

# Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area



## Recreation Guide

Your guide to hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing

## What You Can Do

Indulge your passion for adventure at Babcock-Webb. Wide-open vistas of undeveloped pine flatwoods create a scenic backdrop for a range of outdoor pursuits. Everyone from hunters and anglers to hikers and birdwatchers share a love of conservation and the outdoors, and a respect for the land and each other. Come explore!

### Planning Your Visit

There is something to do year-round at Babcock-Webb, whether your favorite time of year is winter quail season, spring bird migration or fall wildflower display in the flatwoods. Find all the information you need to plan your trip by visiting [MyFWC.com/Recreation](http://MyFWC.com/Recreation). Note that hunts occur on scheduled days, in specific areas. Wear bright orange clothing if you use trails during a hunt. Planning a picnic? Share your snacks with friends, not wildlife. Animals accustomed to human food can become dangerous.



### Wildlife Viewing

Babcock-Webb's expansive vistas offer good opportunities for wildlife viewers, particularly in the early morning and evening. White-tailed deer and alligators are often spotted. Watch and listen for red-shouldered hawks, northern bobwhites, ground doves and eastern meadowlarks at this Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail site ([floridabirdingtrail.com](http://floridabirdingtrail.com)). Busy groups of

federally endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers may be found in the vicinity of their nest trees, marked with white bands by biologists. During the April to July nesting season, keep 70–80 feet (the length of a semi-trailer truck) from these trees. A variety of Florida's wading birds (including sandhill cranes, ibis, egrets and herons) may be spotted in the open waters or marshy edges of Webb Lake and in wetlands throughout the area. Look aloft for bald eagles, osprey, swallow-tailed kites, and black and turkey vultures. Also expect the gamut of woodpeckers and a nice selection of breeding warblers (pine, palm and prairie warblers, parula, and common yellowthroat).



### Hiking and Biking

Thirty-seven miles of mostly unpaved roads allow you to experience Babcock-Webb at your own pace. A two-mile nature trail passes ponds and marshes popular with alligators and wading birds. Roads and trails may be soggy during rainy times of year.

### Camping

Primitive sites are available at the Webb Lake campground during hunting season (see map on reverse side). During the remainder of the year, camping is allowed each weekend from 5 p.m. Friday until 9 p.m. Sunday and on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day.



### Horseback Riding

Follow in the footsteps of the cracker cowboys by exploring the area on horseback. The network of named and numbered roads is open to equestrians and spans a variety of scenic habitats. A group-use site is located at the Field Trial Area. Picnic shelters, grills, restrooms and horse stables may be reserved by calling the area office at (863) 648-3200.

### Driving on Babcock-Webb

During hunting season (approximately mid-October through mid-January) the entire area is open to vehicle access. At other times of year, you can drive only on designated roads in the recreation area shown on the map. A scenic driving tour with interpretive signs and shady picnic tables runs along the western border of Webb Lake.

### Hunting

Babcock-Webb is popular with hunters from all over south Florida; peak use is late-October through mid-November. The area's deer population is on the rise due to careful habitat management. Northern bobwhite are hunted on the Field Trial Area from traditional wagons or on horseback. Hunting is also available on the nearby Yucca Pens Unit of Babcock-Webb WMA.

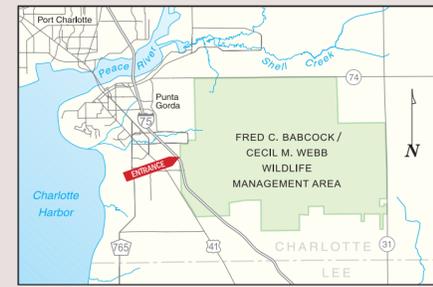


### Shooting Range

A popular activity is target shooting at the Cecil M. Webb Public Shooting Range, where rifle, shotgun and pistol positions are available.

### Fishing

Fish from the pier or banks at 395-acre Webb Lake for largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, speckled perch, black crappie and channel catfish. Fish have been stocked and feeders installed on Webb Lake to help fish grow. Bluegill eight inches or larger are common, and they occasionally exceed 10 inches in length. Catch-and-release is the rule for black bass to protect this outstanding fishery. Check on-site for specific size and bag limits for other species. Three boat ramps provide access for canoes, kayaks and boats; gasoline-powered motors are not allowed. Marl Ponds 1, 2 and 3 provide excellent opportunities for bank fishing.



### How to get to Babcock-Webb

Travel five miles south of Punta Gorda on Interstate 75; take exit 158 (Tucker Grade). At exit ramp, turn east (left) and drive 0.25 mile to area entrance.

### What it costs to visit

A Daily-Use Permit or WMA Permit is required to enter this area. For information on entry fees visit [MyFWC.com/Recreation](http://MyFWC.com/Recreation). To hunt or fish you must possess the appropriate license and permit.

### Need a hunting or fishing license?

Toll-free at (888) HUNT-FLORIDA (486-8356) or (888) FISH-FLORIDA (347-4356), or go to [MyFWC.com/License](http://MyFWC.com/License)

### Area lodging, camping and restaurants

Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce (941) 639-2222; [charlottecountychamber.org](http://charlottecountychamber.org)  
Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor and Convention Bureau (941) 743-1900; [PureFlorida.com](http://PureFlorida.com)

Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (239) 338-3500 or 800-237-6444; [fortmyers-sanibel.com](http://fortmyers-sanibel.com)

### Want to know more?

[MyFWC.com/Recreation](http://MyFWC.com/Recreation)

## Fred C. Babcock/ Cecil M. Webb Wildlife Management Area



### A Journey Through Time

For 10,000 years, the land we know today as the Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area (WMA) lay within the realm of the Calusa Indians, a powerful tribe whose domain stretched across nearly all of southwest Florida. Today, this WMA is one of the few remaining expanses of natural landscape in rapidly urbanizing southwest Florida. Babcock-Webb's significant populations of both rare and common wildlife attract recreational enthusiasts of all descriptions.

Although the Calusa no doubt hunted deer in these flatwoods, they were primarily a maritime people — their villages and towns were located along the Gulf coast and interior rivers and lakes. The Caloosahatchee River ("river of the Calusa") just to the south still bears their name.

Spanish invasion of Florida in the early 1500s proved catastrophic to the Calusa and all of Florida's native peoples. Diseases carried to North America by the European invaders, and later, slave raiding and wars against the Indians, killed or pushed almost all Native Americans out of Florida in just several hundred years.

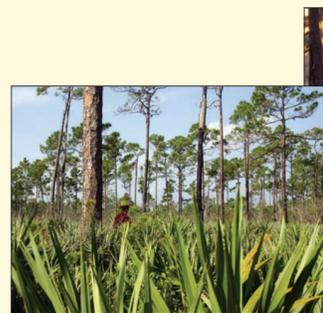
What we think of as the modern development of this region began in 1881 when Hamilton Disston bought 4 million acres of "swamp and overflowed lands" in south Florida. This land was advertised in northern newspapers at unbelievably cheap prices, and cattle, timber and phosphate mining became major industries in the area.

In 1914, Pittsburgh lumberman Edward Babcock bought two townships east of Punta Gorda along Telegraph-Cypress Road for a hunting preserve and a cattle ranch (now part of Babcock-Webb WMA). In 1931 Babcock leased the timber rights on his property. Railroad grades were built throughout the flatwoods to accommodate the lumbering industry, and virtually all old growth pine trees were eventually cut.

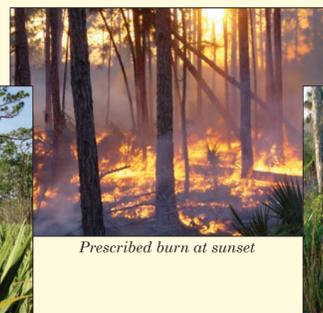
In the late 1930s, the Commission of Game and Fresh Water Fish (predecessor of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC]) began to purchase land for wildlife management and in 1941 purchased 19,200 acres from Fred Babcock (Edward's son). Today, the WMA embraces more than 65,000 acres of outstanding wildlife habitats, including pine flatwoods, hammocks, cypress strands and freshwater marshes.



## Restoration: the forces that make this landscape work



Overgrown palmettos before prescribed burning



Prescribed burn at sunset

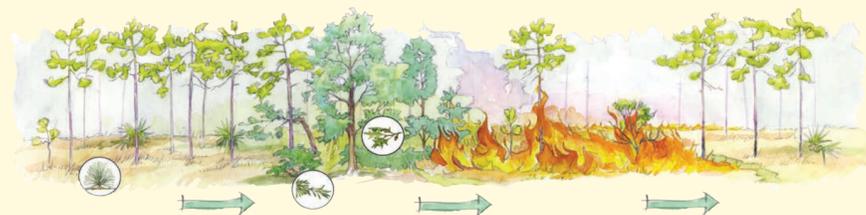


Renewed groundcover five to eight months after burning

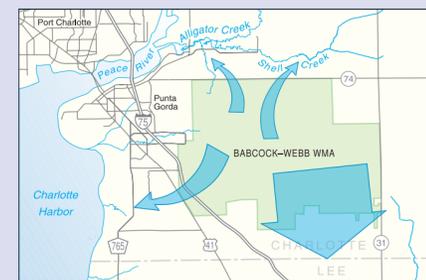
Like many natural communities in Florida, the predominant habitat on Babcock-Webb WMA — slash pine flatwoods — requires periodic fire to maintain its open aspect and stay healthy.

If not for frequent lightning-ignited fires (and in their absence, prescribed burns managed by humans), the airy stands of woods you see here would be thickened and choked with underbrush.

If fire was excluded, numbers of many wildlife species, including northern bobwhite, red-cockaded woodpecker and eastern bluebird, would dramatically drop.



The landscape of Babcock-Webb was sculpted more than a million years ago when an ancient sea receded. The land alternately flooded and dried in response to rainfall fluctuations. Wild animals adapted their nesting and feeding cycles to these seasonal variations, just as they did to cycles of fire. During wet summers, south Florida was a mosaic of interconnected wetlands, home to all manner of water-loving wildlife. Excess water flowed off the land we now know as Babcock-Webb WMA, through interconnecting sloughs and marshes.



Historic water flow across Babcock-Webb WMA

Over the last 100 years the construction of roads, dikes and dams interrupted the natural flow of water over this landscape. This caused unnatural quantities of surface water to back up on Babcock-Webb, flooding wildlife habitat. Today, FWC biologists better understand regional drainage patterns. They work closely with adjacent landowners to set the timing and volume of seasonal flow via existing wetlands and water control structures, thus mimicking natural water movement through the land.



As you explore Babcock-Webb, you may occasionally see tractors and other heavy equipment at work. They may seem out of place in a natural setting, but they are valuable tools biologists use to restore and maintain ecosystems for native plants and animals.



Roller-chopping prior to burning

For example, healthy pine flatwoods feature trees of different ages, adequately spaced so that plenty of sunlight can reach the forest floor. Pine seedlings, a mix of grasses, and scattered, low-growing saw palmettos thrive in these openings. To return flatwoods to this ideal condition, biologists thin crowded forests and open the forest floor by mowing or chopping overgrown palmetto and gallberry thickets prior to burning. This prevents intense, destructive fires, protects adjacent properties and creates conditions suitable for a wide variety of native plants and animals. Managers also remove nonnative invasive plants such as melaleuca, cogon grass and Brazilian pepper.

## What does this wild land grow?

The landscape of Babcock-Webb may appear flat and unchanging, but it is actually a series of ridges rising a mere 20 to 40 feet above sea level. As is true throughout south Florida, this land was formed by sediments laid down at the bottom of an ancient sea.

For a good part of each year, the poorly drained soils of Babcock-Webb may flood. Heavy summer rains accumulate on the land, eventually flowing towards the coast by way of a network of interconnecting sloughs and marshes.



Birders flock here to catch glimpses of pine flatwoods specialties, including brown-headed nuthatches, Bachman's sparrows and federally endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers.

Look for marked pine trees. These are nest trees for the rare red-cockaded woodpecker. During the April to July nesting season, keep 70–80 feet (the length of a semi-trailer truck) from these trees.



Visitors may hike or bike miles of unpaved roads, including Seaboard Grade, the raised bed of the old railroad line. Most of Babcock-Webb sprawls flat under a bright sun, but nature has canopied this quiet path with shady palms and pines.



Webb Lake fishing pier

### Wet Flatwoods

One of the largest expanses of wet flatwoods remaining in Florida unrolls from horizon to horizon on Babcock-Webb. Airy forests of south Florida slash pine stand above saw palmetto, wax myrtle and a wide variety of wildflowers.

### Trams and Roadways

The highest elevations on this area are found on raised trams and roadways constructed during logging operations early in the 1900s.

### Dry Prairie

Dry prairies lack the slash pine overstory of the flatwoods but otherwise share the same diverse groundcover and shrubby plant communities. Covering these treeless plains are grasses such as wiregrass, broomsedge and carpet grass. Palmettos are the most common shrubby plant.

### Freshwater Marsh

Freshwater marshes are often wet year-round. They are clothed with a variety of water-loving plants, including saw grass, pickerel weed, buttonbush and rushes.

### Wet Prairie

Wet prairies resemble grassy meadows and are only seasonally flooded. They bridge the gap between freshwater marshes and pine flatwoods.

### Lakes and Ponds

Six artificial ponds and the 395-acre Webb Lake provide habitat for aquatic species as well as recreational opportunities.

## Cowhunter Heaven

By the 1800s, cattle became the region's king. With wild scrub cattle for the taking and open range that could support large numbers of grazing animals, some early immigrants with only a few dollars in their pockets eventually became rich cattle barons. Cuban buyers paid up to \$15 a head in gold doubloons. Cattle were marked with distinctive brands or earmarks and rounded up by men who called themselves cracker cowboys, a name thought to be derived from the crack of their rawhide whips.

Florida's cowboy era began to change when prominent southwest Florida cattle owners signed a peace treaty of sorts shortly after the turn of the 20th century and fencing became more commonplace.

Cracker cowboys inspired a series of paintings by famous artist Frederic Remington, who visited Punta Gorda in 1895.



### LEGEND

|  |                          |  |                  |
|--|--------------------------|--|------------------|
|  | Interstate               |  | Freshwater Marsh |
|  | Highway                  |  | Wet Flatwoods    |
|  | WMA Multiuse Roads       |  | Pine Flatwoods   |
|  | Improved                 |  | Hammock          |
|  | Unimproved               |  | Dry Prairie      |
|  | Driving Tour             |  | Wet Prairie      |
|  | WMA Boundary             |  | Disturbed Area   |
|  | Recreation Area Boundary |  | Water            |
|  | Gate/Fence               |  |                  |
|  | Hiking Trail             |  |                  |

|  |                    |  |                      |
|--|--------------------|--|----------------------|
|  | Interstate         | These classifications are condensed from the very detailed classifications used by biologists to manage wildlife habitat on this area. |                      |
|  | US Highway         |  |                      |
|  | State Road         |  |                      |
|  | Parking            |  |                      |
|  | Interpretive Kiosk |  | Designated Entrance  |
|  | Picnic Area        |  | WMA Office           |
|  | Restrooms          |  | Hunter Check Station |
|  | Camping            |  |                      |
|  | Boat Ramp          |  |                      |
|  | Fishing            |  |                      |
|  | Shooting Range     |  |                      |

0 1 Mile



### Fishing Tip

Webb Lake is managed as a trophy panfish area. Common catches include bluegill and redear sunfish.



### Wildlife Viewing Tip

If you bike or hike lightly traveled Roads 7 and 8, watch for coveys of northern bobwhite and ground doves crossing your path.