

Savannah

National Wildlife Refuge

Yours to enjoy...
Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1927 as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds. Today its 29,175 acres are home to a variety of wildlife, including several endangered species such as the wood stork, shortnose sturgeon and manatee. The refuge is an important link in the chain of wildlife refuges along the Atlantic Flyway, attracting thousands of migratory birds—over 30 species of warblers and 20 species of ducks have been recorded. The refuge also provides nesting habitat for wood ducks, purple gallinules, bald eagles, anhingas and swallow tailed kites, among others.

About half of Savannah NWR is bottomland, composed primarily of cypress, gum, and maple species. Access to this area is by boat only. Motorists are welcome year-round on the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive. This four-mile wildlife observation route, off South Carolina Highway 170, meanders through a portion of the refuge’s freshwater impoundment system.

The refuge, unless otherwise posted, is open to hiking, biking, wildlife observation, interpretation, environmental education, and photography. It is also open certain times of the year to hunting, fishing, and boating; review refuge regulations for details. The visitor center offers a variety of interpretative and educational opportunities.

Refuge hours
Visitor Center: Monday – Saturday (9 am - 4:30 pm): closed federal holidays

Refuge lands (except closed areas) including Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive: Seven days a week, daylight hours only



Rice field trunk by Kirk Rogers

Impoundment area north of SC-170: Closed December –February: (except Tupelo Trail, open year round)

Land and Water Management
By 1850 as many as 13 rice plantations were located along the Savannah River on land now within the refuge boundaries. The current 3,000 acres of freshwater impoundments (levee-enclosed pools), now managed for migratory waterfowl and wading birds, were once rice fields dating back to the mid or late 1700s. Many of the levees used today, including the wildlife drive, were built upon some of the original plantation levees constructed during the rice culture era. Now the former rice fields are actively managed with 30 water control structures, including 13 rice field trunks. A regimen of flooding and draining the impoundments provides feeding, roosting and nesting habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and other wildlife.

Freshwater marsh by Kirk Rogers

In place of rice, wild foods such as smartweed, redroot, and millet are encouraged to grow through careful manipulation of water levels.

History
Rice field trunks were first used in the 1700s on all rice plantations along the freshwater tidal rivers from Georgetown, South Carolina to Brunswick, Georgia. Today the refuge still uses handmade, wooden rice field trunks to control the water levels within the impoundments.

The Diversion Canal, constructed in 1977, borders the wildlife drive on the east and provides water to refuge impoundments and neighboring private plantations. The nine mile canal was part of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project to mitigate problems created by a tide gate installed on the Savannah River as part of a harbor channel maintenance plan. Though the tide gate is no longer in operation, the canal continues to be used for distribution of freshwater to refuge impoundments and adjacent private land.



Purple gallinule by Pope Johnson

- Regulation Reminders**
- Entry into areas posted as closed is prohibited.
 - Feeding, capturing, or harassing wildlife is strictly prohibited.
 - Artifact hunting/collecting is not allowed.
 - Do not pick or cut vegetation.
 - Dogs, cats and other pets are not permitted on the refuge.
 - Camping is not permitted.

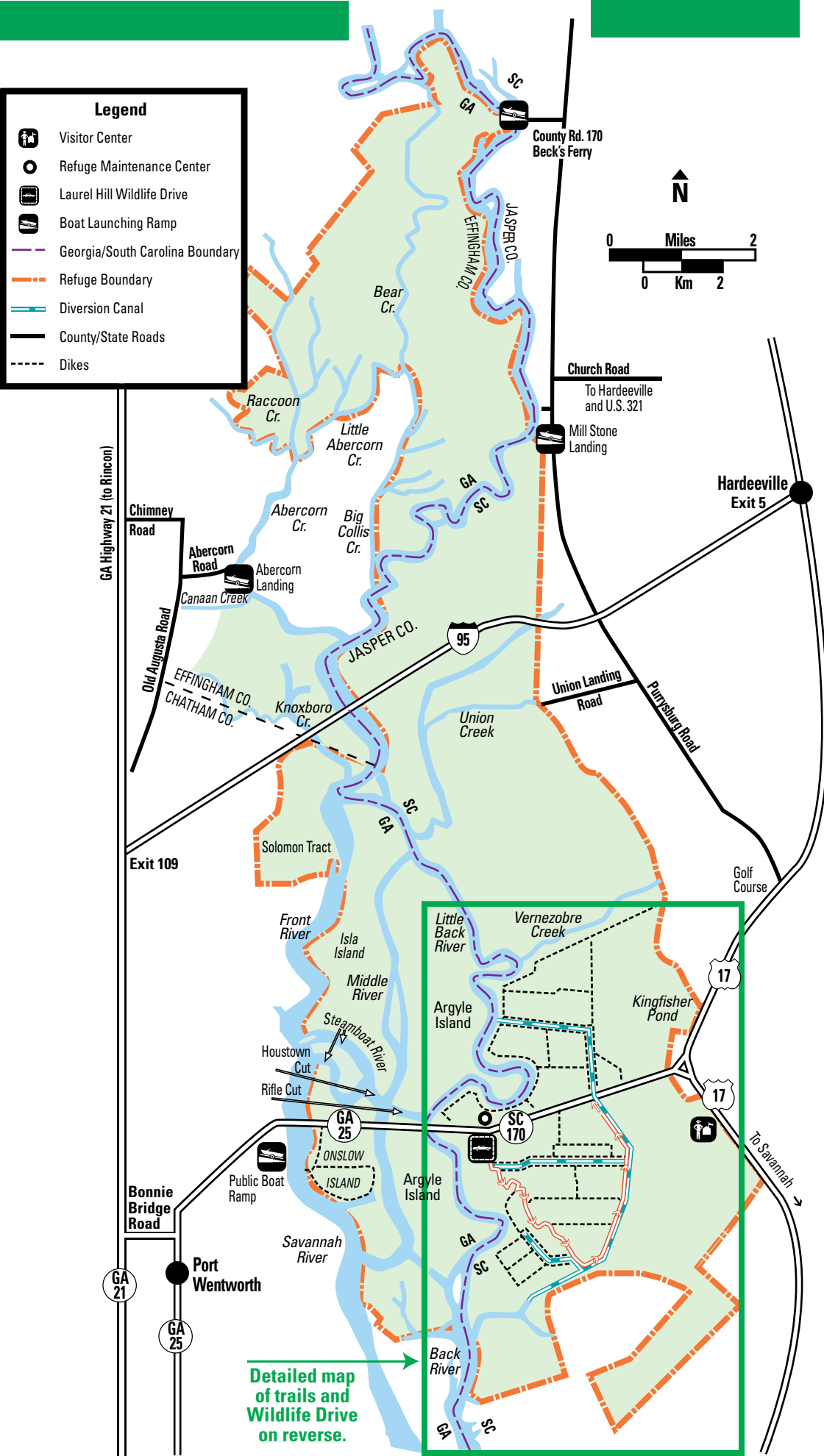
- Littering is prohibited.
- Fishing from banks or boats (non-motorized, or electric motors only) within the impoundment system is permitted March 1 to November 30.
- Bank fishing is allowed year-round on the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive.
- Bank and boat fishing is allowed year-round at Kingfisher Pond Recreation Area.
- Hunting opportunities are available. Refer to refuge hunt brochure for additional information.

- Safety Reminders**
- Overgrowth on trail shoulders and dikes may conceal snakes, poison ivy, or stinging insects.
 - Alligators may be encountered on the wildlife drive or any of the trails; it is potentially dangerous (and a violation of state and federal law) to feed or molest this reptile in any way.

- Be cautious of potholes and puddles when bicycling/hiking the trails and dikes.
- There are no shelters for visitor protection from the sun or inclement weather, except at the visitor center.
- Drinking water is only available at the visitor center.
- Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when to expect your return.

- Wildlife Viewing Tips**
- Birdwatching opportunities are good all year, but are best from October through April
 - Waterfowl are most abundant from November through February
 - Alligators can even be seen in winter on warm, sunny days, but are most easily viewed when basking in the spring and fall

- You Can Help**
- By obeying regulations
 - By respecting the refuge, wildlife, and other visitors
 - By volunteering your time
 - By joining the Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges, Inc. PO Box 16841 Savannah, GA 31416



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Legend

- Wildlife Drive - 4.0 mile
- Tupelo Trail - 2.5 mile
- Little Back River - 3.9 mile
- Recess Plantation - 3.2 mile
- Cistern Trail - .1 mile
- Plantation Island - 2.5 mile
- Raccoon Island - 1.3 mile
- Wetlands
- Hardwood Hammocks
- Upland Areas
- Managed Impoundments
- Open Water
- Maintenance Area - closed
- Dikes

For More Information:

Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex
 694 Beech Hill Lane, Hardeeville, SC 29927
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