

Savannah

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: Diana Churchill



photo: David E. Goeke



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photo: Ray Porter

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Savannah National Wildlife Refuge is part of the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex headquartered in Savannah, Georgia. The complex includes seven national wildlife refuges, totaling 56,949 acres, along a 100-mile stretch of coastline in Georgia and South Carolina. The seven refuges are Pinckney Island and Tybee NWRs in SC; Savannah (located in both states along the Savannah River); and Wassaw, Harris Neck, Blackbeard Island, and Wolf Island NWRs in GA.

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1927.
- Acres: 29,175.
- Savannah NWR lies in Chatham and Effingham counties, Georgia and Jasper County, South Carolina.
- Location: the refuge is located on SC Highway 170, one mile east of Port Wentworth, Georgia and six miles south of Hardeeville, South Carolina.

Natural History

- The refuge lies on the lower Savannah River between mile markers 18 and 40. The port city of Savannah, Georgia lies downstream of the refuge.
- There are over 38 miles of river and 25 miles of streams and creeks within the refuge boundaries.
- Habitats include bottomland hardwoods, palustrine, estuarine and tidal (8ft. amplitude) freshwater wetlands. Fringe area of upland hardwoods exists along the east boundary.
- A 3,000-acre impoundment system is actively managed for migratory wading birds and waterfowl.

- The Seaboard Coastline Railroad has a 24-acre Right-of-Way agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- The refuge is home to a large variety of wildlife including ducks, geese, wading birds, shorebirds and several endangered and/or threatened species including bald eagles, wood storks, manatees and shortnose sturgeon. The refuge also provides nesting areas for wood ducks, great horned owls, bald eagles, osprey and swallow-tailed kites among others.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Savannah NWR is part of a seven-refuge complex with an annual budget of \$3,434,000 and a combined staff of 29, eight of which are assigned to this refuge.
- Over 170,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Utilize refuge property as "a refuge and breeding ground for native birds and wild animals."
- Provide habitat and protection for those species of plants and animals whose survival is threatened or endangered.
- Provide habitat and sanctuary for migratory birds consistent with the objectives of the Atlantic Flyway.
- Maintain and enhance as needed the habitats of all other species of indigenous wildlife and fishery resources.
- Manage furbearers, deer and other upland game species so their numbers will be compatible with other wildlife management goals.
- Promote wildlife education, interpretation and recreational opportunities to the visiting public.

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Management Tools

- Water level management on 3,000 acres for the benefit of waterfowl, wading birds, wood storks, swallow-tailed kites and shorebirds.
- Prescribed fire.
- Mowing/disking.
- Mechanical/chemical treatment of noxious plants.
- Public hunting for deer and feral hog management.
- Environmental education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking/biking trails.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildlife photography.
- Environmental education/interpretation.
- Fishing.
- Hunting.
- The four-mile Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive is open to vehicle traffic throughout the year.
- Thirty-six miles of dikes are open seasonally to foot traffic.

Calendar of Events

March: All impoundments (pools) open to fishing March 1 to November 30 (designated areas are open all year); feral hog hunting.

April: Turkey hunting.

May: Migratory Bird Day.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week; Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding & Nature Festival; youth archery deer hunting; archery deer/hog hunting.

November: Gun hunt for deer, squirrel and feral hogs; two-day mobility-impaired deer hunt.

December: Christmas Bird Count; youth waterfowl hunt

Questions and Answers

How do I get there?

From Savannah: Take U.S. Highway 17 North across the Talmadge Bridge into SC and continue approximately seven miles. Turn left onto SC 170 and continue 1.5 miles to the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive entrance on your left.

From I-95: Take either SC Exit 5 (Hardeeville) U.S. Highway 17 South towards Savannah or GA Exit 109 (Port Wentworth) GA Route 21 East towards Savannah and follow signs to refuge.

Are there any costs associated with a visit?

There are no fees charged to visit the refuge.

What can I expect to see?

During the spring and fall, you will usually see many alligators sunning themselves on the banks of waterways, along with an assortment of wading birds. During the winter months, waterfowl and other migratory birds are visible in the impoundment system.

Is there a visitor center?

Currently, there is no visitor center, however, there is an informational kiosk where a refuge map and interpretive displays of the refuge can be viewed and written information can be obtained. A visitor center is being planned and is currently in the design phase. Construction could begin as early as spring of 2007.

Are there any hunting and/or fishing opportunities?

Yes, fishing is allowed year-round in the creeks and rivers throughout the refuge. Fishing is also allowed within the impoundment system between March 1 and November 30 of each year. Bank fishing from the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive is permitted all year.

Hunting is also permitted on the refuge. The archery hunting season

for white-tailed deer and feral hogs extends from October 1-31 each year. The firearm season for deer, feral hogs and squirrel extends from November 1-30 of each year.

Designated areas are open to mobility-impaired hunters for a quota hunt in November. In March, a feral hog hunt is open to gun hunters. During April there is a turkey hunt. Waterfowl hunting is permitted in designated areas during state (Georgia and South Carolina) seasons. A portion of the refuge in Georgia is set aside for a youth archery hunt and waterfowl hunt. Alligator hunting, though currently allowed in Georgia, is prohibited within refuge boundaries.

For more information on refuge hunts and to receive permit applications for the quota hunts, please call the headquarters office 912/652 4415 or visit our website (www.fws.gov/savannah).