

# Roanoke River

## *National Wildlife Refuge*



photo: USFWS



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**Harvey Hill, Refuge Manager**  
**Roanoke River NWR**  
**P.O. Box 430 (mailing)**  
**114 West Water Street**  
**Windsor, NC 27983**  
**Phone: 252/794 3808**  
**Fax: 252/794 3780**  
**E-mail: [roanokeriver@fws.gov](mailto:roanokeriver@fws.gov)**  
**Website: <http://roanokeriver.fws.gov>**

### Refuge Facts

- Established: 1989
- Acres: 20,978
- Other management: Two satellite tracts totaling 174 acres and 98 conservation easements totaling 2,870 acres in 19 counties.
- Location: The refuge consists of five different tracts of land in the Roanoke River basin, plus two distant satellite tracts in other river basins. The Roanoke River tracts are scattered along 70 miles of the River from Hamilton, NC to the mouth of the River at Albemarle Sound. Refuge headquarters are in Windsor, NC.

### Natural History

- Refuge lands are located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain and are part of an extensive bottomland hardwood forest supported by wehadkee and chewacla soils. The forests consist of mixed hardwood flats and ridges, cypress/tupelo sloughs and black and brown water streams.
- Concentrations of wintering waterfowl, nesting ducks, raptors and neo-tropical migrants are common. At least four heron rookeries are located on the refuge, including what is believed to be the largest inland heron rookery in North Carolina.
- The endangered shortnose sturgeon is thought to be present in refuge habitat near the mouth of the River; although its present status is not known.
- Bald eagles nest on adjacent lands. The Roanoke River corridor serves as a wintering area for bald eagles.
- Bottomland hardwood forest accounts for 13,824 acres; cypress/tupelo swamp for 7,154 acres.

### Financial Impact of Refuge

- Six-person staff.
- 5,000 visitors annually (visitor services program is in early development stage through partnerships).
- Current budget FY 05: \$430,000.

### Refuge Objectives

- Provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, neo-tropical migrants and other birds.
- Provide migrating, spawning and nursery habitat for anadromous fish; i.e. blueback herring, alewife, hickory shad and striped bass.
- Enhance and protect forested wetlands consisting of bottomland hardwoods and swamps.
- To protect and manage for endangered and threatened wildlife.
- Provide recreation and environmental education for the public.

### Management tools

- Water management for wintering and nesting waterfowl, wading bird rookeries and anadromous fish nurseries.
- Wetland restoration.
- Bottomland hardwood management.
- Mechanical or chemical treatment of non-native plants.
- Deer and turkey management with public hunting.
- Environmental education and interpretation.
- Law enforcement.

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## Partnerships

- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.
- North Carolina Department of the Environment and Natural Resources.
- Partnership for the Sounds.
- The Nature Conservancy.
- Dominion Power.
- National Marine Fisheries Service.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- Ducks Unlimited.
- University of Maryland; Appalachian Laboratory.
- U.S. Geological Survey.
- Bertie County.
- Town of Windsor.
- Conservation Fund.

## Visitor Opportunities

- Fishing.
- Hunting.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildlife photography.
- Environmental education.
- Wildlife interpretation.
- Trails.

## Calendar of Events

**April:** youth turkey hunt.

**April-May:** turkey hunts.

**May:** International Migratory Bird Day.

**September-October:** archery/muzzleloader deer hunts.

**October:** National Wildlife Refuge Week.

**October-November:** deer hunts.

**October-December:** small game hunts.

**November-December:** waterfowl hunts.

## Questions and Answers:

*When is something going to be done with the flows on the river?*

Flows on the lower Roanoke River, defined as the area from below Roanoke Rapids to the River's mouth, are managed by three dams, the US Army Corps of Engineer's (USACOE) John H. Kerr flood control project and two private hydro-power projects owned by Dominion Power. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is working with over forty stakeholders to address the flow issues on the River and any impacts they may have on fish and wildlife resources.

There are two formal processes underway to address the flow issues. The first was the issuance of a new license by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to Dominion Power. Under Dominion Power's new 40-year license, the FERC has directed Dominion Power to carry out studies to determine possible impacts their hydro-power operations may have on fish and wildlife resources. Depending on study results, flows may be adjusted to minimize impacts using an adaptive management approach.

The second process is a USACOE section 216 study, which authorizes the USACOE to evaluate the operations of their John H. Kerr flood control project on the Roanoke River and any impacts it may have on fish and wildlife resources. If it is found that USACOE's flood control operations are adversely impacting fish and wildlife resources such that impacts outweigh project benefits, then the USACOE will consider changing their operations.

Addressing the flow issues on the River is a long and tedious process, as local economies and human activities within the floodplain have evolved around the River's current managed flow regime. The FWS is hopeful that the outcome of the section 216 study and Dominion Power's obligations under their new license will restore a more natural flow regime to the lower Roanoke River.

*Is camping allowed?*

Primitive camping is only permitted in conjunction with refuge managed hunts due to safety concerns with river navigation at dusk and dawn. Hunters can set up camp within 100 feet of the River levee.

*Do I need a hunting permit?*

Special hunt permits are required to hunt on refuge lands. Permits are issued by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). Information, application procedures and hunt dates can be obtained by visiting their website: [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org), by calling 1-888-248-6834 or through the Special Hunt Opportunities booklet annually published by NCWRC. The booklet can be obtained from NCWRC's website, through local sporting goods centers or through the refuge.

*What are hunting conditions like?*

Refuge staff can provide you with this information. Answers depend on the season and river flows, which can abruptly change.

*Where can I go on the refuge for good birding?*

Kuralt Trail, a 1.5 mile round-trip walk, is located on northbound Highway 13/17 just north of Williamston, NC and offers the best location for birding. Other natural river levees and trails off Highway 13/17 offer good birding opportunities as well. There are designated parking areas at each site. You can also float the Roanoke River by accessing local boat ramps.