population could possibly be extirpated eventually, as coastal barrier islands do not naturally supply turkey habitat needs. However, turkeys are still reproducing on the Island after artifical roosting and feeding structures were removed. The reduced population numbers of these species will better reflect the natural role these animals may have occupied on Matagorda and other coastal barrier islands.

Coastal barrier islands are relatively simple ecosystems. Nevertheless, natural processes such as drought, tropical storms, tidal surges, and lightening fires create a disclimax mosaic on these islands. Wind, tidal surges, and waves are probably the processes which naturally have the greatest impact on a coastal barrier island ecosystem. Natural fires, probably most common with late spring and summer thunderstorms, played a secondary role. Little information is available regarding the extent of the role of fire in these ecosystems, but natural fire was a factor on Matagorda Island and other coastal barrier islands.

Matagorda Island will continue to be affected by these natural processes. In addition, prescribed burns will be used as needed to ensure habitat diversity in the barrier flats on the Island, to meet endangered and threatened species and migratory bird objectives. Prescribed fires are the management tool of choice to create successional stages, because fire is the easiest natural process to replicate on the Island. Prescribed burns are also effective, inexpensive, and require no developments. Thus, prescribed fire fits the minimal tool guideline stated previously. Prescribed fire is the only habitat management tool specified by this Plan; other techniques could be used as needed to support objectives for Federally and State listed endangered or threatened species or migratory birds.

The majority of wildlife species on the Island are found in the bayside marshes and along the Gulf beach. The number of upland wildlife species typically found on a coastal barrier island are small compared to the marshes or beachfront, as island barrier flats are relatively simple communities. However, the prescribed fires in the barrier flats and natural disturbances from storms etc., will provide disclimax communities within the barrier flats/upland grasslands communities. Thus, those wildlife species needing particular disclimax stages will find habitat on Matagorda Island.

Under this habitat management approach, the distribution, abundance, and composition of those biological components (plants and wildlife) typically found on coastal barrier islands should be better represented on Matagorda Island than under a more aggressive habitat management approach using additional tools. This approach is derived from the goals and objectives of the national wildlife refuge system and the number three goal developed for Matagorda Island, "preserve the coastal barrier island ecosystem and encourage natural diversity."

Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge and State Natural Area

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5. Many artificial structures, such as fences, windmills, and bombing towers, etc., will be eliminated. However, some artificial structures, such as posts and poles, may be left as perching poles, etc., if deemed to be directly beneficial to endangered species and migratory birds.
 6. To the extent possible, while meeting management goals for endangered species and migratory birds, wildlife and plant resources will be managed as communities. Management aimed at creating healthy plant and animal communities will generally provide the greatest, long-term benefit to listed species as well. Non-indigenous species will be controlled as needed to maintain healthy populations of indigenous wildlife and plant species.
 7. In keeping with policies of the FWS's National Wildlife Refuge System, wildlife and habitat are the top priority, but there are important opportunities for public use of Matagorda Island. Public uses allowed on the Island will be compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established, as well as consistent with the wildlife goals and objectives of this Plan. Matagorda Island provides an opportunity to introduce the public to the resource values inherent in a natural coastal barrier island. Interpretation and recreation activities will focus on the unique natural and historic resources of the Island rather than facilities.

To facilitate detailed planning and operations, three Island zones are designated. These zones are based on the public uses to be allowed in each zone. See Map 5, "Facility Use and Special Public Use Areas."

D. Habitat Management

Throughout the entire Island, reliance on natural processes and natural diversity of plant communities will be emphasized. Habitat used by endangered and threatened species (Federal or State listed) and migratory birds may require manipulative techniques to achieve objectives for these species. The natural/minimal tool concept will apply to all habitat management, to the extent possible.

A major management activity for all habitat types will be vegetation monitoring. The vegetation monitoring program, in the past conducted separately by FWS and TPWD, will be coordinated so that the same techniques are used Island wide. The photo point and robel pole program used on the southside will be combined with the TPWD line transects monitoring system, and this unified system will cover the entire Island. A survey to determine the existence of threatened and endangered plants will be conducted. If federally or state listed plants are found, an important aim of the ongoing monitoring effort will be to ensure the health and distribution of listed plant species on the Island.

game stocking, and grazing. Within the last 5 years TPWD, and more recently FWS, shifted to a less manipulative management approach.

Wildlife diversity and abundance on Matagorda varies on a spatial and temporal scale. At any time of the year and at any location on the Island, numbers and species of wildlife may be extraordinary; at other times, the diversity and abundance can be minimal. Waterfowl, shorebird, and songbird concentrations are tremendous during the spring and fall migrations, but during the summer months, these groups are represented by only a few species. Regardless of management efforts, this temporal and spatial arrangement exists; the wildlife species associated with coastal barrier islands evolved and adapted to this situation.

The recent international recognition, support, and management of ecosystems illustrates the importance of maintaining biodiversity, not only in the context of diverse assemblages of plant and animal species, but in preservation of ecosystems as well. Matagorda's relative isolation and lack of fragmentation provides the medium for managing within a systems approach. To illustrate this philosophy, the following concepts are incorporated in the comprehensive management plan. These concepts provide the critical framework to protect, preserve, and when necessary, enhance wildlife populations and their habitats on Matagorda Island:

1. Matagorda is one of the few coastal barrier islands fronting the United States coastline which is considered to be in a relatively undisturbed state. The Island manifests all the natural components necessary to permit a coastal barrier island to function as an ecosystem. The Island's wildlife diversity is a direct result of the ecosystem processes.
2. Management programs will ensure that an ecosystem/community concept is integrated into each program. This will be the unifying concept binding all efforts toward protecting and managing Matagorda Island. (This strategy will not prevent FWS or TPWD from implementing actions necessary to protect, enhance, and maintain endangered species and migratory birds and their habitats.)
3. The plan ensures representative types of barrier island plant communities are maintained and natural landscapes indicative of such a system are present, with their extent and location determined largely by natural processes.
4. Techniques used to manage habitat or wildlife will replicate natural tools and processes to the extent possible. Whenever possible, the minimal tool required to carry out strategies will be used.

each retain their respective fee titles to lands currently owned by each agency; easements providing management authority and activities have been exchanged. These easements are a part of the Memorandum of Agreement that authorizes and guides the cooperative management relationship between GLO, TPWD, and FWS.

In addition, a franchisee (currently The Nature Conservancy) will manage the Wynne Ranch House according to the terms of a cooperative agreement. This structure was built by the Wynne family as a ranch headquarters, retreat, and entertainment facility. The Wynne Ranch House will be used for environmental education, The Nature Conservancy group fund raising, and meeting facilities for FWS, TPWD, GLO, and The Nature Conservancy, and for other authorized visitor groups. The three Government agencies agree that a cooperative arrangement with a private group for management of the Wynne Ranch House (including maintaining the building and grounds, organizing and conducting the activities to be held there, and providing meals and lodging for overnight activities) would be an appropriate means of conserving and using this building without draining agency resources. (The Nature Conservancy will have no management authority over Island lands.) FWS has the lead in developing the agreement and coordinating activities with this non-profit group. TPWD and GLO must concur with the agreement.

Thus, there are two State agencies and one Federal agency working cooperatively to conserve and manage the unique resources of Matagorda Island. The activities of these entities will be guided by the goals, objectives, and management strategies contained in this Comprehensive Management Plan.

C. Management Guidelines

This Plan recognizes the importance and necessity of managing Matagorda Island as an ecosystem, giving consideration to all of the species associated with such a system. The Plan places priority on endangered and threatened species (both Federal and State listed) and migratory birds dependent upon Matagorda and ensures the protection needed to guarantee their survival. At the same time, the plan recognizes the importance of the Island to other wildlife species and places management priority on those species typically found on Gulf coastal barrier islands.

Matagorda has long been recognized for its wildlife values, but only recently has the Island received management consideration for its holistic values as a coastal barrier island. Historical documentation of wildlife on Matagorda centered primarily on the Island's importance as wintering habitat for waterfowl and whooping cranes. Past management efforts, primarily by the Air Force, were directed toward enhancing wildlife diversity and increasing populations of game animals by discing, plowing, mowing, planting of exotics,

VI. LONG RANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A. Introduction

This section describes the habitat, wildlife, and public use management and development programs which constitute the comprehensive management plan for Matagorda Island. The Long Range Management Strategy translates the goals and objectives listed in this comprehensive management plan into Island management programs and ties these diverse programs together.

Specific management plans will be developed for some activities (such as a Prescribed Burn Management Plan) which must be planned in greater detail. The Long Range Management Strategy provides guidance for these activity management plans.

Note that the management programs outlined below are detailed further in Section VIII., in the individual Objective Documentation Records, starting on page 7.1. In Section VII, the rationale for each plan objective is given, along with more detailed information on how each objective will be achieved.

B. Unique Features of Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge and State Natural Area

Matagorda Island is unique in many ways. This Island provides a singular opportunity to preserve a complete barrier island ecosystem. Matagorda is one of the few barrier islands in the nation having large areas in an essentially undeveloped state, in part due to the Island's remote location and access only by boat. The natural resource values of Matagorda Island are important and well documented, including its use by the endangered whooping crane and five other Federally endangered species. The Island ecosystem is healthy and demonstrates the physical and biological processes which form a coastal barrier island. In addition to the natural features of the Island, there are significant scenic, historic, and cultural resources.

An innovative approach to preserving and managing this special resource combines the efforts of FWS, TPWD, and GLO. These three agencies will work cooperatively: FWS has responsibility in managing the Island's natural resources, its habitat and wildlife; TPWD has the lead in managing the public uses of the Island; and GLO is responsible for ensuring that uses of the lands owned by the state of Texas and leased to FWS will be in keeping with the policies of the GLO. Both the FWS and TPWD will have staff on the Island, including a manager from each agency who will oversee each agency's respective activities. These two managers and a GLO representative will meet frequently and regularly to coordinate Island activities. Regardless of who has the lead for a given activity, there will be extensive cooperation in carrying out Island programs. All programs will be mutually supportive. FWS and GLO will

COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN SUMMARY

These excerpts are photocopied directly from the draft Comprehensive Management Plan. This summary covers the proposed Memorandum of Agreement and the Cooperative Agreement between FWS and The Nature Conservancy, in addition to the Comprehensive Management Plan strategies for wildlife, habitat, and public use.

Calhoun County Main Library
301 South Ann
Port Lavaca, Texas

Bay City Main Library
1900 5th Street
Bay City, Texas

University of Texas Undergraduate Library
F1 Academic Center Building on West Mall
Austin, Texas

Texas A&I University Undergraduate Library
University Blvd to circle
Kingsville, Texas

You may also request copies of these drafts when you return the enclosed mailer.

You Are Invited to Comment

A question and answer open house will be held in Port Lavaca at Bauer Community Center on Tuesday, June 19, 1990, from 1 to 8 p.m. The address is 2300 Highway 35 Bypass (toward Galveston from Port Lavaca). Representatives from FWS, TPWD, and GLO will answer questions regarding Matagorda Island. We will accept written comments, only, at the open house.

A public meeting will be held in Port Lavaca at Bauer Community Center (address above) on Wednesday, June 20, 1990, at 7 p.m. People interested in commenting on the MOA, draft Comprehensive Management Plan, draft Environmental Assessment, or the TNC agreement are welcome to attend.

A second public meeting will be held in Austin on Thursday, June 21, 1990, at 7 p.m. The location will be the Stephen F. Austin Building, conference room 118, 1700 North Congress Avenue.

You may also mail your comments to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Minda Stillings, Refuge Planner
P.O. Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103-1306

The deadline for all comments is Friday, June 29, 1990.

appropriate for Matagorda Island.

Your comments will be considered during the revision process--together with the many other factors which shape Island management--in forming alternative objectives and land uses for the Island.

What Happens Next?

After the comment period, we will tabulate your responses. We will furnish a copy of this tabulation to everyone who requests to remain on our mailing list. After the planning documents are revised, we will distribute another Planning Bulletin which will explain what changes were made, and why. The Bulletin will also outline final comment opportunities.

Documents Available For Review

Representatives from FWS, TPWD, and GLO have prepared a proposed MOA and developed a draft Comprehensive Management Plan for Matagorda Island. These documents provide long-term direction for the Island's management, administration, and operations. A draft Environmental Assessment describes several management responsibility alternatives. Also available is a draft agreement between FWS and TNC, covering the use of the Wynne Ranch House.

The enclosed excerpts from the Comprehensive Management Plan provide a summary of these documents. The complete drafts are available for review at the following locations:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Parks and Wildlife Library
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas

General Land Office
Stephen F. Austin Building
1700 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 100
(6 miles south of Austwell on FM 2040)
Austwell, Texas

Houston Main Public Library
500 McKinney Avenue
Houston, Texas

Austin Main Public Library
8th & Guadalupe
Austin, Texas

Victoria Main Public Library
302 North Main
Victoria, Texas

Corpus Christi Main Public Library
805 Commanche
Corpus Christi, Texas

Texas A&M Undergraduate Library
College Station, Texas

Four broad goals guide the operation of the entire System and are applicable to Matagorda Island:

1. To preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with extinction. Matagorda Island provides habitat for 13 threatened or endangered species.
2. To perpetuate the migratory bird resource. Matagorda Island provides nesting, resting, and wintering areas for large numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, and raptors.
3. To preserve the natural diversity and abundance of plants and animals. Matagorda Island provides homes for a variety of resident wildlife species. Barrier island vegetative communities and natural lands will be maintained.
4. To provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and people's role in the environment, and to provide visitors with high-quality, safe, wholesome, and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife. The proposed cooperative management approach gives TPWD the lead for developing and conducting compatible public use programs, including interpretation, environmental education, and recreation.

The Island's 26,000 acres of state land are primarily in marshlands and wet beach areas. They are dedicated to the state's Permanent School Fund and are managed under the Coastal Public Lands Management Act of 1973. The primary goals of the Coastal Public Lands Management Act that relate to Matagorda Island are:

1. The natural resources of the surface estate shall be preserved in their natural state for the protection and nurture of all types of marine life and wildlife.
2. Uses which the public at large may enjoy and in which they may participate shall take priority over those uses which are limited to fewer individuals.

How the Information You Provide Will be Used

Many of you have already commented during past planning efforts for Matagorda Island, and/or during the acquisition of various portions of the Island. The planning team and decision-makers for the three agencies considered these prior comments while drafting the planning documents. Now you are being invited to evaluate the responsiveness of the draft plan to your concerns. You will see whether your suggestions were incorporated into the drafts. A clear rationale for the proposals should be evident. If your suggestion was not included, you may request an explanation in writing or at either of the public meetings. We will be pleased to answer questions you may have about the proposed management of Matagorda Island. If you have new information or ideas, please offer them! Finally, the three agencies want to know if you think that the proposed management approach is

1. FWS will have the lead responsibility for wildlife and habitat management for the entire Island.
2. TPWD will have the responsibility for providing compatible public use and environmental education for the entire Island.
3. GLO will retain jurisdiction over all coastal public lands on Matagorda Island.

With the objective of managing the Island under one cooperative plan, the agencies drafted a Comprehensive Management Plan which ensures that the Island will be managed to preserve and protect endangered species while accommodating and enhancing opportunities for compatible public uses.

The Comprehensive Management Plan discusses programs for wildlife habitat and populations management. It also identifies public use and facilities for the Island, such as interpretive trails, a shuttle system, camping areas, and hunting and fishing opportunities. A summary of this Comprehensive Management Plan is enclosed.

Planning Process

A planning team was formed to study Matagorda Island and recommend the future direction for the Island. The team is made up of representatives from GLO, FWS, and TPWD. The team will carefully consider public comments and respond, to the fullest extent possible, to the concerns and needs of the public. We invite you to share your interests and concerns about the future of Matagorda Island.

Planning Considerations

As plans are developed for Matagorda Island, many constraints will shape management decisions, such as existing laws and policies governing the National Wildlife Refuge System and State Natural Areas. It is important to realize that, although Matagorda is an integral part of the community, it also serves national and statewide purposes and constituencies. These perspectives will have an important impact on decisions made during planning.

The legal foundation of the National Wildlife Refuge System mandates that its primary purpose is wildlife conservation. Thus, only those uses consistent with wildlife objectives for a given refuge may be permitted. Matagorda Island was acquired under two different authorities. The 19,000+-acre north end was acquired under 16 USC Transfer Act to support the national migratory bird management program. The south end of the Island was purchased under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act for endangered species (especially the whooping crane).

Refuge Planning Bulletin

Matagorda Island...Edition 1



A NEW APPROACH FOR MATAGORDA ISLAND

About Matagorda Island

Matagorda Island (Island) is a barrier island situated along the Coastal Bend of Texas in Calhoun County. The Island provides a singular opportunity to preserve a complete barrier island ecosystem. Matagorda Island is one of the few barrier islands in the United States which remains in an essentially natural state, in part due to the Island's remote location and public access only by boat. The natural resource values of the Island are important and well documented, including its use by the endangered whooping crane and 12 other endangered and threatened species. State-listed threatened and endangered species such as white-tailed hawk, reddish egret, white-faced ibis, and sooty tern are known to the Island. Migrating birds such as the following use the area: redheads, sandhill cranes, 16 species of wading birds and thousands of waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds. Texas coast resident species, such as the mottled duck, also occur.

Current Management

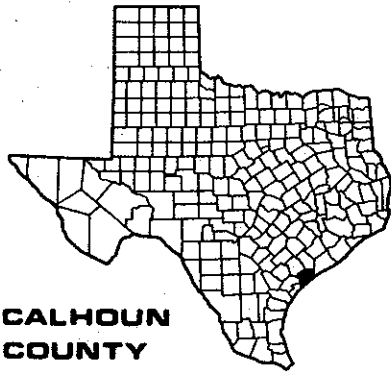
The northern part of the Island, currently known as Matagorda Island State Park and Wildlife Management Area, is being managed under the terms of a 1982 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the State of Texas and the Department of Interior. This MOA combined management of 19,000 Federal acres and 24,893 State acres. Texas' role was authorized by an Act of the Texas Legislature in 1979. The Act provides for operation of the facility for public recreational and wildlife conservation purposes and further provides that tideland and submerged land be part of the area. This end of the Island is open 7 days a week to fishing, camping in designated campgrounds, water sports, and nature study. Hunting is authorized during specific seasons.

The south end of the Island, consisting of 11,502 acres, was recently acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Until completion of a Comprehensive Management Plan, refuge management is limited to protecting wildlife and wildlands. Public use is restricted.

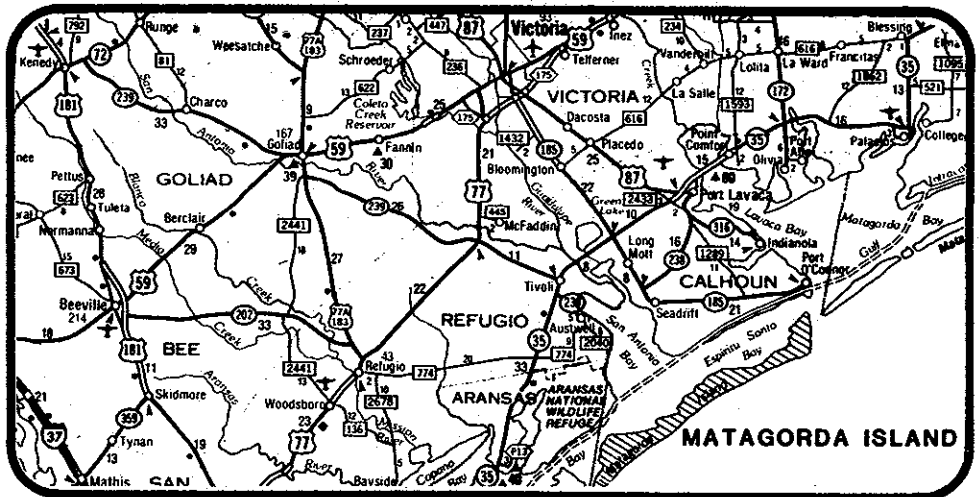
Future Possibilities

FWS, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), and the Texas General Land Office (GLO) have concluded preliminary negotiations on a new agreement for the management of Matagorda Island. (This agreement replaces the 1982 MOA which has guided the management of the Island for the past 8 years.) Creation of this new agreement was stimulated by FWS acquisition of the Wynne Ranch property from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) completed in 1988.

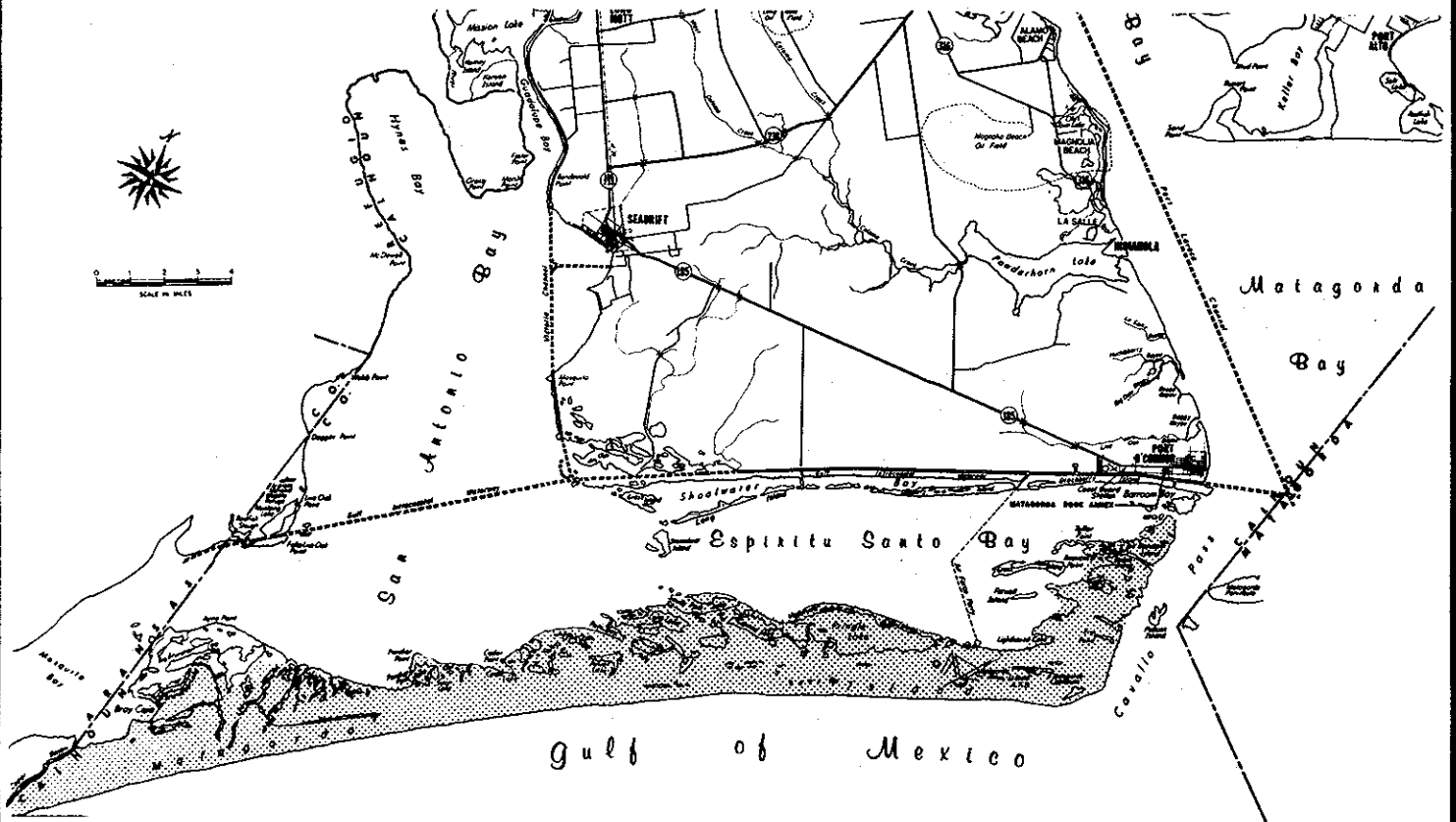
The proposed MOA would amend current agreements and provide for cooperative and integrated management of the entire Island. Management would occur through a formalized partnership among TPWD, FWS, and GLO. The partnership arrangement will be based on a division of functional roles and responsibilities:



**CALHOUN
COUNTY**



MATAGORDA ISLAND



PROJECT LOCATION MAP

MATAGORDA ISLAND

Refuge Planning Bulletin



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INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas General Land Office, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are proposing a new approach to the management of Matagorda Island. When completed, documents now being drafted will provide long-term direction for the Island. These documents propose a new management relationship between the three agencies and also outline specific goals, objectives, and strategies for wildlife, habitat, and public use programs on the Island.

The three agencies wish to ensure that future management of Matagorda Island accommodates the needs and desires of the public, to the extent that laws and regulations allow. Thus, the agencies are actively seeking the opinions of a wide spectrum of the public.

You and/or your organization have indicated an interest in Matagorda Island. We have scheduled public meetings to hear your concerns and response to the draft documents. We invite you to attend!

The enclosed informative bulletin describes the planning and public involvement processes for Matagorda Island, including details about the public meetings and comment period. Also enclosed are excerpts taken directly from the draft Comprehensive Management Plan which the three agencies prepared; this will give you a brief summary of the planning effort.

PLEASE FILL OUT AND RETURN THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS LETTER, so that we can keep you on the mailing list and provide you with further planning information. If for some reason you cannot attend either meeting, but have concerns you'd like to express, you're welcome to write the Fish and Wildlife Service's Refuge Planner (see bulletin for address). Thank you for your interest in Matagorda Island and we hope to hear from you!

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Texas General Land Office
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service