

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Lake Ophelia

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to “administer a national network of lands for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”



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

The National Wildlife Refuge System

Unmatched anywhere in the world the National Wildlife Refuge System is an extensive network of lands and waters protected and managed especially for wildlife and its habitat and for people to enjoy.

This unique system encompasses over 92 million acres of lands and waters from north of the Arctic Circle in Alaska to the subtropical waters of the Florida Keys and beyond to the Caribbean and South Pacific.



Schaus Swallowtail Butterfly

Introduction

Established in 1988 to primarily protect waterfowl and its habitat, Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge is located in Avoyelles Parish in east central Louisiana. This 18,000 acre refuge is a mix of bottomland hardwood forests, open fields and croplands crisscrossed with meandering bayous, streams, lakes ponds and the Red River that provides homes for a diversity of wildlife.

The refuge is named for its most prominent water body, the 350 acre Lake Ophelia was at one time a channel of the nearby Red River.

*Left: Blue-winged Teal
Cover: Wood Ducks*



Above: American Alligator
Right: Slider



The cypress-lined lake is renowned for its warmwater fishery. The land surrounding Lake Ophelia was once part of a vast bottomland hardwood forest that stretched along the Mississippi River. Much of this forestland, including large areas of what would become Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge, was cleared for agriculture in the 1970s.

Refuge Residents

Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge supports a wide variety of wildlife species. Though established primarily for waterfowl, the refuge also is a place for all or part of the year for mammals, songbirds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians. Many of these animals are difficult to see. Hiding throughout the refuge are creatures great and small such as bobcats, alligators, red and grey fox and wild turkeys. River otter, beaver, raccoon, mink and nutria also make the refuge their home. Other animals



Wading Bird

that are more frequently seen include white-tailed deer, squirrels, little blue herons, night herons, and barred owls. Many songbirds and wading birds arrive in the spring, and the waters are full of game fish such as channel catfish, largemouth bass and crappie (white perch).

Waterfowl

Due to its location in east-central Louisiana, this area is influenced by both the Mississippi and Central Flyways. These highways in the sky are the route for millions of duck and geese each spring and fall. Although mallards, gadwall and green-winged teal are the most abundant waterfowl species on the refuge; wood ducks, blue-winged teal, northern shovelers, northern pintails, and widgeon are also plentiful. Diving ducks such as scaup and ring-necked ducks use deeper refuge waters. Canada, snow and white-fronted geese can sometimes be observed feeding in harvested croplands.

Species of Concern

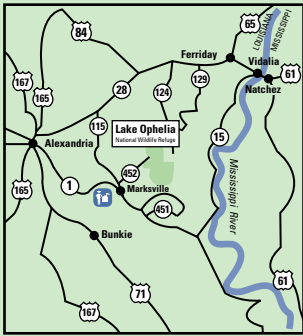
Few endangered and threatened species frequent the refuge and sightings are always marked with special interest. The peregrine falcon is an occasional visitor and bald eagles nest in the area.

Mallard Ducks



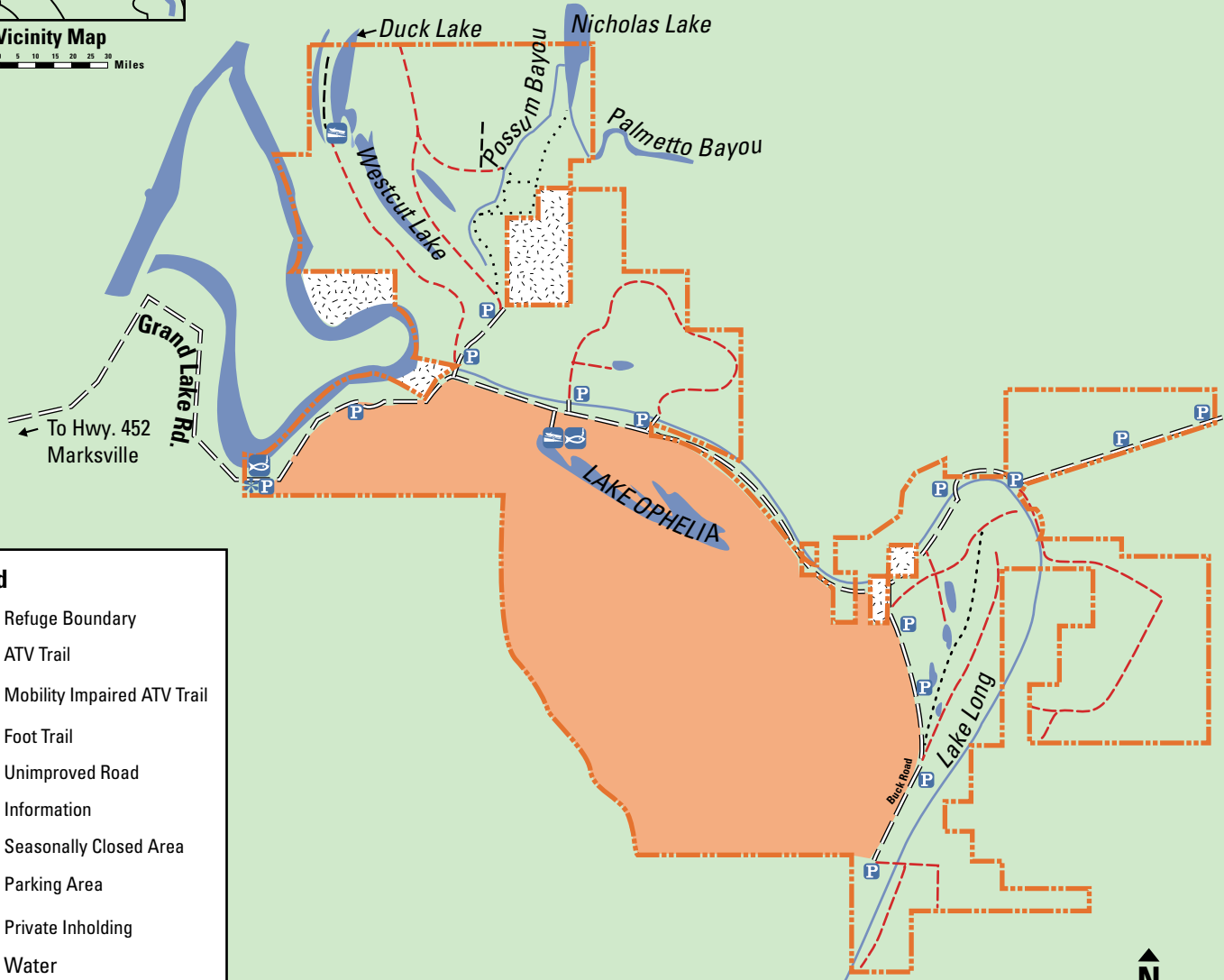
Lake Ophelia

National Wildlife Refuge



Vicinity Map

Scale 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 Miles



Legend

- — — — — Refuge Boundary
- - - - - ATV Trail
- - - - - Mobility Impaired ATV Trail
- Foot Trail
- == Unimproved Road
- * Information
- Seasonally Closed Area
- P Parking Area
- Private Inholding
- Water
- Refuge Headquarters
- Boat Launching
- Bank Fishing Area



Miles
0 1/2 1
0 Kilo 1



Treefrog

The threatened Louisiana black bear is rarely sighted moving through the area, but is expected to reestablish as the Tensas River bear population to the north and the Atchafalaya River population to the south increase. As young bears look for new homes, the refuge and surrounding woodlands can play an important role in its recovery. Not only will this area serve as a corridor linking these two existing bear populations, but also as habitat for additional bears.

A Home for Wildlife

Providing Diversity

Lake Ophelia National Wildlife is actively managed to provide a diverse habitats for the myriad of animal species that abound here. Croplands, reforested uplands, bottomland hardwoods, cypress swamps and permanent waters are molded to benefit wildlife.

Refuge croplands are farmed on a share basis, leaving part of the crops in the fields for refuge wildlife. Moist soil areas are managed by lowering and raising water levels to promote natural vegetation favored by ducks and geese. During the fall and winter, croplands and naturally vegetated areas are flooded, thus “setting the table” for wintering waterfowl. In late summer, wetland pools are dried to create mudflats for migrating shorebirds.



Songbird

Top: Green-winged Teal

Bottom: Wood Ducks



Reforestation

Two centuries ago the Lower Mississippi River Valley contained over 24 million acres of bottomland hardwood and swamp forests. Today, only 4.4 million acres of wetland forests remain, most as islands in a sea of agriculture. Gone from Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge are the Florida panther and red wolf, lost forever are the ivory-billed woodpecker and Backman's warbler.

In efforts to restore large forested block and re-link fragmented forest, several Federal and State natural resource agencies are promoting reforestation of marginal privately-owned land and replanting cleared forest on public land. Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge is part of these efforts. Many agricultural fields on the refuge have been planted with hardwood trees that once dominated the land. These native oaks, cypress, ash, gum, and pecan trees will help restore the bottomland hardwood and swamp forests that supported such a large diversity of wildlife.



Sunfish

Enjoy Your Visit

You are welcome to visit the refuge any time of the year from daylight to dark. The best time for seeing wildlife is early in the morning or at dusk.

The refuge; located at the end of Louisiana Highway 452, 18 miles north of Marksville; is open year-round from daylight to dark. Portions of the refuge are seasonally closed due to flooding and to reduce disturbance to wildlife. The headquarters is located on Louisiana Highway 1194, 3.9 miles from the junction of Highway 1194 and Louisiana Highway 1 in Fifth Ward. Highway 1194 becomes Island Road 0.5 miles from the headquarters. An alternate route from Marksville is south on Louisiana Highway 115 to Little California Road, 3.3 miles to Island Road, the headquarters is located 0.5 miles left from the intersection. The headquarters office opened Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.

White-tailed Deer



Hunting

The refuge is open for small game, white-tailed deer and waterfowl hunting. See the refuge Hunting Brochure for more information.

Fishing

The refuge is open for fishing from March 1 to October 15. See the refuge Fishing Brochure for more information.

Wildlife Observation/Photography

Wildlife observation and photography opportunities are available throughout the year. There are a number of hiking trails accessible from designated parking areas. Waterfowl can be seen during the winter months and migratory songbirds and wading birds during the spring and summer.

Environmental Education

Environmental education is a very important refuge program. Programs and tours can be arranged by contacting the refuge headquarters in advance for school and group programs and tours.

Pets

Pets must be on a leash at all times.

Firearms

Firearms are prohibited on the refuge except during refuge hunts.

Overnight Parking and Camping

Overnight parking and camping are not permitted on the refuge.

Access

All vehicles must stay on public roads and parking areas. All-terrain vehicles are permitted only on designated trails during refuge hunts as described in the refuge hunting and fishing brochure.

Fires

Fires are not permitted on the refuge.

**Lake Ophelia
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