

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Lower Suwannee

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Located along the southern edge of the Big Bend Region of Florida's west coast, Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 52,935 acres of land in Dixie and Levy Counties.

The historic Suwannee River, made famous by Stephen Foster, bisects the refuge.





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

Introduction

Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge was established on April 10, 1979, for the purpose of protecting, maintaining, and enhancing a beautiful and rare natural ecosystem. Purchase of the lands was made possible through the cooperative efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and Florida's Suwannee River Water Management District.

Along the river and its tributary creeks, the habitat consists of majestic cypress trees and floodplain hardwood forests; scrub oak communities and pine plantations are found on the upland sites.

From the mouth of the Suwannee River, the refuge fronts 26 miles of the Gulf of Mexico where the habitat changes to scenic tidal marshes dotted with coastal islands. Each of these diverse vegetative communities

contributes to making Lower Suwannee Refuge one of the largest undeveloped river delta-estuarine systems in the United States.

The overall goal of Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge is to provide conditions desirable to wildlife through scientific management. Specific objectives developed for the area include providing habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species as well as migrating birds and resident wildlife. The refuge also provides opportunities for environmental education and wildlife oriented recreation.



RJ Lemaire

Habitat and Wildlife

A constant influx of nutrients from the river system coupled with numerous offshore islands and tidal creeks create excellent wildlife habitat. Marine mammals such as bottlenose dolphin and the endangered West Indian Manatee, along with several species of marine turtles, utilize the coastal waters of the Suwannee Sound. Natural salt

marshes and tidal flats attract thousands of shorebirds and diving ducks while acting as a valuable nursery area for fish, shrimp and shellfish.

Freshwater fish including largemouth bass, Suwannee bass, bluegill, redear sunfish and channel catfish are found in the Suwannee River and its creeks.

Floodplain wetlands such as bottomland hardwood forests, wooded swamps and freshwater marsh support nesting wood ducks, black bear, otter, alligator, wading birds, raccoons and several species of

wintering waterfowl. Mixed hardwood pine forests and uplands offer cover to turkey and white-tailed deer.

In addition to these animals, other species (including several that are classified as endangered or threatened) utilize various habitat types present on Lower Suwannee Refuge.



Bruce Colin ©



Sean Dowie ©



Over 250 species of birds have been identified on the refuge. Osprey, swallow-tailed kite and bald eagles are among the ninety species that nest on the area.

Major habitat management practices since 2002 have emphasized construction of activities for several species of bats (Brazilian free-tail, Rafinesque's big-eared and southeastern Myotis) and Prothonotary warblers.

Innovative bat houses were constructed and placed in critical areas of the refuge, so that suitable habitat is available for each species. The Rafinesque's big eared bat historically took up residence in old hollow gum trees. After decades of indiscriminate logging, culvert bat houses were designed to replace the large hollow trees and provide security for the swamp dwelling bat. While the very large crevice roosting bat house near the River Trail can house more than 100,000 colonially roosting bats, such as Brazilian free-tails.





One of the most significant recent projects has been the rediscovery of the salt marsh vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus dukecampbelli*), listed as an endangered species in 1991. After being documented in 1982 in the near-by Waccassa Bay, it was not found again until

2004 when the Refuge Biologist successfully trapped three of the furry Pleistocene relicts in refuge coastal marsh habitat.



Managing the Forest

Refuge employees strive to provide high quality habitat conditions for a variety of native wildlife. When the refuge was established, more than 6,000 acres of uplands had been commercially

managed for timber production. Projects designed to restore these areas to more natural conditions are underway. Hundreds of acres of slash pines have been selectively thinned – and in some cases clear cut - to allow reforestation to more native longleaf/wiregrass and mixed hardwood communities.

Much of the state of Florida contains ecosystems that have adapted with fire, typically burning naturally every three to ten years. Pine flatwoods



and scrub are good examples of communities that need fire to sustain high quality habitat. Prescribed fire (controlled burning) is used on refuge uplands and wetlands to mimic the

natural fire regime. This improves habitat and food availability for many species of wildlife including the gopher tortoise, eastern indigo snake, and marsh and wading birds.



Recreational Opportunities

Lower Suwannee Refuge provides opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors through wildlife-oriented recreation including wildlife observation and photography, fishing, hunting, environmental education, interpretive programs, and canoeing. There is no admission fee and most of the Refuge is open 24 hours a day 365 days per year.

Hiking trails, observation platforms, fishing piers, boardwalks and several launch sites for small boats provide access to many areas of the refuge that are off the beaten path.



Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge



| Legend | |
|--------|-----------------------------|
| | State or county highway |
| | Primary refuge road |
| | Secondary refuge road |
| | Canoe trail |
| | Walking trails |
| | Lower Suwannee Nature Drive |
| | Refuge boundary and land |
| | Inholdings |
| | Information kiosks |
| | Information box |
| | Refuge headquarters |
| | Observation tower |
| | Canoe launch |
| | Boat ramp |
| | Fishing |

Gulf of Mexico





Trenton

Fanning Springs

CR 341

US 19

US 129

Chiefland

CR 330

CR 347

CR 347

CR 345

To Old Town

CR 349

Yellow-jacket Loop

Beaver Dam Road

Weeks Landing Road

CR 347

To Chiefland

CR 349

North Dead End Road

Fowlers Bluff

Middle Loop Road

River Trail

Headquarters Drive

Lower Suwannee Nature Drive

County

Triangle Loop Road

South Dead End Road

Suwannee River

Levy County

Gopher River

Pond 4 Road

CR 347

Lower Suwannee Nature Drive

Barnett Creek Road

McCormick Creek Road

Cabin Road

Gate 10 Road

Dan May Creek

Barnett Creek

Big Trout Creek

CR 347

Shell Mound Fishing Pier

Shell Mound Unit

Shell Mound Trail

Dennis Creek Trail

SR 24

To Cedar Key

Dennis Creek



Paddling along the salt marshes or around the estuarine waters of the Shell Mound unit provides scenic wildlife observation. The Paddling Trail on the historic Suwannee River can be accessed in the town of Suwannee and offers three loops ranging from 1.5 to 4 miles in length. Spectacular tidal creeks (Shired and Sanders) along the Dixie Mainline offer award-winning photo opportunities from your kayak or canoe.



During the spring and summer months, American alligators are commonly sighted throughout all refuge wetland areas. Osprey, swallow-tailed kite, and bald eagle activity peaks during late spring. White-tailed deer are more readily observed during the fall and winter with the best time for viewing being at dusk along road right-of-ways.





How to Enjoy Your Visit

The refuge is open year-round for wildlife observation, hiking and photography. There are 40 miles of improved roads (primary) scattered through the refuge that are open to motorized vehicles, which provide the visitor a glimpse of the various forest and wetland habitats within the refuge. Hiking and bicycling are allowed on all refuge roads. An additional 50 miles of unimproved roads (secondary) are available for hiking and bicycling only.



Several walking trails are available on the refuge. The historic Suwannee River and its hardwood swamps can be viewed along the 0.6-mile River Trail located just north of the refuge headquarters.

The Dennis Creek Trail (1.0-mile loop) and the Shell Mound Trail (0.3-mile loop) are located at Shell Mound at the end of County Road 326. The Dennis Creek trail takes you through a coastal island where you will see various bird life and unique coastal habitat. The Shell Mound Trail crosses over an ancient Indian shell midden (reaching 28 feet above mean sea level), where a spectacular view of the coastal estuary and Gulf of Mexico awaits you.

A handicapped accessible fishing boardwalk/observation pier is also available at Shell Mound. The Salt Creek observation trail (.1 mile) and fishing boardwalk provides a breath taking view of the salt marsh and coastal pine islands. This trail is located off of CR 349 about one mile from the town of Suwannee.



USFWS

Note: Biting insects are particularly numerous along these trails during the summer months. Use of an insect repellent is advised.

Coastal waters, tidal creeks, interior ponds and the Suwannee River are open year-round to fishing. Public boat ramps providing access to the Suwannee River are located at nearby Fowler's Bluff and the town of Suwannee in Dixie County.



Henry Sansing

Access to coastal waters is available at Cedar Key, Shell Mound, Shired Island and the town of Suwannee.

Hunting of small game (squirrel, raccoon) big game (turkey, deer and hog), and waterfowl is permitted during designated seasons. A special brochure and permit is required for hunting. Information is available at the refuge headquarters.



The Refuge System

Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 540 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the System is to preserve a national network of lands and waters for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources of the United States for the benefit of present and future generations. The System encompasses over 100 million acres administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior.

In addition to the refuge system, the Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for the endangered species program, National Fish Hatcheries, certain marine mammals and migratory birds, as well as other wildlife programs. The refuge office is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.

Refuge Regulations

Vehicles

All motorized vehicles are restricted to use on designated roads as shown on the attached map. The use of ATV's (three and four wheelers, etc.) is prohibited.

Camping

Not permitted on the refuge, but is available at county campgrounds located on CR 326 near Shell Mound and Shired Island off CR 357.



USFWS

Littering

Prohibited. Please dispose of in a responsible manner.

Fires

Not permitted on refuge.

Collecting

Taking of government property, any artifact, natural feature, animal or plant is prohibited. Metal detectors are prohibited.

Firearms/weapons

Firearms/weapons are prohibited except as authorized during refuge hunting seasons.

Pets

Must be on a leash and under control of owner at all times.

Horses

Not permitted on refuge.



Jerry Gamble

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National Wildlife Refuge
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May 2006

