

# Big Branch Marsh

## *National Wildlife Refuge*



photo: USFWS



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**Elizabeth Souheaver, Project Leader**  
**Jody Malinowski, Refuge Manager**  
**Southeast Louisiana Refuges**  
**1010 Gause Boulevard, Building 936**  
**Slidell, LA 70458**  
**Phone: 985/646 7555**  
**Fax: 985/646 7588**  
**E-mail: FW4RWSELARefuges@fws.gov**

### Refuge Facts

- Established 1994.
- Acres: 15,000.
- Located in St. Tammany Parish, LA.
- Refuge is cooperatively managed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries.
- Location: the refuge is located on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Refuge is between Slidell and Mandeville, LA off of U.S. Highway 190 and along State Highway 434 south of Lacombe, LA.

### Natural History

- Encompasses the habitats and transition zones between the pine savannahs to the north and the shorelines, marshes, and offshore grassbeds of the lake to the south.
- Concentrations of waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and neotropical migrants.
- Several red-cockaded woodpecker colonies, bald eagle nests, and osprey nests are present.

### Financial Impact of Refuge

- Nine full-time, 1 part-time staff.
- More than 24,000 visitors annually.
- Current budget (FY 01) \$455,503.

### Refuge Objectives

- Provide habitat for a natural diversity of wildlife associated with Big Branch Marsh.
- Provide habitat for endangered and threatened species.
- Provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl.
- Provide nesting habitat for wood ducks.
- Provide habitat for non-game migratory birds.

- Provide opportunities for public outdoor recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, birdwatching, and environmental education and interpretation, whenever they are compatible with the purposes of the refuge.

### Management Tools

- Forest habitat management.
- Prescribed fire.
- Artificial nest boxes/structures.
- Mechanical/chemical control of noxious plants.
- Public hunting.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

### Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking/biking trails.
- Canoeing.
- Boardwalk.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- Fishing.
- Hunting (big game, waterfowl, small game).

### Calendar of Events

**April:** Great Louisiana Bird Fest.

**May:** International Migratory Bird Day.

**August:** Louisiana Youth Environmental Summit.

**October:** Wildlife Refuge Week.

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## Questions and Answers

*Where is the refuge and how do you access it?*

The refuge is located along the northshore of Lake Pontchartrain between Slidell and Mandeville, LA. It can be accessed by vehicle off of State Highway 434, along Paquet Road, along Barringer Road, and along Lemieux Road. It can be accessed by boat from Liberty Bayou, Bayou Bonfouca, Bayou Lacombe, Cane Bayou, and Lake Pontchartrain.

*What is available at the refuge, what can I do?*

The refuge has a hiking and biking trail, and a nature boardwalk, and has a canoe launch into Cane Bayou. Public hunting and fishing are available in-season. Opportunities for wildlife observation and nature photography can be found around the refuge.

*What types of fishing are available?*

Both freshwater and saltwater fishing are available on or near the refuge. The most commonly caught species include largemouth bass, bream, crappie, redfish, and speckled trout.

*What types of hunting are available?*

Public hunting is allowed for white-tailed deer (archery only), waterfowl, quail, squirrel, rabbit, woodcock, snipe, and hog.

*What is in store for the future?*

We will continue to acquire lands as they become available and as funds are available and make those lands available for compatible public uses. We are in the process of planning visitor access facilities (boat launches, parking areas, nature trails) and also a visitors center, environmental education center, and administrative complex near the refuge in the town of Lacombe, LA.