

# Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge

photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



**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](mailto:alligatorriver@fws.gov)

## Refuge Facts

- Established: March 14, 1984.
- Size: 153,000 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.
- Lead Refuge in NC Coastal Plain Refuges Complex, which includes Alligator River, Pea Island, Pocosin Lakes, Mackay Island, Currituck, and Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuges.
- Comprehensive Conservation Plan was completed June 8, 2007.

## Natural History

- Established to preserve and protect a unique wetland habitat type “the pocosin” and its associated wildlife species.
- 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

- 29-person staff (includes Alligator River and Pea Island, Fire Program, and Red Wolf Recovery Program).
- 62,000 visitors annually.
- Current budget (FY 07) \$3,521,000 (includes Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges, Fire Program, and Red Wolf Recovery Program).
- 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 Goals

- Inventory, protect, and manage to maintain healthy and viable populations of threatened and endangered species (e.g., red wolf and red-cockaded woodpecker), other priority wildlife (migratory birds and black bear), and fish.
- Inventory and manage to provide diverse, high quality mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain forested wetlands, marshes, aquatic habitats, and areas intensively managed for wildlife.
- Provide safe, quality wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the wildlife resources and habitats of the refuge and of the National Wildlife Refuge.

# Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge

- Limit the adverse impacts of development to refuge resources and allow natural processes to dominate on candidate wilderness areas.

## 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 2,500 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

- Universally-accessible foot trails and fishing dock.
- Auto tour route (11 miles).
- Paddling trails (15 miles).
- Wildlife observation and photography.
- Hunting and fishing.
- Guided interpretive programs, including Red Wolf Howlings, Bear and Wolf talks and Canoe Tours (fee program).
- Environmental education.

## Calendar of Events

**April-December:** Red Wolf Howlings.

**April:** Earth Day, National Wildlife Week, scheduled canoe tours (fee program)..

**May:** International Migratory Bird Day.

**June-August:** Summer 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

*What can I do to help Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge?*

You can help this refuge by volunteering your time as a volunteer, donating your money to the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society (the refuge non-profit support group), and by being a good steward for natural resources. Contact the Society (<http://www.fws.gov/alligatorriver/cwrs.html>)! They'll tell you all kinds of ways you can help!

Alligator River Refuge uses volunteers in a variety of program areas. Local volunteers work regularly staffing the Visitor Center, maintaining interpretive trails, putting up signs, conducting interpretive tours, and assisting with biological and maintenance work. We also have programs for interns and resident volunteers.

*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 it is threatened with extinction. By the late 1970's, the red wolf was extinct in the wild, with only a few captive wolves surviving in zoos. 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 100-130 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.