

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/wheeler/>

September 2017

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wheeler

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Cover photo: George Lee

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1938 as a wintering area for ducks, geese and other migratory birds.



photo: USFWS

Today the refuge is one of over 560 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.



Waterfowl and Wildlife

This 35,000 acre refuge attracts thousands of wintering waterfowl and cranes each year. The refuge is also a winter home to the endangered whooping crane who first arrived in 2004. The refuge manages and protects habitats for 13 federally listed endangered or threatened species.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of diverse habitat types including bottomland hardwoods, wetlands, pine uplands, shoreline or riparian woodlands, agricultural fields, and back water embayments. These habitats provide excellent feeding, resting, and roosting sites for wintering waterfowl, sandhill and whooping cranes, as well as nesting sites for migratory songbirds and many species of resident wildlife.

Wildlife Management

Waterfowl Food Production

Several thousand acres of cropland are cultivated by local farmers on a share agreement. During harvest, a portion of the crop is left in the field as a food source for ducks, geese, and other wildlife. Each fall the refuge provides green browse for wintering geese by planting wheat.

Photos courtesy of George Ponder.





Water Control

Water control structures are used in impoundments to manage water levels to provide food for waterfowl by encouraging the growth of moist soil plants and flooding agricultural crops such as corn, milo, and millet.



Providing Habitat Diversity

Wheeler NWR's wide variety of habitat types are managed to produce as much quality food and cover as possible for wildlife.



Banding

Wood ducks are banded each year in an effort to maintain current information on nesting success, harvest numbers, and the general condition of populations.



Visit Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Opportunities for Visitors Visitor Center

The Visitor Center offers wildlife exhibits, detailed maps, helpful personnel, wildlife literature, a birding station, a classroom, a conference room, a small gift shop, and a 126 seat auditorium.



Wildlife Observation

The Wildlife Observation Building offers a large, glass-enclosed room with seating and spotting scopes for viewing waterfowl and

wading birds. The building overlooks a Backyard Wildlife Habitat Area which is maintained to attract songbirds, hummingbirds, butterflies, and other wildlife. There is also a Wildlife Observation Tower on Beaver Dam Peninsula on the north side of the TN River.



Fishing

Most of the Refuge's waters are open year-round for fishing by boat, from the bank, or from the universally accessible fishing pier. Some areas may be closed seasonally to provide sanctuaries for waterfowl and other wildlife.

Anglers can fish for bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, crappie, and catfish.

Fishing must be in accordance with State and Refuge regulations.



Trails

Five established walking trails are available for use on the Refuge. They wind along the water and through crops, fields and woodlands. Maps and more information may be obtained at the Visitor Center.

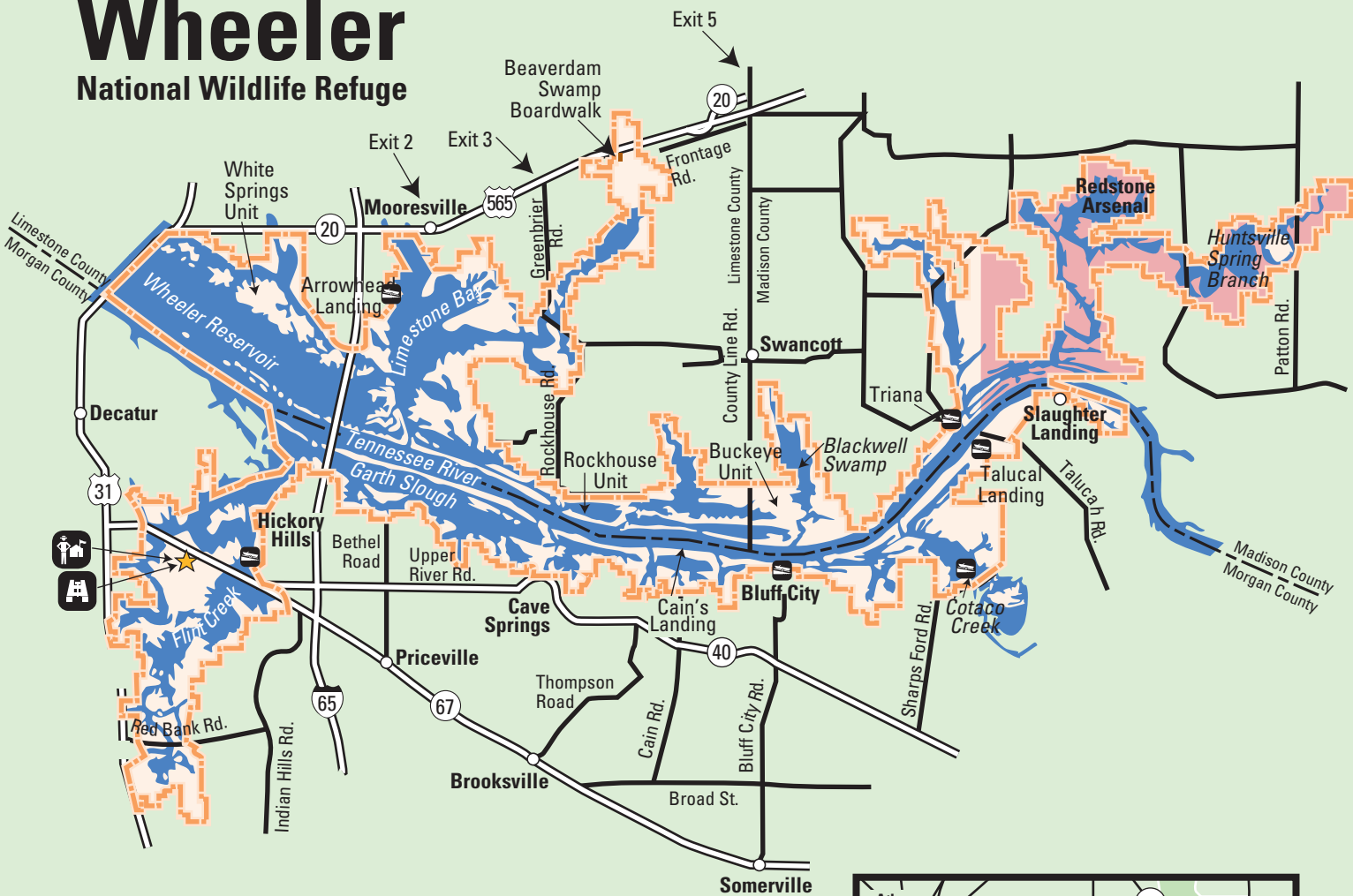


Environmental Education/ Interpretation

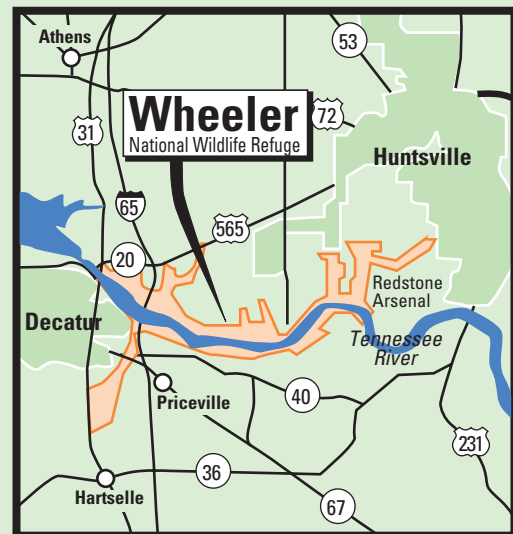
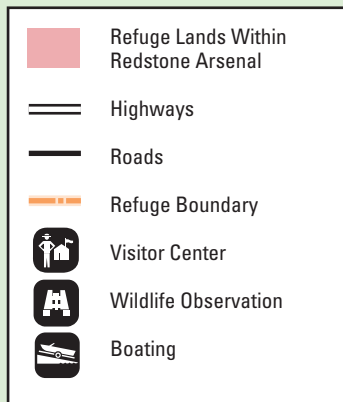
Organized groups may reserve dates for presentations, wildlife tours, and outdoor classroom activities. Environmental education and interpretive programs are available at the Visitor Center.

Wheeler

National Wildlife Refuge



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Boating

Improved boat launching areas are located at Hickory Hills, Bluff City, Cotaco Creek, and Talucah Landing on the south side of the Tennessee River and Arrowhead Landing and Triana on the north side. There are also several unimproved ramps at various locations for smaller boats and canoes. Water skiing and jet skis are restricted. Overnight mooring is prohibited.

Hunting

Managed hunts are held for small game, deer, and feral hogs. The required Refuge hunting permit may be obtained at the Visitor Center, Refuge Headquarters, or online.

Wildlife Photography

Photography is encouraged on the refuge. There is one, fully enclosed, permanent blind near the observation pond that may be reserved with a special use permit.

Other Opportunities

Throughout the year Wheeler NWR hosts a variety of seasonal activities such as Refuge Summer Day Camps and an Annual Youth Fishing Rodeo. We also offer a Junior Refuge Manager Program at the Visitor Center for children ages five to thirteen. Visit our website for more information about these activities.



Visitor Center Hours

October – February, daily 9 am – 5 pm
March – September
Tuesday – Saturday, 9 am – 4 pm

Directions:

From I/65: (5 minutes)
Take exit 334. Take Highway 67 North (towards Decatur). Visitor Center is 2.5 miles on the left.

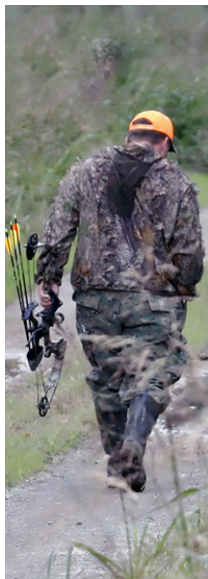
From Alt. 72: (15 minutes)
Take Highway 67/Beltline Road South. Follow 67 all the way through Decatur. After passing Highway 67/Highway 31 intersection, the Visitor Center is 2.5 miles on the right.

Contact us:

Physical Address:
Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge
3121 Visitors Center Road
Decatur, AL 35603
Phone: 256/350 6639
Website: <http://wheeler.fws.gov>

A Few Simple Rules:

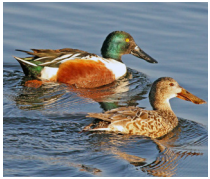
- Do not approach or feed the wildlife.
- No ATVs permitted.
- Permit required for hunting.
- Bicycles, horses, and mules restricted to gravel roads.
- No collecting artifacts.
- No camping.
- Pets must be on a leash. No pets allowed in buildings.





Calendar of Wildlife Events

This calendar is meant to serve as a guide to general wildlife events for visitors. Weather and fluctuating water levels may cause variations in these events.



January

Waterfowl and crane numbers are at their peak during the first half of the month. Canada and greater white-fronted geese are common, along with many species of ducks. Waterfowl begin moving north by the end of the month.

February

Waterfowl and crane numbers begin to decline rapidly. Wood duck nesting begins. Depending on the weather, fishing can be good by the end of the month.



March

Waterfowl numbers are low, but a variety of species can still be seen. Blue-winged teal and shorebirds begin migrating. Turtles are present on sunny days. Crappie fishing is at its best.

April

Warblers, vireos, and other small passerine birds are migrating. Migrant songbird nesting is in full progress. Wildflowers are at their peak.



May

Broods of wood ducks and mallards appear. Young songbirds and rabbits begin to appear. The last of the migrant songbirds are moving through the refuge.

June

With migration at an end, only resident birds and mammals are seen. Fishing for bluegill and bass is good.



July

Waterfowl activity is at its lowest ebb for the year. Songbird young are common in the woods and fields.

August

The fall migration of songbirds begins with purple martins bunching for their southward move. Large numbers of swallows move through and some early shorebird migration begins. A few blue-winged teal begin arriving. Fishing for catfish is good.

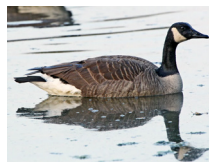


September

Blue-winged teal migration is at its peak. Shorebirds and large numbers of swallows begin moving through.

October

Sport fishing is good. Waterfowl continue to arrive with good concentrations present by the end of the month. The mass of migratory, southward bound fall songbirds is at its peak.



November

Although songbird migration is at an end, waterfowl numbers continue to increase. Large numbers of sandhill cranes and some whooping cranes can be seen congregating. Red-tailed and marsh hawks, along with other raptors, are common. White pelicans begin to arrive.

December

Waterfowl numbers reach their peak during the latter part of the month. Bald eagles may be present.