

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bill Williams River

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



The 6,105-acre Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 500 refuges throughout the United States managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only national system of lands dedicated to conserving our wildlife heritage for people today and for generations yet to come.

**Welcome:
Desert Oasis**

With its majestic rock cliffs; its ribbon of cool water running through classic Sonoran Desert; and its cattail-filled marsh harboring rails and waterfowl, Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge offers a little bit of everything for both wildlife and people.



*Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge.
Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth*

Rare Habitat

A century ago, cottonwood forest was widespread along the Colorado River. In their journals, western explorers such as General John C. Fremont noted miles-thick stands of cottonwood and willow along the banks. They also mentioned the presence of abundant mesquite on the higher reaches.

In 1935, the 726-foot Hoover Dam was built on the Arizona-Nevada border, followed by twenty smaller dams over the following decades. As the water backed up into a series of lakes, many of the riparian forests along the Colorado River were drowned. The construction of Alamo Dam on the Bill Williams River in 1968 changed the old flood cycle, which reduced stands of native cottonwood and willow trees.



Cholla. Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth

Fortunately, Bill Williams River NWR holds one of the last stands of natural cottonwood-willow forest along the lower Colorado River, creating a unique ecosystem that provides good habitat for resident and migratory wildlife.

Wildlife: Lush Living in the Desert

The rare riparian habitat of Bill Williams River NWR draws a variety of neotropical migratory birds—winging their way from Central and South America to their breeding grounds in the north. Bright colors from birds like the yellow warbler, vermilion flycatcher, and summer tanager flash like sparks in the desert sky as they flit across the riverbed.

About a dozen endangered Yuma clapper rails spend the summer months in the cattails of the marsh and may overwinter. More likely heard than seen, their dry *kek-kek-kek* echoes at dusk and dawn. Another endangered bird, the southwestern willow flycatcher, nests on the refuge in the willow trees lining the river.

Crisscrossing tracks in the sand chronicle the nighttime excursions of cottontails, javelina, and deer, as well as predatory coyotes, bobcats, and the less common cougars.



Refuge scene. Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth

Rattlesnakes are highly mobile at dawn and dusk and may be active during any month. In daytime heat they recede to cooler spots, such as rodent burrows or crevices.

Native Fish Get a Finhold

Just below refuge headquarters lies a cove where razorback suckers and bonytail chubs are raised. The two species are among 31 native Arizona fish, 28 of which are either endangered, threatened, or candidates for listing.

At Bill Williams River NWR, biologists from the Fish and Wildlife Service's Arizona Fishery Resources Office receive young razorback suckers and bonytail chubs from Dexter National Fish Hatchery, a New Mexico facility that produces endangered fish. The fish are introduced into the cove, where they'll grow to around 10 inches—a size that offers them a chance against predators. At that point they're released into Lake Havasu and other areas, where they'll be monitored to determine their survival. In the future, these fish will also be released into stretches of free-flowing river.



Refuge view. Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth

Working for Wildlife

Refuge staff use various management techniques to protect and restore the native plants and animals at Bill Williams River NWR. Cottonwood and willow trees are planted and maintained, salt cedar is controlled, and native fish are being reintroduced. The refuge is also working with the Army Corps of Engineers, the agency in charge of water releases from Alamo Dam, to return water flows in the Bill Williams River to a more natural state.

History: Mystic to Mythic Past

The lower Colorado River region is within the ancestral boundaries of the Mojave and Chemehuevi, tribes whose legacies date back many thousands of years. Descendants of these tribes still use willow stems from the refuge for traditional Native American basket weaving.

The river that flows through the refuge gets its name from Bill Williams, a mountain man who traveled through much of Arizona in the early 1800s. Williams came west from St. Louis, serving as a missionary to Native Americans. He eventually gave up the life of a missionary and spent the rest of his life traveling the west as a trapper.

The year and cause of his death remains a mystery, but legend has it he is buried in an unmarked grave somewhere on Bill Williams Mountain near Williams, Arizona.

Things to do at the Refuge



Wildlife watching, boating, fishing, and hunting are popular activities on the refuge. Stop by headquarters (open Monday through Friday, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm) for the latest wildlife sightings and hunting and fishing regulations.

Wildlife Watching

There are no developed trails at Bill Williams River NWR, but the riparian area can be seen from the gravel road that begins less than a mile northeast of refuge headquarters and ends approximately 3 miles east of highway 95. There are several pull-outs off highway 95 that offer good views of the delta area, including a cattail marsh. Visitors are welcome to explore the rest of the refuge on foot.

The Bill Williams River flows gently, at the average rate of 50 cubic feet per second, except during sporadic dam releases. Its depth is perfect for wading ankle-deep in the sandy bottom along a canopied passage that cuts a path through dense riparian growth. In some pools you might spot native fish species, such as longfin dace.

Greater Roadrunner. Photograph by John and Karen Hollingsworth



The refuge encompasses a small portion of Lake Havasu flanked by a shallow, cattail-lined marsh. (Be careful navigating here; boats can get stuck on sandbars.) A small number of birds, such as pied-billed and eared grebes, nest in a few sheltered inlets along this stretch. Canada geese and common and Barrow's goldeneye are present in winter.

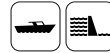
Bald eagles winter in the area and may be spotted hunting for fish in the river. The red-breasted merganser is another species that uses the marsh area, along with yellow-breasted chat, common yellowthroat, and red-winged blackbird.

The "no wake" zone on the Bill Williams River delta can be a peaceful place, particularly if you go by canoe or pull your motor and paddle once you've reached the marsh. Jagged desert mountains tower above, wrapped by a searing blue sky; golden cattails wave in the breeze and harbor great blue herons, egrets, and rails.

The Bill Williams Road takes you along the river, through desert uplands, and past a valley lined with cottonwoods, willows, and salt cedar. Along the way you can stop and explore the desert and cliff-base habitat, where phainopepla and cactus wren are common. Walk out on cactus-flecked rises and look north to scan the cottonwood crowns at eye level. Here you might spot a summer tanager, Bullock's oriole, or any of several warbler migrants. Look, also, for the elusive yellow-billed cuckoo that often perches amid the tree's thick central branches.

You can hike the full 6-mile length of the refuge's river canyon, which lies beyond the parking area located 3 miles from highway 95. Before heading out, however, check with the refuge headquarters about the possibility of releases from Alamo Dam. Heavy rains can overflow Alamo Lake, and water is then released into the Bill Williams, causing the river to rise quickly.

Boating



If you visit Bill Williams River NWR by boat, you'll do the birds a big favor if you observe the *no wake speed* rule and cruise slowly in the middle of the river. This is to protect the fragile riparian habitat and because many backwater areas provide nesting and hiding places for birds, especially in spring and summer.

Boats can be launched from a mile below the refuge office on Parker Dam Road, at Take Off Point. Canoes and hand-carried boats may be launched from refuge headquarters. Be sure to be out by 4:00 pm, when the gate is locked, if you wish to take your boat out on refuge grounds.



Fishing



Fishing for striped and largemouth bass, catfish, bluegill, and others, is allowed on the refuge (all Arizona fishing regulations apply). Please use catch-and-release techniques with any native fish caught, and report catches to refuge staff.

Hunting



Hunting is permitted on Bill Williams River NWR for mourning and white-winged dove, Gambel's quail, and cottontail rabbit on designated areas. Desert bighorn sheep hunting is also allowed on designated areas of the refuge, but you will need a special state permit.

Help Us Protect the Refuge

Camping



Camping is not allowed on the refuge, but visit nearby Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas for excellent camping opportunities.

Fires



To protect scarce desert wood, fires are not permitted on Bill Williams River NWR.

Pets



Pets must be leashed and under control at all times.

Litter



Please leave only your footprints; take all litter with you.

Collecting

Keep wild things wild—all plants, animals, minerals, and historic objects are protected. Disturbance or collection is prohibited except by special permit.

Vehicles

All vehicles must remain on roads, where the maximum speed is 25 mph. Off-road travel is by foot only. ORV's and drivers must be licensed for highway travel.

Volunteer Opportunities

Interested in volunteering for Bill Williams River NWR? There are many volunteer opportunities at the refuge, including maintenance work (carpentry, plumbing, welding, etc.); photographers (landscape or nature and wildlife); clerical (filing, typing, answer phone); artists (crafters, painters, carvers); and someone with a flair for creative writing or design to help design displays for the visitor center.

One gravel trailer pad (with water, electricity, and sewer) is available for volunteers; arrangements must be made at least 2 months in advance. Please contact refuge headquarters for more information.

Bill Williams River NWR Facts

Where is it?

To get to Bill Williams River NWR from Lake Havasu City, Arizona, follow Arizona Highway 95 south approximately 23 miles. Headquarters are located between mileposts 160 and 161.

When was it established?

January 1941.

How big is it?

6,000 acres.

Why is it here?

To preserve, protect, and enhance some of the last remaining native riparian habitat in the lower Colorado River Valley.

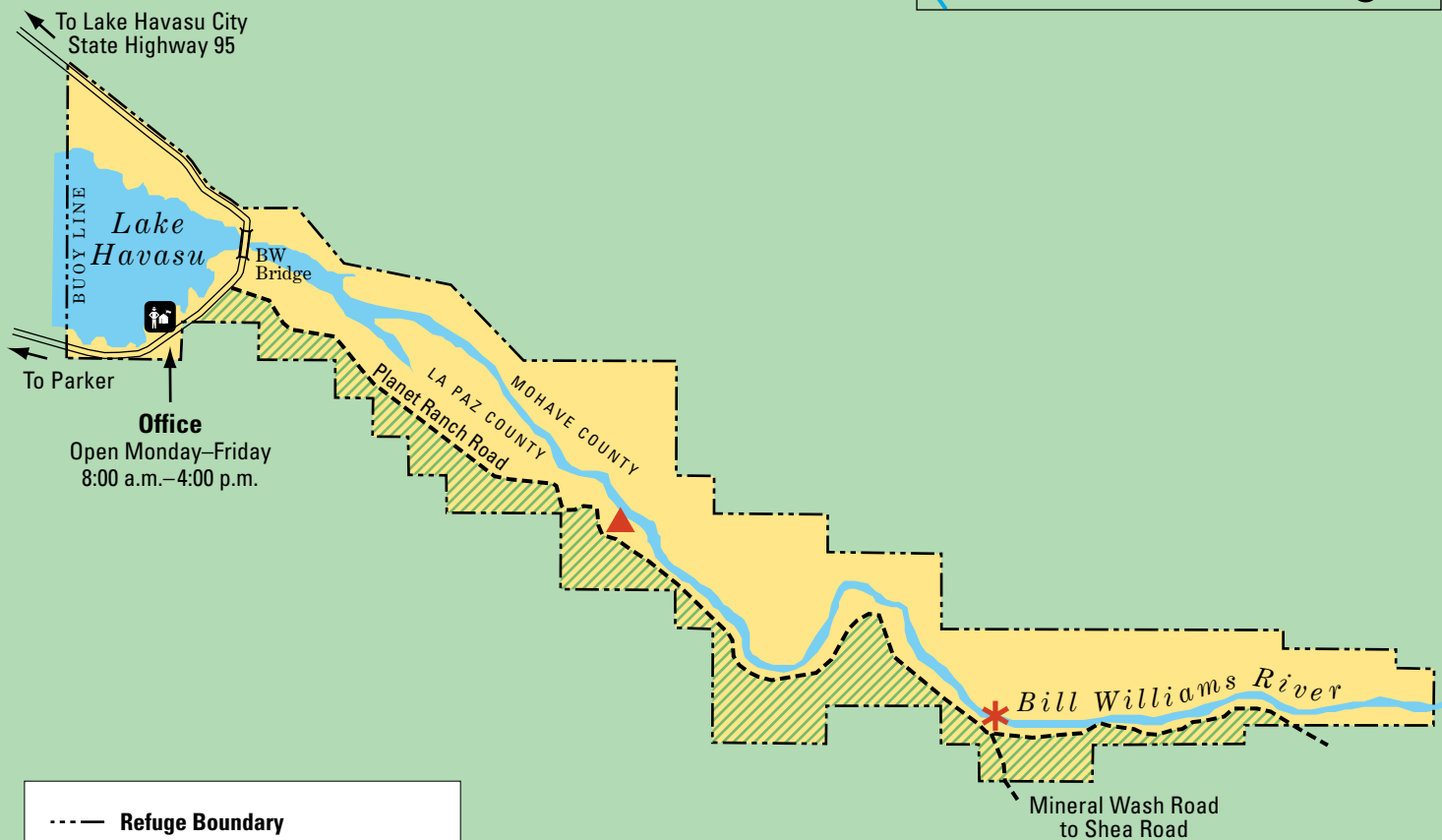
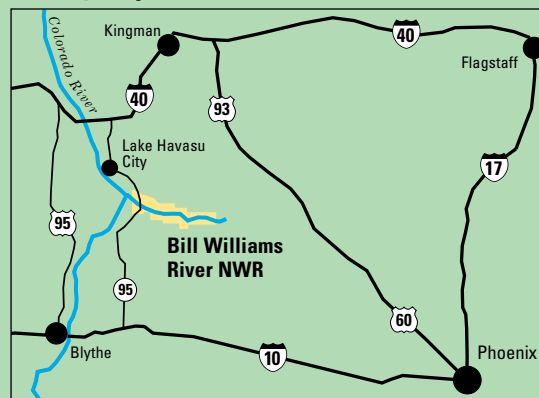
Text Credit

The text for this brochure was adapted from *Western Wildlife Refuges: Thirty-Six Ecological Havens from California to Texas* by Dennis Wall (Museum of New Mexico Press).

Bill Williams River

National Wildlife Refuge

Vicinity Map



--- Refuge Boundary

 Public Hunting Area

--- Planet Branch Road
Unimproved Dirt Road

 Road passable by 4-wheel-drive vehicle only beyond this point

 Road impassable by vehicle beyond Mineral Wash Road



0 1/2 1 2 miles

**Bill Williams River
National Wildlife Refuge
60911 Highway 95
Parker, Arizona 85344
520/667-4144
520/667-4015 Fax**

<http://southwest.fws.gov>

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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John and Karen Hollingsworth**