

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Southeast Louisiana

## *National Wildlife Refuges*





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



*photo: Al Jorjorian*



## A Tapestry of Wetlands

The National Wildlife Refuges of Southeast Louisiana are part of a coastal wetlands system that includes marshes, pine and bottomland hardwood forests, lakes, barrier islands, swamps and bayous.

The diversity of wildlife found on these refuges is representative of Louisiana.

While refuge managers are working to preserve and enhance this natural landscape, it shows signs of wear, especially along the fragile edges. Coastal erosion, subsidence, the loss of replenishing river sediments, combined with sea-level rise and the fury of Gulf hurricanes all take a toll on the delicate patchwork of habitat.

## *Providing the Best Possible Habitat*

The guiding principle of managing a National Wildlife Refuge is “Wildlife First.” The benefit or effect on wildlife and habitat are the main tests for any decision made by refuge managers. Providing the best possible wildlife habitat on refuge lands is increasingly important as available habitat dwindles. Refuge employees actively work to control exotic plants and animals, protect endangered species, and enhance and restore refuge habitats.

## *The Public Is Invited*

All of the Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges are open to the public for uses that are centered around enjoyment of wildlife. These priority public uses, sometimes known as the “Big 6,” are: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation. Each refuge offers most of these activities.

## **Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge**

Referring to the river and wetland region, the name Atchafalaya derives from the Choctaw word, “hacha falaia,” meaning “long river.” The Atchafalaya River runs through the Atchafalaya Basin, the largest river swamp in the nation. Within this basin





photo: Brian Wheeler ©

is the 15,220-acre refuge. Established in 1986, the refuge is co-managed with the State of Louisiana's Sherburne Complex.

### *Enjoying the Refuge*

Hunting, fishing, hiking and some of the best wildlife viewing and bird-watching opportunities in the country exist in the Atchafalaya Basin. The refuge is popular for hunting white-tailed deer and is noted for its youth and handicapped accessible hunt programs. The refuge is open year round for sport fishing. Largemouth bass, white crappie, black crappie, warmouth, bluegill, redear sunfish and channel catfish are all found here.

### *Wildlife and Habitat*

Thousands of migratory waterfowl winter in the overflow swamps and lakes of the Atchafalaya Basin along with large populations of songbirds, resident deer, wild turkey, fox squirrel, grey squirrel and swamp rabbit. The American alligator is prevalent in these wetland habitats. The Louisiana black bear has also been observed here.

## **Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge**

Herons and egrets silhouetted against a city skyline -- 25,000 acres of fresh and brackish marsh nestled entirely within the city limits of New Orleans makes Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge the nation's 2nd largest urban refuge. Established in 1986, the area is directly influenced by the man-made levee system that surrounds the city.

### *Enjoying the Refuge*

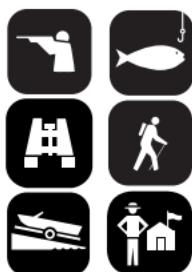
The boardwalk and nature trails found here offer a quiet break from nearby city life. Groups can arrange for hands-on environmental education programs and school visits. Proximity to the city provides the opportunity for thousands of visitors each year to enjoy bird watching, hiking, paddling, wildlife observation, photography, fishing and hunting.





### *Wildlife and Habitat*

Fresh marsh, tidal estuaries and hybrid maritime/bottomland hardwood forest provide natural habitats for a wide variety of wildlife. Wading birds, waterfowl, migratory songbirds, alligators, raccoons and white-tailed deer are just some of the refuge's residents. Water levels inside the levee system are managed to promote the growth of vegetation, vital to over 50,000 ducks that winter here.



### **Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge**

The 9,073-acre refuge in St. Mary Parish was established in 2001, with the primary goal of preserving denning and foraging habitat for the Louisiana black bear.

#### *Enjoying the Refuge*

The Refuge offers hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, boating and hiking. Nearby public boat launches allow convenient access to the refuge. A small sampling of cypress/tupelo swamps may be seen from a short boardwalk nature trail.

Paddling the area's waterways and canals provides a unique view of the wide array of both upland and wetland wildlife. While bear sightings are possible, they are rare, as bears are most active near dusk and dawn.



### *Wildlife and Habitat*

The Refuge currently consists of six separate units with habitat that includes freshwater marsh, cypress/tupelo swamp, open water, canals, bayous and parcels of bottomland hardwood forest. The Refuge provides excellent habitat for wading birds, neotropical songbirds, wood ducks, bald eagles, various fish species, reptiles and amphibians.



### **Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge**

Established in 1994, Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge is one of the last large undeveloped natural areas on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. With over 18,000 acres of offshore grass beds, marshes,



hardwood hammocks and pine ridges, the refuge is nestled in the middle of an area that is rapidly urbanizing.

### *Enjoying the Refuge*

Lake Road serves as a popular local spot for fishing and crabbing on Bayou Lacombe. The marshes of the refuge provide waterfowl hunting opportunities hard to find near a major urban center. The Boy Scout Road site provides a beautiful and easy boardwalk stroll and a four-mile round trip hike through the various habitats that make up the banks of Bayou Lacombe.



The environmental education staff offers classroom visits and field trips that explore wildlife, habitat, and refuge management practices through hands-on, science-based programs.

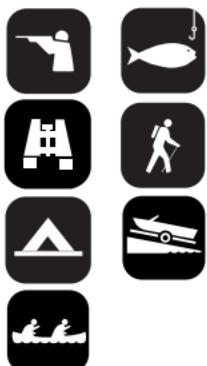
### *Wildlife and Habitat*

With a variety of habitat on the Refuge, shorebirds, wading birds, neotropical migrants and a host of year-round resident waterfowl can be found here. Deer, rabbit, mink, otter, raccoon and muskrat, all make their home here as well.

A population of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, once common throughout the southeast, is found on the Refuge. Prescribed fire and placement of artificial cavity inserts are management techniques used to restore and maintain the forest habitat these birds require.

### **Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge**

Straddling the Louisiana-Mississippi state line in the Pearl River basin, this Refuge was established in 1980 to preserve 36,500 acres of bottomland hardwood forest habitat. These forests are laced with swamps and bayous that offer vital wildlife habitat and unique opportunities for visitors.





## *Enjoying the Refuge*

Popular visitor use opportunities here include hunting, fishing and primitive camping. The majority of the refuge is accessible only by boat, and the remoteness here is the draw for many visitors. In contrast, the annual youth fishing rodeo attracts crowds of children and marks the first fishing experience for many involved. A sampling of the habitats found throughout the refuge can be found along Jim Schmidt trail, a 1/2 mile looping trail and boardwalk located at the Pearl River turnaround site, and the 3/4-mile Holmes Bayou Trail. The trails also provide hikers a good opportunity for birding and photography.



## *Wildlife and Habitat*

The refuge's swamps and bottomland hardwoods, with ever-changing water levels, provide important habitat for migratory songbirds, Mississippi and swallow-tailed kites, wading birds, white-tailed deer, and the threatened ringed sawback turtle. The pine uplands throughout the refuge provide habitat for the threatened gopher tortoise.



## **Breton National Wildlife Refuge**

Established in 1904, Breton is the second-oldest refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The remote and ever-changing barrier islands that make up Breton are a critically important part of the region's coastal habitat.

The beaches, dunes, marshes and seagrass beds of Breton provide habitat for diverse wildlife. The Refuge is a nesting ground for brown pelicans and other colonial seabirds, and the winter home to thousands of redhead ducks. Breton Refuge is also used by untold numbers of shorebirds and wading birds.

## *Enjoying the Refuge*

Only accessible by boat, anglers who venture to Breton enjoy some of the best coastal fishing in the world. Although, Breton National Wildlife





Refuge is difficult to reach, the remote location is a prime destination for birders. Nesting birds include brown pelicans, royal terns, Caspian terns and skimmers. A colony of non-nesting magnificent frigate birds summer on the refuge, while piping plovers and other shore birds are common in the winter months.

### *Wildlife and Habitat*

These islands and their nesting seabirds are affected annually by coastal storms, most profoundly by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Restoration approaches are being considered, which will likely require ongoing deposit of sediment from other sources. However, since Breton is a designated wilderness area, management activities are limited. This, plus the frequency and intensity of future storms will determine the degree of recovery of the islands and their wildlife populations.

### **Delta National Wildlife Refuge**

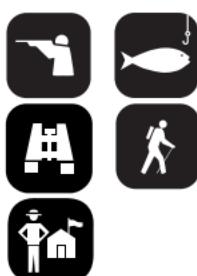
Part of the active Mississippi River delta, this 49,000-acre refuge was established in 1935. In this dynamic landscape, the Mississippi River deposits sediments on to the refuge. Aided by warm climates, the resulting vegetation provides a food source for a multitude of fish, waterfowl, marsh birds and other animals.

### *Enjoying the Resource*

This refuge is accessible only by boat, and the primary public use activities at Delta are hunting and fishing. The Refuge offers some of the best fishing and waterfowl hunting opportunities in the world.

### *Wildlife and Habitat*

Situated at the southern end of the Mississippi Flyway, the marshes here are dominated by migratory birds. Tens of thousands of ducks, geese, wading birds, shorebirds and migratory songbirds utilize this flyway. The aquatic habitats here provide for the needs of numerous fish and shellfish species, and the area is an important spawning and feeding



ground for trout, drum, mullet, crab and shrimp. Deer, otter, raccoons and alligators also make this Refuge home.

Aided by man-made crevasses, new land is being formed. These cuts in river banks and levees allow silt-laden river water to spread into interior ponds and open water areas, dropping sediments and creating new marshlands. The Refuge has served as a laboratory for testing this technique, one that holds great promise for coastal areas with active deltas.

### **Mandalay National Wildlife Refuge**

The Refuge preserves and protects the freshwater marshes in the wetlands of western Terrebonne Parish. Because of the importance of its waterfowl habitat, the Refuge is a top priority wetland conservation project of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Mandalay was established in 1996, and is located approximately five miles west of Houma, Louisiana.

#### *Enjoying the Refuge*

Waterfowl hunting, deer archery hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography and boating are among the activities available to the public here.

A half-mile nature trail leads visitors through bottomland hardwood habitat to an observation deck and views of freshwater marsh. However, with the exception of this short trail, a boat is required to access the refuge. Fishing is often superb in the area's deep-water canals, where freshwater species can be found. Visitors can also enjoy wildlife observation and photography on the refuge.

#### *Wildlife and Habitat*

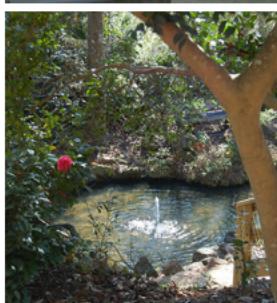
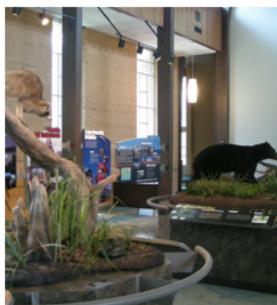
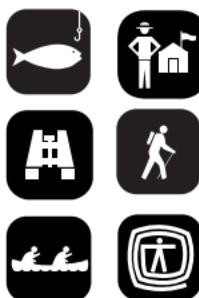
The 4,619-acre refuge is made up of freshwater marsh, cypress/tupelo swamp and numerous canals. The refuge is normally inundated each spring by flow from the Atchafalaya River transported through the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway.



Mandalay Refuge serves as a waterfowl wintering area, with high counts of blue-winged teal, ringnecks, wigeon and pintails. It also provides excellent habitat for wading birds, bald eagles, migratory birds, white-tailed deer, furbearers, alligators, a variety of fishes and many other wildlife species.

## Bayou Lacombe Center

Since 1996 the 110-acre site in Lacombe, Louisiana, has served as the headquarters facility for the Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges Complex.



The property was privately owned in the 1930s. Over the next twenty years the grounds were beautifully developed and opened to the public as "Bayou Gardens," a horticultural attraction which drew visitors to admire the wide variety of camellias, azaleas, flowering trees and shrubs. The property was sold in the mid-1950s to the Redemptorist order of the Catholic Church and became Holy Redeemer High School. Then later operated as a seminary retreat center for the Catholic Church. It was purchased in 1990 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be the headquarters complex for Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges.

The Bayou Lacombe Center includes a network of trails that offers a leisurely look at the area's natural habitats along with restored sections of Bayou Gardens. Peak bloom periods for camellias and azaleas are roughly December through April.

## Visitor Center

The Southeast Louisiana Refuges Visitor Center is located on-site at the Bayou Lacombe Center. Interactive displays and dioramas highlight the eight refuges of the complex. You can learn more about how refuge managers maintain productive wildlife habitat and about opportunities for wildlife viewing, hiking, fishing, educational programs and available refuge tours. The complex's Conservation Room serves as a meeting place for nature-





based lectures and seminars. A nature bookstore is operated by the Friends of the Louisiana Wildlife Refuges.

#### *Volunteers and Friends*

The wildlife and habitat restoration goals of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are not possible to achieve without help. Some of the strongest allies are volunteers who share a passion for preserving habitat and protecting wildlife resources. Many volunteers help visitors engage and enjoy their National Wildlife Refuge System.



Volunteers have contributed thousands of hours toward environmental education, habitat restoration, litter control, maintenance, construction,



wildlife monitoring and countless other tasks crucial to managing national wildlife refuges.

Two non-profit Friends organizations support a wide variety of projects on the Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges Complex. As non-profit organizations, Friends groups are able to seek funding from both private and public sources and have secured grants for habitat restoration, special events and education projects.



These are your lands and your help is needed. If you are interested in volunteer opportunities within the Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges please call 985/882 2000.

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