

Alligator River

National Wildlife Refuge



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Mike Bryant, Refuge Manager
Alligator River NWR
P. O. Box 1969
708 North Highway 64
Manteo, NC 27954
Phone: 252/473 1131
Fax: 252/473 1668
E-mail: alligatorriver@fws.gov

Refuge Facts

- Established: March 14, 1984.
- Size: 148,265 acres lying on the mainland portions of Dare and Hyde Counties, North Carolina.
- Location: 15 miles west of Manteo, NC on US Highways 64 and 264.
- Roughly 28 miles north to south and 15 miles east to west.
- Bordered on the west by the Alligator River and the Intracoastal Waterway; on the north by Albemarle Sound; on the east by Croatan and Pamlico Sounds; and on the south by Long Shoal River and corporate farmland.
- Administers Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge as a part of complex; Alligator River NWR Manager supervises the Mackay Island, Currituck, and Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuges' Managers.
- Refuge staff and planners have begun the process of formulating the Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Public involvement is encouraged. Please contact the refuge for more information.

Natural History

- Established to preserve and protect a unique wetland habitat type "the pocosin" and its associated wildlife species. (*Pocosin* is a native American word meaning "swamp-on-a-hill" and is characterized by poorly drained soils high in organic material).
- First ever attempt to re-establish a species (the red wolf) that was extinct in the wild.
- Diversity of habitat types including high and low pocosin, bogs, fresh and brackish water marshes, hardwood swamps, and Atlantic white cedar swamps.

- Plant species include pitcher plants and sun dews, low bush cranberries, bays, Atlantic white cedar, pond pine, gums, red maple, and a wide variety of herbaceous and shrub species common to the East Coast.
- One of the last remaining strongholds for black bear on the Eastern seaboard.
- Concentrations of ducks, geese, and swans; wildlife diversity includes wading birds, shorebirds, raptors, black bears, American alligators, white-tailed deer, raccoons, rabbits, quail, river otters, red wolves, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and neotropical migrants.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- 23-person staff.
- 42,000 visitors annually.
- Current budget (FY 05) \$2,516,000.
- Attracts visitors worldwide for Red Wolf Howling programs.
- Serves as a "gateway" to other eastern North Carolina refuges, encouraging visitors to venture inland into the counties with fewer economic advantages.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect and preserve unique wetland habitat types and associated wildlife species.
- Provide habitat and protection for endangered species such as red wolves, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and American alligators.
- Provide habitat for black bears.
- Provide habitat and management for waterfowl and other migratory birds.
- Provide for a wide variety of native wildlife species through diverse wildlife management techniques and strategies.

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- Provide wildlife-dependent public use opportunities including hunting; fishing; wildlife interpretation; observation; photography; and environmental education.

Management Tools

- Restoration of historic water levels altered by past logging and farming operations.
- Water management for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and other wildlife.
- Moist soil management for waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds.
- Atlantic white cedar restoration.
- Approximately 3,000 acres of cooperative farming for black bears, red wolves, and waterfowl.
- Wildlife and habitat surveys.
- Red wolf re-establishment.
- Prescribed burning and wildfire suppression.
- Mechanical/chemical control of invasive plants.
- Deer, small game, and waterfowl hunting.
- Environmental education.
- Wildlife interpretation.
- Outreach.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Handicapped accessible foot trails and fishing dock.
- Auto tour route (8.5 miles).
- Paddling trails (15 miles).
- Wildlife observation and photography.
- Hunting and fishing.
- Guided interpretive tours, including Red Wolf Howlings, Night Wildlife Tours, Bike Hikes, and Canoe Tours (fee program).
- Environmental education.

Calendar of Events

April-December: Red Wolf Howlings.

April: Earth Day, National Wildlife Week.

May: International Migratory Bird Day.

June-August: Night Wildlife Programs, scheduled canoe tours (fee program).

September: dove season, bow season for deer.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week; Howl-O-Ween Howlings; primitive weapon and conventional weapon hunting for deer, raccoon, squirrel, waterfowl, and opossum.

November: Wings Over Water, conventional hunting for quail, snipe, and rabbit.

Questions and Answers

Are there volunteer opportunities on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge?

Alligator River NWR uses volunteers in a variety of program areas. Local volunteers work regularly maintaining interpretive trails, putting up signs, conducting interpretive tours, and assisting with biological and maintenance work. Student interns (college age) spend 10-14 weeks during all seasons, gathering work skills and learning about what a refuge might offer them for future employment. More recently, the refuge has begun a Workamper Program, where adults live in their own RVs on a site provided by the refuge in return for a minimum of 40 hours per week of work. We are especially interested in Workampers with biological experience or skills in carpentry or vehicle/equipment mechanics.

*Why do you **start** fires on the refuge?* Fire is a natural process. Much of the refuge is pocosin habitat, which typically has a natural fire cycle of three to seven years. Native Americans were known to set fires to aid in hunting game and to promote better access to the woods and marshes. Frequent fires had the effect of pruning back the thickets of shrubs and canes; consuming accumulations of dead grasses, pine litter, and woody debris; and

recycling nutrients into the soil. The results were more open conditions in the marshes and woodlands and very diverse and productive wildlife habitats.

FWS “starts fires on the refuge” to reduce hazardous fuel conditions and to mimic the natural fires of the past. Many plant species, such as pond pine, are fire dependent and need fire to reseed and maintain a healthy stand. The FWS fires are accomplished under “prescribed” conditions in which they can be managed safely to burn out the accumulation of forest litter and shrubs.

Why is the Fish and Wildlife Service introducing the red wolf, a predator, into eastern North Carolina?

The endangered red wolf once ranged throughout the Southeast, but now is threatened with extinction. By the late 1970s, the red wolf was extinct in the wild, with only a few captive wolves in zoos surviving. Eastern North Carolina was once part of the red wolf’s historic habitat, and may again be able to provide the conditions necessary for its survival. At present, there are about 90 red wolves in the wild in North Carolina.

Also, if mega fauna, such as wolves, are able to survive and reproduce within an ecosystem, that provides us with an excellent indication of environmental quality. Predators, like the red wolf, help maintain balance in an ecosystem by controlling populations of prey species and removing unhealthy animals.

Where can I go to see a wolf or bear?

The chances of seeing a wolf are slim. During some seasons, bear may be observed with some regularity. Weekly, during the summer, a guided “Bear Necessities” program begins at Creef Cut Trailhead on U.S. 64 in East Lake. Participants receive an orientation to the refuge and its management programs and have an opportunity to drive along the refuge wildlife drive to see black bears, owls, and other wildlife. A ride down Milltail Road near sunset will often produce bear sightings.