

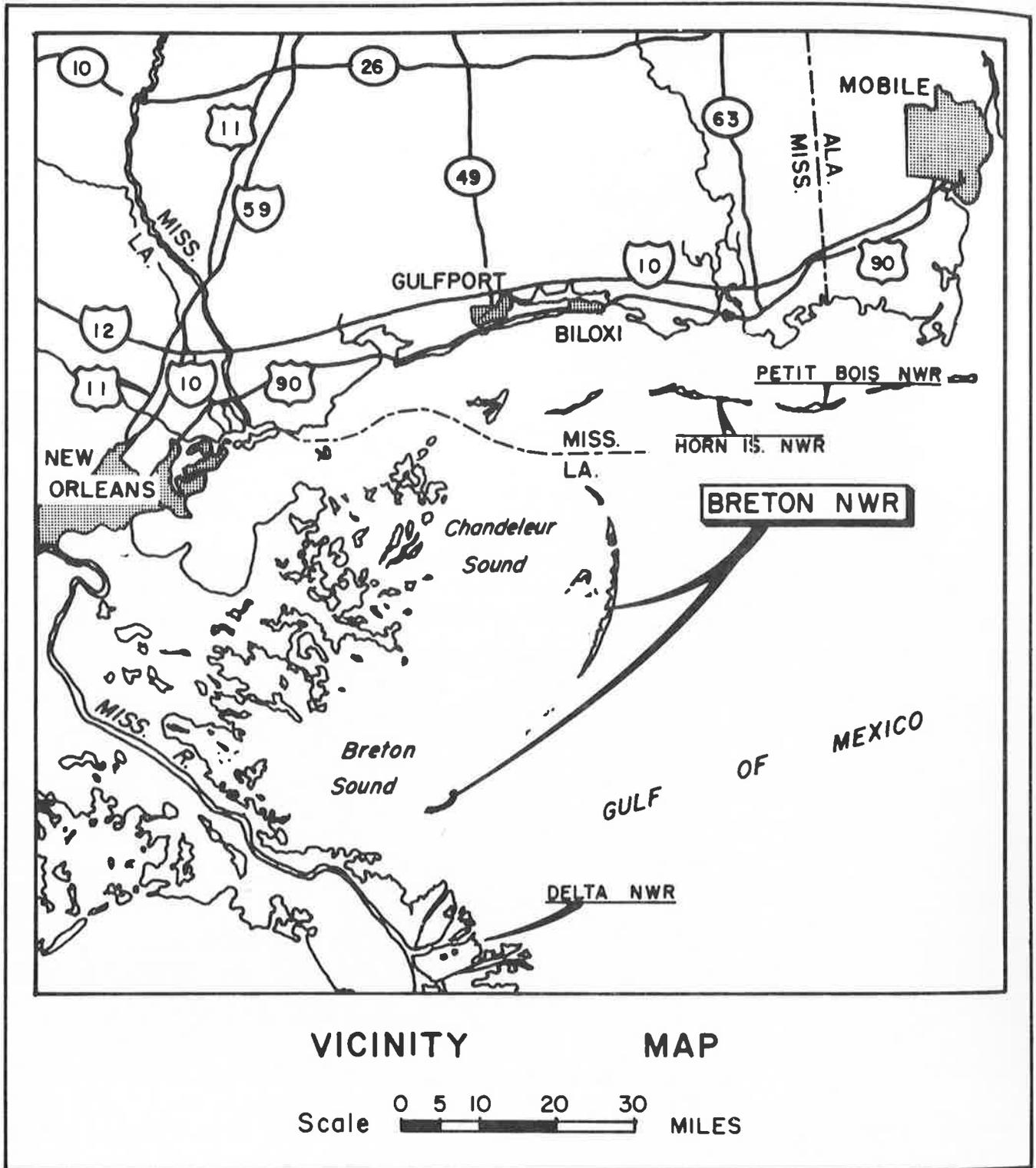
BRETON WILDERNESS PROPOSAL



BRETON

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

LOUISIANA



LOCATION

Breton National Wildlife Refuge is located in St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes, Louisiana, offshore from the Mississippi River Delta. New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mobile, Alabama, are located to the northwest and northeast respectively and within 100 miles of the refuge. Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi, are about 25 miles from the northern tip of the refuge island chain.

PREFACE

The Wilderness Act of September 3, 1964 (Public Law 88-577), requires that the Secretary of the Interior review every roadless area of 5,000 contiguous acres or more and every roadless island, regardless of size, within the National Wildlife Refuge System within ten years after the effective date of the Act, and report to the President of the United States his recommendations as to the suitability or unsuitability of each such area or island for preservation as wilderness. A recommendation of the President for designation as wilderness does not become effective unless provided by an Act of Congress.

In defining wilderness, the Act also included areas of less than 5,000 acres that are of sufficient size to make preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.

Sections 4 (a) and (b) of the Wilderness Act provide that: (1) The Act is to be within and supplemental to the purposes for which National Wildlife Refuges are established; and (2) Wilderness areas shall be administered so as to preserve their wilderness character and shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use insofar as primary refuge objectives permit. Wilderness designation does *not* remove or alter an area's status as a National Wildlife Refuge.

This brochure concerns a national wildlife refuge that has been studied by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife at the direction of the Secretary of the Interior. Its purpose is to summarize the wilderness study in sufficient detail to enable the reader to form an opinion regarding study conclusions concerning the suitability and desirability of including all or part of the refuge within the National Wilderness Preservation System.



The Refuge System is a National network of lands and waters managed and safeguarded for preservation and enhancement of the human benefits associated with wildlife and their environments. It presently consists of over 320 units, embracing nearly 30 million acres in 46 states. About 90 refuges containing 25 million acres in over 30 States qualify for study under the Wilderness Act.

INTRODUCTION

Breton National Wildlife Refuge, administered as a satellite of the Delta-Gulf Islands National Wildlife Refuges Complex, includes a number of roadless islands that qualify as a wilderness study area. With headquarters off the refuge proper in Gretna, Louisiana, Breton includes the long chain of Chandeleur Islands and the Breton Island group in Louisiana. The refuge contains a total of 4,507 acres with ownership extending to the mean high water mark. These barrier islands are located about 15 miles offshore from the Mississippi River Delta and 25 miles from the Mississippi mainland. The islands are characterized by long stretches of beaches of fine white sand, crystal blue waters, and marshes that have not been altered by human encroachment or development.

The undisturbed shorelines of these islands guarantee that many thousands of shorebirds will have a place to nest and rear their young and many waterfowl will have a place to spend the winter. The refuge further insures that the scenic and wild shore values, which have disappeared along a good portion of the Gulf Coast, will be preserved for future generations of people and wildlife.

HISTORY

The Mississippi Sound and River were extensively used by early explorers to the new world. Ponfilo de Narvaez, a Spanish explorer, is believed to have seen the river and sound in 1519. In 1539, Desoto explored from Pensacola Bay west to the delta of the Mississippi River and probably saw some of the refuge islands. Indian usage of the islands proper was apparently not very extensive and is believed to have been limited to short visits while they fished the waters of the Chandeleur Sound.

Early literature on Breton and the Chandeleur Islands mentions trees and a much higher elevation than exist today. In 1915, Breton Island had several families and a school on it. Prior to the hurricane of that year, the island was evacuated. The hurricane destroyed the settlement and it was never rebuilt.

President Theodore Roosevelt established Breton by Executive Order as the second National Wildlife Refuge in 1904. Other island refuges in the Gulf of Mexico include Petit Bois and Horn Island which were established in 1913 and 1958 respectively.

BRETON ISLAND



DESCRIPTION

Breton and Chandeleur Islands are barrier landforms representative of the dynamic processes of continental accretion which has been in progress along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts since the Cretaceous Period. The chain of islands are generally low lying and subject to constant change from wave action, winds, and frequent storms. The force of these storms was well defined in August 1969 as Hurricane Camille ripped through the refuge causing a reduction in above mean high tide acreage from 9,432 acres to the current 4,507 acres. The refuge contains the two parts of Breton Island as well as the entire chain of the Chandeleur Islands from Stake Island north to the Coast Guard lighthouse at the tip of the Chandeleurs. The U.S. Coast Guard still maintains the light although the lighthouse is no longer manned. The tract is administered as part of the refuge. These islands are never more than three-quarters of a mile wide and extend over a 48-mile arc.

Elevations average about four feet above mean low water. The crystal clear waters of the Gulf of Mexico bathe the endless miles of wild shores of sugar-white sand, contrasting sharply with the man-made beaches and oftentimes muddy waters near the mainland. On the Chandeleur Sound side, many of the islands are bounded by a maze of ponds, inlets, and marshes. The bay waters support good stands of turtle grass, shoalgrass, and many marine organisms. Low dunes parallel many of the Gulf beaches. The principal plant species on the islands are low-growing black mangrove and black rush. The Chandeleurs are the lowest lying within the study area and they are frequently awash during extremely high tides. The sea is constantly changing the shape and profile of these islands, producing new cuts and filling in old ones.

CHANDELEUR ISLAND CHAIN





SOOTY TERN

ROYAL TERNS NEST ON THE REFUGE ISLANDS



WILDLIFE

The wild shores of the Breton Refuge are distinctive for their teeming colonies of nesting shorebirds and wintering waterfowl. A variety of gulls, terns, egrets, and herons can be seen throughout the year, but are more abundant during the summer. Twenty-three different species of water and shorebirds are frequent users of the refuge and thirteen species nest on the various islands. The most abundant nesters are black skimmers, laughing gulls, and royal, Caspian, and Sandwich terns.

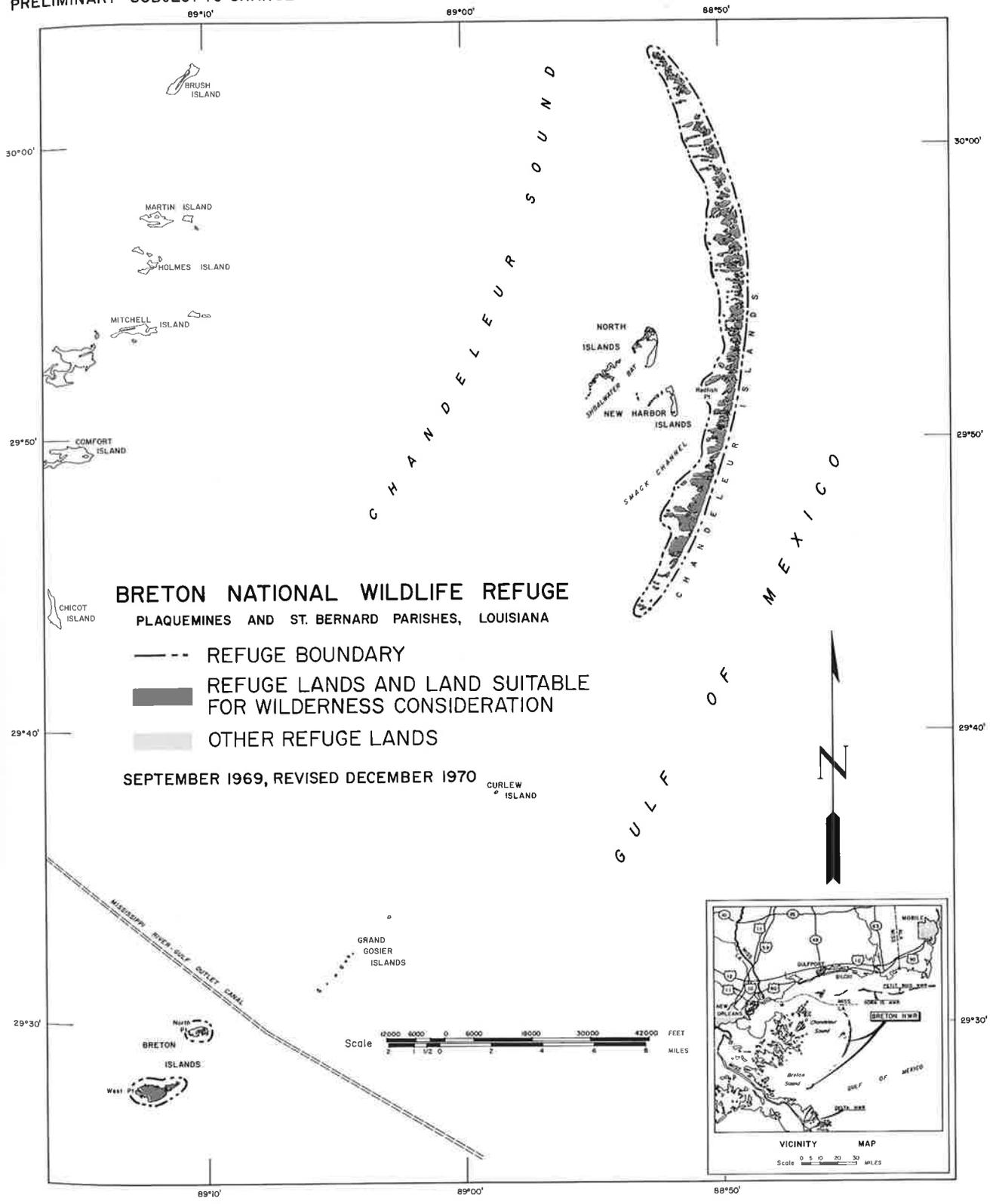
Waterfowl winter near the refuge islands using the adjacent shallows, marshes, and sounds for feeding and for protection during inclement weather. Redheads and scaup account for the majority of use but many other species including goldeneyes, bufflehead, American widgeon, and black duck are also present during the winter.

The American osprey and the Eastern brown pelican are sometimes seen within the refuge. These two species are of considerable concern because of their rapid decline in recent years. The Eastern brown pelican did, at one time, nest near the Chandeleurs; however, since 1960, when a small colony used an island just off the refuge, these birds have virtually disappeared from the Mississippi-Louisiana coast. The Chandeleurs could play an important part in the re-introduction of the pelican to this part of its former range.

Other wildlife found on the refuge include nutria, rabbits, and raccoons. The undeveloped shores of these islands are also important to loggerhead sea turtles which annually return to the beaches to lay eggs. Developments along other beaches have reduced the nesting territory of the loggerhead making retention of Breton's beaches in a natural state even more important to this species.

BRETON WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

PRELIMINARY—SUBJECT TO CHANGE



MANAGEMENT

Breton Refuge has been managed as a natural area since establishment. No developments are present on refuge land, except the Coast Guard lighthouse at the northern end of the Chandeleurs. Only periodic maintenance of the light is required. The refuge is managed primarily for use by nesting shorebirds and will continue to be preserved for this purpose. No developments are planned. Limited opportunity exists for recreational use on the refuge due to the isolation of the area. Day use of the beaches may be permitted during the late summer and early fall when shorebird nesting is complete. Hunting of waterfowl in season in the Chandeleur Sound may be possible if the area is retained in a natural condition. The retention of the lighthouse as a historical landmark is also planned.





BEACHCOMBING AND SURF FISHING ARE THE MAIN
RECREATIONAL USES



RELATIONSHIP TO SURROUNDING AREA

The Breton Refuge is a considerable distance from the mainland and access is difficult. Rough seas often prevail in the Chandeleur Sound making travel via small boat difficult. The closest launching sites for boats are in Gulfport, Mississippi, twenty-five miles away from the extreme northern tip of the Chandeleurs. North, Freemason, Grand Gosier, and Curlew Islands are adjacent to the refuge in Chandeleur Sound. These State-owned areas are not developed as of yet and for the most part they complement the management program within the refuge. A great many fishermen travel to the area by small planes.

A Gulf Islands National Seashore now under consideration will bring civilization somewhat closer to the refuge. Islands within the proposed Seashore would include Cat, Ship, Horn, and Petit Bois. The closest of these is Ship Island which is ten miles from the northern boundary of Breton Refuge. Approximately 21,250 acres are included in the Seashore proposal. Projected visits to the Seashore are estimated at 3.5 million during the fifth year after establishment. Retention of Breton Refuge in a wild state will become increasingly more important to the wildlife resources and also as an area where the scenic wild shore values are preserved in the northern Gulf Region.

Little social or economic impact on the surrounding communities is expected if Breton Refuge is included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Rather a wilderness area in close proximity to a National Seashore will enhance the value of the seashore itself.

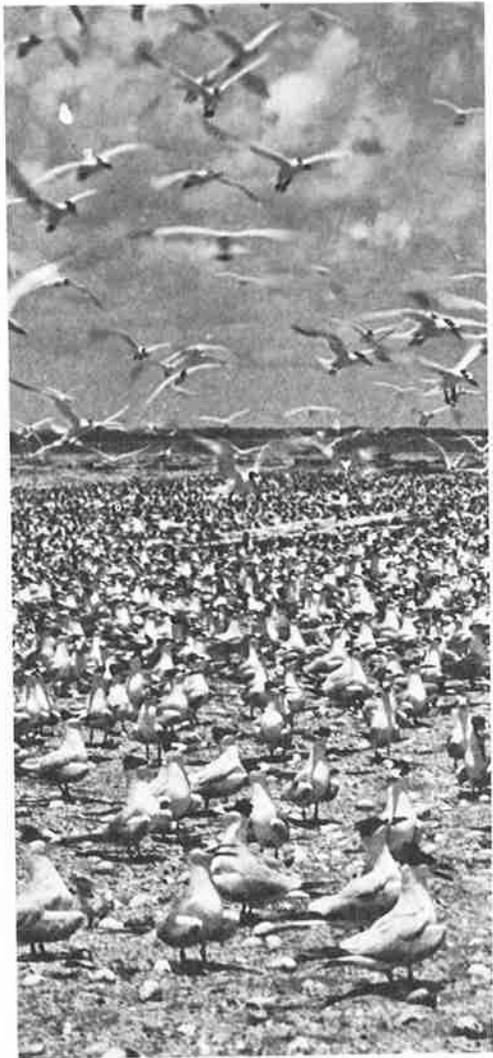
Oil exploration and production flourish in the Chandeleur Sound. Producing wells are located near the refuge islands and in the State-owned water bottoms. Northern Breton Island, which totals 86 acres above high mean tide, is the only refuge land under oil production lease, and this area is not included in the Breton Wilderness Proposal. The leasing of additional refuge lands for oil production is not in keeping with the primary objective of the refuge and will not be considered.



SUMMARY

The Breton Refuge embraces a number of barrier islands that contain valuable wildlife habitat and wild shore recreational values that soon will not be found elsewhere along the northern Gulf of Mexico. These islands constitute a wildlife habitat complex of undisturbed mangrove, natural beaches, marshes, and bays so vital to shorebirds, waterfowl, and sea turtles. The islands and the surrounding water areas are an intricate ecological system important to man, fish, birds, and other wildlife. Of the 4,507 acres included in the refuge, only the 86 acre northern Breton Island, which is under oil lease, does not appear to qualify for wilderness consideration.

The main goal of the refuge has been the preservation and protection of natural conditions. No development has been carried out and none is planned. The primary goals will remain the same in the future. These goals will be strengthened by wilderness designation.



INSPECTION

Anyone concerned about this proposal is urged to inspect personally the Breton Refuge. Additional information may be obtained from the Refuge Manager, Delta-Gulf Islands National Wildlife Refuge, 1216 Amelia Street, Gretna, Louisiana 70053, or the Regional Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Peachtree-Seventh Building, Atlanta, Georgia 30323.

SEPTEMBER 1969

REVISED DECEMBER, 1970



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