



LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond Research Natural Area (RNA) became our nation's 250th RNA in 1991. RNA's are permanently protected to maintain biological diversity and to provide places for research and monitoring of undisturbed natural areas. More than 1200 species of plants and animals make their homes in the LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond RNA. Many are threatened and endangered species. Northern prairie plants, southern swamp types and plants typical of the eastern and western forests are all found here, over 1150 plant species in all. It is one of only two sites in the state where the native shortleaf pine grows naturally.

Perhaps this area is most famous for the biannual 'Snake Migration' across the LaRue Road at the base of the bluffs, adjacent to LaRue Swamp. The road is closed to vehicular traffic every spring and fall to help protect thousands of reptiles and amphibians during their migration between their summer and winter habitats. About 66 percent of the amphibians and 59 percent of the reptiles known to occur in Illinois are found here (approximately 35 species of snakes). Approximately 90 percent of the Illinois mammal species and 173 bird species inhabit the RNA. It is an important resting area for migratory birds and waterfowl. Some unusual animals and birds that make LaRue-Pine Hills their home include the bobcat, bald eagle, spring cavefish, eastern woodrat, golden mouse, Mississippi kite, and indigo bunting.

Protecting the Reptile and Amphibian Population

The yearly migration involves the hibernation of the animals during the winter months in the bluffs. These animals then move to their feeding grounds in the swamp during the summer months. Herpetologists have reported that the main factor in triggering the seasonal migration is ground temperature. This road was open to traffic year-round prior to 1972. This resulted in the death of many animals that were crossing the road. Consequently, the Forest Service decided to close a 2.5-mile segment of the road during the seasonal migration to protect the reptiles and amphibians. The road is now being closed for two months in the spring and fall to further ensure the protection of early or late migrating species. The number of animals protected by this action is unknown, however, far fewer reptiles and amphibians are found dead on the road.

The closure dates are March 15 to May 15 in the spring and September 1 to October 30 in the fall.

Collecting of any kind is prohibited.

The impact of this action on people is minimal. People who want to enter this area of the Shawnee National Forest for scientific study or recreation are welcome to travel the snake road on foot or by non-motorized methods. Alternate travel routes are available for the motorized traveler. The closure does not interfere with waterfowl hunting, a popular late fall activity in the LaRue Swamp.

Common names of some of the species are:

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| Spiny Softshell | Northern Red-Bellied Snake | Spotted Salamander | Chorus Frog |
| Slimy Salamander | Broadheaded Skink | Eastern Hognose Snake | Red Milk Snake |
| Midland Water Snake | Western Ribbon Snake | Eastern Rough Green Snake | Eastern Garter Snake |
| Western Lesser Siren | Marbled Salamander | Small-Mouthed Salamander | Midwest Worm Snake |
| Central Newt | Zigzag salamander | Long-Tailed Salamander | Black Rat Snake |
| Cave Salamander | American Toad | Fowler's Toad | Copperhead |
| Blanchard's Cricket Frog | Northern Spring Peeper | Eastern Grey Treefrog | Black Racer |
| Bullfrog | Green Frog | Southern Leopard Frog | Midland Brown Snake |
| Common Snapping Turtle | Stinkpot Turtle | Eastern Box Turtle | Ringneck Snake |
| Eastern Painted Turtle | Red-Eared Turtle | Northern Fence Lizard | King Snake |
| Ground Skink | Western Cottonmouth | Five Lined Skink | |
| Western Earth Snake | Western Mud Snake | Diamond-Backed Water Snake | |

LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond Research Natural Area Regulations

This Research Natural Area has been established to protect a number of special plants, animals and important scenic attractions. To help meet these objectives the following special restrictions apply to public use and occupancy of the area.

The following is prohibited:

- Use of all forms of motorized vehicles or mechanical transport, including use of motorized watercraft or equipment, except on Forest Road 345 and the woods road in the SE ¼ SE ¼, Section 21.
- Collection or removal of any snake species. This includes gathering, herding, harassing or having in possession.
- The use of horses except on Forest Road 345.
- Overnight camping.
- Building fires outside stoves, grills, fireplaces or fire rings provided by the Forest Service at designated sites. Portable heaters or cooking stoves using processed fuels, as alcohol, gas or gasoline will be permitted.
- Abandonment of refuse brought to the LaRue-Pine Hills RNA.
- Establishment of commercial enterprise, construction of any improvements, establishment of permanent or semi-permanent camps or erection of structures. Temporary waterfowl blinds are permitted, but must be removed at the end of each hunting day.
- Excavation, disturbance or removal of any soil, stone, dirt or material lying upon or contained in the rock or soil of the area.
- Cutting, killing, destroying, injuring or removing living vegetation. A "Permit for Collection" is required and will be issued only for research and educational purposes. Permits and rules governing the removal of plant species may be obtained from the Forest Supervisor, Shawnee National Forest, for certain limited scientific and educational purposes. For a permit application visit our website at www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/shawnee or write to Shawnee National Forest, Forest Supervisor's Office, Attn: RNA Coordinator, 50 HWY 145 South, Harrisburg, IL 62946
- Taking or killing of any animal, bird, fish, reptile or amphibian, except for game species as defined and permitted by state laws. A "Permit for Collection" must be approved by the Director of Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Forest Supervisor to take a species not authorized by Illinois game and fish laws.
- Conducting research projects, which the Forest Service has not approved in writing.



Spotted Salamander

For a copy of the official Forest closure order and area map setting forth conditions of occupancy and use in the LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond RNA contact Mississippi Bluffs Ranger District, 521 North Main Street, Jonesboro, IL 62952, (618) 833-8576.

Length: Snake Road is 2.5 miles

Walking Time: 1 - 2 hours (one-way)

Difficulty Level: Easy

Surface Type: Gravel

Facilities: Small parking lot at Winters Pond can accommodate up to 15 vehicles.

Recommended Season: Spring and fall

Access: From Jonesboro: Take Highway 146 west 8 miles to Highway 3; then north 8 miles on Highway 3 to Muddy Levee Road. Then east 3 miles to LaRue Rd., at the 'T' turn right into Winters Pond parking lot.

From Murphysboro: Take Highway 149 west 7 miles to Highway 3; then south 14 miles on Highway 3 to Muddy Levee Road. Then east 3 miles to LaRue Rd., at the 'T' turn right into Winters Pond parking lot.

Safety: Poisonous snakes are in the area. If you encounter any snake avoid being bitten by slowing moving away. Collection or removal of any snake species is prohibited. Gathering, herding, harassing or having any snake in possession is also prohibited.

Surrounding Area: Clear Springs Wilderness, Oakwood Bottoms Greentree Reservoir, River to River Trail and Pine Hills Campground.

Emergencies: The nearest hospital is St. Joseph's in Murphysboro. The nearest public phone is in Grand Tower.