

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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## WILDLIFE REFUGE AT SPACE CENTER BEING EXPANDED

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel announced today that Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, within the area used by the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, is being enlarged by 25,830 acres to a total of 83,796 acres.

The agreement between the Department of the Interior and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration puts all but the Space Center's most intensively used land within the refuge.

The wildlife sanctuary, established in 1963, is a buffer between missile launching sites on Merritt Island and the mainland. It is administered by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Expansion means that greater protection will be afforded southern bald eagles and other wildlife. Once the island had one of the densest eagle populations on Florida's east coast, but land development and other activities depleted this population severely until NASA began acquiring land. About 15 eagles are believed to use the area at the present time.

Among other species using the refuge are herons, red-tailed hawks, peregrine falcons, and dusky seaside sparrows. The area's shallow, fresh water impoundments and salt water creeks and lagoons also provide desirable wintering habitat for waterfowl. More than 20 species of ducks are there in the winter.

Mammals on the refuge include white-tail deer, bobcats, raccoons, opossums, otters, and armadillos. Alligators inhabit portions of the area and poisonous snakes are present, including the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, the cottonmouth or moccasin, and the coral snake.

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