

Mason Neck, Occoquan Bay and Featherstone National Wildlife Refuges are all managed under the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Occoquan Bay
National Wildlife Refuge
14050 Dawson Beach Road
Woodbridge, VA 22191
Visitor Contact Station: 703/491 6869

For further information, contact:
Potomac River
National Wildlife Refuge Complex
14344 Jefferson Davis Highway
Woodbridge, VA 22191
703/490 4979
r5rw_msnwr@fws.gov

Federal Relay Service for the
deaf and hard-of-hearing
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD

August 2004



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Occoquan Bay

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Twenty miles south of Washington, DC, at the confluence of the Potomac and Occoquan rivers, Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge is an oasis where migrating birds and busy city residents both seek a quiet escape from development. Its diverse grasslands and marshes attract songbirds, raptors, waterfowl and butterflies that depend on meadows and open water for their food, nesting sites, and a place to rest. Visitors share this feeling of respite as they hike quiet trails and watch wildlife drawn to the one-square mile refuge, an oasis in an urban setting.

History



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

Long before Europeans colonized North America, humans and wildlife shared the Occoquan Bay area. When John Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, he found a well established Dogue Indian village at the Occoquan River's mouth. Floods, fire and native farming kept the vegetation low or in early succession, creating meadows and open areas. Migrating birds followed the same waterways that drew explorers and rested in the meadows that Americans would farm until recent times. Sturgeon, eels, striped bass and shad in the adjacent marshes drew humans and avians

alike. When the Army obtained the site in 1950, for a radio transmitting station, fields of antennas replaced cows and crops. In the 1970's, the base's mission shifted to top secret research.

Electromagnetic pulse testing and sight lines for security kept the vegetation low, primarily in grasslands. When

the base closed in the 1990's, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was able to continue to preserve these grasslands that had nurtured wildlife for so long. Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge was established in June 1998, to protect habitat for upland nesting birds, migrating wildlife, habitat diversity and environmental education.



USFWS

Seeding native grasses at Occoquan Bay

Historical artifacts



USFWS

Visitor Opportunities

Management on national wildlife refuges (in contrast to a park), focuses on habitat for wildlife. When compatible, refuges provide wildlife-oriented recreation for people. A network of roads from the site's military days forms the basis for trails and a wildlife drive. Public use is rotated between these trails to permit a variety of wildlife observations while minimizing stress on nesting or migrating wildlife and to facilitate management. Group use of the refuge for education or other activities is regulated to minimize conflict with other visitors and avoid pressure on sensitive habitat-see permits and fees for information.

Hiking-approximately 4 miles of old patrol roads are reserved for foot traffic, rotating between 3 two-mile loops. Information is posted at the visitor contact station and at trail heads.

Wildlife Drive-2 miles of old patrol roads are reserved for motor vehicle and bicycle access. Vehicles can be a mobile blind, allowing visitors closer views. The blind effect is also why drivers and passengers must stay in their vehicles while on the drive.

Photography-By controlling human intrusion, wildlife may feel less threatened and be more visible providing great opportunities for pictures. Special permits to photograph in closed areas and commercial photography are discussed in the permit and fees section.



Regulations

You can help ensure that wildlife has a place to grow and survive for future generations by respecting refuge rules and obeying posted signs. Dispose of litter properly or take it with you. All visitors are expected to comply with local, state, and federal laws and regulations, as well as with the following conditions:

Permitted:

- Visitors must stay on posted trails. Wetlands, fields and forests are reserved for wildlife.
- Foot trails are open to hikers for wildlife observation and photography. Most trails can accommodate wheelchairs and strollers.
- Vehicles are allowed only on posted roads and parking areas. Occupants must stay in their cars on the wildlife drive.
- Bicycles are considered vehicles and may only go where cars are permitted.

Prohibited:

- Pets in or out of vehicles
- Picnicking, camping and fires
- Jogging, inline skates and skateboards
- Kite flying or objects launched into the air



Occoquan Bay

National Wildlife Refuge

Visitor Contact Station

Entrance

Taylor Point Road

Delta Road

Belmont Bay

Maintenance

Bravo Road

Charlie Road

Dawson Beach Road

Catamont Creek

Road

Locust Road

Charlie

Bayview Road

Drive

Painted Turtle Pond

Deephole Point Road

Bayview Road

Easy Road

Deephole Point Road

Marumisco Creek

Fox Road

Deephole Point Road

Occoquan Bay

Legend



Parking



Gazebo



Environmental Education



Vehicle Traffic Only
(Bikes are vehicles.)



Foot Traffic Only



Vehicle & Foot Traffic



Portalet



Marsh



- Fireworks, firearms or weapons
- Audio devices disturbing to wildlife/people
- Disturbing, introducing or removing plants and animals (living or dead)
- Feeding wildlife
- Entry by foot or vehicle into closed areas
- Foot traffic on vehicle trails
- Vehicles (including bikes) on foot trails

Management

The highlights of Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge are its grasslands for upland nesting birds, its location along waterways for migrating wildlife, its many habitats in a small area, its location in an urban area, and its role as a learning and inspirational focal point. To enhance these strengths, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the area to protect existing species, maintain and enhance desired habitat, provide wildlife oriented recreation and offer public education programs.

Refuge management considers overall refuge conditions, current species, the needs of wildlife (locally and as part of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem) and available resources to provide

Mowing encroaching brush at Occoquan Bay



USFWS

Red fox kit

balanced use benefitting wildlife and humans. Selective mowing and prescribed burns keep the vegetation as grasses and shrubs, which are attractive to birds and other wildlife. Removal or control of exotic species using physical or chemical methods help ensure that less competitive or threatened species have their

place in the refuge's ecosystem. Hunting and fishing are sometimes used as management tools with the added benefit of providing wildlife-oriented recreation in a highly developed area.

Environmental Education and Research

The refuge features many sites for environmental education with an emphasis on management and human impact. Teachers and youth leaders may set up appointments with staff to discuss projects and tour the refuge. Some field study equipment is available for loan including a small audiovisual lending library. Staff can also present workshops to prepare teachers for using the area. Fees may be waived for educational programs, but deposits on loan material may apply.

Researchers should contact the refuge biologist for a permit to conduct studies on the refuge.

Canada goose eggs beginning to hatch



USFWS

USFWS

Volunteers

The refuge welcomes volunteers to help staff the visitor contact station and preset programs, assist staff in biological projects and help with maintenance in supporting the refuge. Groups and individuals are needed. Many activities have age and skill level requirements. Ask for a volunteer application.

Safety

Please stay on trails. Otherwise, you are more likely to encounter ticks, bees, chiggers or poison ivy. Insect repellent is recommended. The lack of shade on trails increases your chance of being exposed to the sun. Please dress appropriately for your visit and bring plenty of water.

Refuge wildlife is not tame. Do not try to approach wildlife too closely or touch an animal. Move away if an animal shows signs of nervousness, sudden changes in its activity or rapid flicking of head, ears, tails or wings.

Permits and Fees



The Service encourages adult and youth groups to use the refuge for wildlife-dependent interpretive and educational programs but they must obtain a permit from headquarters in advance to schedule an activity. The permitting process allows the refuge to accommodate groups, reduce pressures on habitat and wildlife, and allow other visitors the opportunity to enjoy the refuge.

Photographers may apply for permits to photograph in closed areas. A fee is required to cover the cost of administering the permit.

Permits are required for any commercial activity.

Fees collected at the refuge are used to improve public use services and facilities.

Fees

Per person \$1

Bus less than 20 passengers
more than 20

Per car \$2

\$20
\$30

Annual Pass/Occoquan Bay NWR

\$10

The refuge honors the annual or lifetime entrance permits listed below:

Federal Duck Stamps \$15

Golden Eagle Passport \$65

Golden Age Passport (age 62 or older) \$10

Golden Access passport-free with written proof of permanent disability

Refuge Facts



USFWS

Acreage: 642 acres — roughly 1 square mile

Primary habitat: grasslands and marshes

Hours: Variable, most weekends — call for hours

Directions



USFWS

Two aerial views of Occoquan Bay NWR

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge is located on the east side of Woodbridge in Prince William County, Virginia, at the junction of the Potomac and Occoquan rivers. From Route 1 (Jefferson Davis Highway) in Woodbridge, go east on Dawson Beach Road .75 miles to refuge and visitor contact station at the end of the road.

National Wildlife Refuge System

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 540 national wildlife refuges and thousands of waterfowl management areas in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and its habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world.

The Service also manages national fish hatcheries and provides leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research technical assistance, and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.