

Mathews Brake

National Wildlife Refuge

photo: USFWS



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1980.
- Acres: 2,418.
- Directions: 10 miles south of Greenwood, MS to the west of Highway 49E.
- Located in Leflore and Holmes counties, it is 10 miles north of Morgan Brake NWR.

Natural History

- Located in the biologically and culturally unique "Delta" region of the Mississippi/Yazoo alluvial plain.
- Refuge is functionally an island of wildlife habitat in a sea of cotton fields.
- Major feature of the refuge is Mathews Brake proper, an 1,810-acre oxbow lake consisting of cypress and tupelo-gum trees.
- Refuge winters 30,000 ducks annually.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Administered by Morgan Brake NWR which is also responsible for management of Hillside NWR and various disjunct fee title tracts (FmHA transfer).
- Mathews Brake is funded through the Theodore Roosevelt NWR Complex, FY 05 complex budget of \$2,097,000.
- Annual visitation is 35,000.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide resting, nesting, and feeding habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds.
- Provide for a diversity of habitat for all resident and non-resident wildlife.
- Protect endangered and threatened species.
- Provide opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreation and environmental education.

Management Tools

- Water management.
- Wetland restoration.
- Reforestation.
- Law enforcement.
- Controlled public hunts for population management.
- Exotic plant and animal control.
- Research and surveys.
- Education/interpretation.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Accessible boat ramp and fishing pier.
- Hunting.
- Fishing.
- Wildlife observation and photography.
- Environmental education and interpretation.

Calendar of Events

(fishing open year-round in certain areas)

January: waterfowl, archery for deer, squirrel and rabbit hunting.

May: International Migratory Bird Day.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week, archery for deer, squirrel and rabbit hunting

November: archery for deer, waterfowl, squirrel and rabbit hunting.

December: archery for deer, waterfowl, squirrel and rabbit hunting.

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Questions and Answers

How big is the brake?

The refuge encompasses 2,400 acres of which 1,800 comprise a pristine cypress and tupelo-studded oxbow lake (brake).

Why is duck hunting so popular there?

Featured over the years in many national hunting-related magazines, Mathews Brake NWR hosts hunters from all over the nation during duck season because of its high quality waterfowl habitat. The maze of “fingers” of the brake, varied water depths which support many natural foods, and the fact that the refuge is literally an island of habitat in a sea of agriculture, attracts tens of thousands of ducks.

What can be done to combat the terrible water lily problem during summer?

Spray a target pesticide on the dense water lily (lotus) that makes the brake inaccessible to fishermen from June through September. With many other immediate safety-related visitor needs and inadequate refuge funding, this problem will not be likely solved in the near future without an estimated \$50,000 in special funding.

Is it true the water level in the lake is controlled by beavers?

Yes. It is perhaps fitting that the lifeblood of a national wildlife refuge should depend on wildlife. Having the beavers create their dams is the only way that water is held in the 1,800-acre brake. However, a more dependable water source such as a weir, levee or water control structure is desperately needed to ensure the protection of the refuge’s habitats and outdoor recreation opportunities. Again, funding is critically needed to accomplish this.

Why are there only four people stationed at Mathews Brake NWR?

Actually, there is no staff on Mathews Brake NWR, yet the responsibilities and opportunities there could justify its own two or three-person staff. Unfortunately, the four-person staff at Morgan Brake NWR must also manage Mathews Brake and Hillside refuges.