

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



Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

General

Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge was authorized in 1986 and officially established in 1990. The refuge is located entirely within the corporate limits of New Orleans, Louisiana and encompasses approximately 23,000 acres. It is the largest urban wildlife refuge in the country, and is one of the last remaining marsh areas adjacent to Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne.

The refuge contains a wide variety of wildlife habitat, including bottomland hardwoods, freshwater marshes, brackish marshes, lagoons, canals, borrow pits, cheniers (ancient beach fronts) and natural bayous.

The diverse habitat supports 340 bird species during various seasons of the year. Peak waterfowl populations of 30,000 use the wetland areas during fall, winter, and early spring. The American alligator is also a common sight on the refuge.

Most of the refuge is located within massive hurricane protection levees built to protect New Orleans from storm surges and flooding. The levees interrupt natural water flow patterns and challenge refuge managers to maintain productive wetland habitats in this altered environment. A network of pumps and flapgates provides a means of regulating water levels seasonally to encourage the summer growth of emergent grasses, that in turn provide waterfowl food supplies in winter. Rainfall is the main source of water for these fresh marshes, and during dry periods some areas of the refuge may dry up totally. Introducing brackish water from Lake Pontchartrain may provide a degree of relief but too much will damage freshwater grasses and other plants.

Facilities

Headquarters

Bayou Sauvage and six other National Wildlife Refuges (Atchafalaya, Big Branch Marsh, Bogue Chitto, Breton, Delta and Shell Keys) form a complex known as Southeast Louisiana Refuges, managed from a headquarters facility located in LaCombe, Louisiana. This office is a central access point for information about all refuges in the complex. Plans call for the development of an office and visitor information facility on Bayou Sauvage in the near future.

Recreation Area

The Ridge Trail area on U.S. Hwy 90 is a primary spot from which to enjoy the refuge. There is a 2/3 mile loop boardwalk trail, access to the Maxent Levee trail, and a pavilion with tables. Restrooms are planned at this location. This area is adjacent to the historic Bayou Sauvage waterway, once a distributary for flood waters from the Mississippi River, and is an example of a forested wetland ecosystem.

Environmental Education Programs

Formal environmental education programs, which allow students to experience learning in a natural setting, are offered year round on the refuge. Targeted for various age groups, these programs allow a first-hand encounter with aspects of the refuge's ecology and wildlife. Classroom visits by refuge rangers



photos: USFWS

may also be arranged. Schools and other organized groups should contact the refuge at least two weeks in advance for reservations.

Festivals

A refuge festival/open house is held each spring, and features special tours, exhibits, and activities that highlight the unique features of the refuge. Inquire at refuge headquarters about the dates and locations of upcoming events.

Recreational Opportunities

Interpretive Tours

Free interpretive programs are presented on weekends by refuge staff, and include canoe tours, birdwatching trips, and explorations by bike and trail. These programs require advance reservations. A quarterly calendar of events provides more information, and may be obtained by mail, at the headquarters, in brochure racks around the refuge, or online at southeastlouisiana.fws.gov.

Canoeing

The varied habitats of the refuge provide rewarding canoeing opportunities in areas not accessible by car. Launch sites include the Madere Marsh unit, on U.S. Hwy 90, and the boat launch on U.S. Hwy 11. Spring and fall are ideal for enjoying the many waterways of Bayou Sauvage.

Hiking

The Ridge Trail Boardwalk is the most popular short hike on the refuge, affording views of a variety of habitats. Other options include the Maxent Levee trail (three miles one way) which offers great wildlife viewing opportunities from the crown of the levee. The bike trail as well as other levee tops throughout the refuge provide more possibilities.

Biking

The Mildred Fossier bike trail is accessible from Interstate 10 at exit 251. The paved trail cuts across the open marsh and ascends the hurricane protection levee along Lake Pontchartrain, affording great views of the 30-mile wide lake. The round trip is approximately nine miles, but shorter portions can be biked. A

bikeway brochure may be obtained from headquarters, by mail, or in brochure racks around the refuge, or online at southeastlouisiana.fws.gov.

Birdwatching

The diversity of habitats on Bayou Sauvage provides an opportunity to observe a variety of bird species within a small geographical area. Neo-tropical migrants abound during the fall and spring migrations, with many nesting on the refuge. Shorebirds and wading birds are present year-round, and mottled ducks and wood ducks are common summer nesters. Each winter thousands of waterfowl make their home on the refuge.

Fishing/Crabbing/Crawfishing

There are great opportunities for these activities on Bayou Sauvage. Freshwater lagoons, bayous and ponds serve as production areas for largemouth bass, crappie, bluegill, catfish, and crawfish. Crabbing is popular at "Crabbing Bridge."

The marshes along Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne serve as estuarine nurseries for fish and crabs. Non-commercial fishing, crabbing, and crawfishing are permitted year round; some restrictions may apply within the impoundments (see map). Be sure to obtain a copy of the refuge fishing regulations, available in boxes at various sites on the refuge, at headquarters, on the web site, or by mail.

Concessionaire Tour

A private company offers daily wildlife viewing tours through a concession agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The public tours are conducted via a 65-passenger boat and last approximately one hour and 45 minutes. The tour is accessed from exit 251 on Interstate 10. For more information phone New Orleans Swamp Tours at 504/236 3143.

Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, Inc.

The Friends are a non-profit corporation that supports the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in educational and environmental projects on Bayou Sauvage and other area refuges. To join the Friends or for more information contact 985/882 2025, or visit www.FLWR.ORG.

When Visiting Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

Bayou Sauvage is located thirty minutes from downtown New Orleans. Access is available from U.S. Highways 90 and 11, and Interstate 10. Lodging is available in New Orleans. General tourist information is available from the New Orleans Welcome Center at 529 St. Ann St., New Orleans, LA 70116, phone 504/568 5661. You can also visit the New Orleans web site at www.NOLA.com.

For More Information Contact:

Project Leader
Southeast Louisiana Refuges
61389 Hwy. 434
LaCombe, LA 70445
southeastlouisiana.fws.gov

Headquarters hours of operation:
Monday - Friday 7:30 am - 4:00 pm.
985/882 2000

For Your Safety

Wear life jackets and have other required safety equipment on all water vessels.

Do not leave valuables in your vehicle.

Tell a relative or friend where you are going and when you expect to return.

Regulations

Be prepared and observe regulations concerning: fishing license requirements, closed areas, and boat registration.

Access to and recreational use of refuge resources are permitted in designated areas and in accordance with state and federal regulations.

Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge is a daylight-use-only refuge.

Motorized vehicles are permitted only on paved public roads and designated parking areas.

Only outboard motors, 25 horsepower or less, are permitted in waterways inside the hurricane protection levee.

Airboats, aircraft, motorized pirogues, mud boats, and go-devils are prohibited in refuge waters.

Taking, collecting, or injuring of plants or wildlife is prohibited.

Feeding, enticing, or disturbing alligators or any other wildlife is prohibited.

Hunting is not permitted on the refuge.

Firearms:

Carrying, possessing, or discharging firearms on the refuge is prohibited.

