

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Tensas River

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1980, is located in the Tensas River basin in northeastern Louisiana. The refuge was acquired in an effort to preserve the largest privately-owned tract of bottomland hardwoods remaining in the Mississippi delta. This refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which protects and manages over 500 refuges for wildlife and for people to enjoy.



When the first settlers arrived, over 25 million acres of seasonally flooded bottomland hardwoods carpeted the Mississippi Valley. Now, less than five million acres remain in scattered pieces. Today, the refuge lands have become an island of woods surrounded by a sea of agriculture. There are plans to buy more lands nearby, and someday the refuge may encompass 85,000 acres.

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge is one part of a network of refuges devoted to preserving and restoring increasingly scarce habitat for native wildlife and migratory birds.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages this system of refuges by directing a variety of programs aimed at preserving our natural wildlife resources.

Wildlife on the Tensas

The bottomland forest contains a great variety of trees, shrubs, vines and other plants. This habitat provides food and shelter for many different kinds of wildlife. There are over 400 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish found on the refuge. Many of these animals are difficult to observe. The forest offers hiding places for such creatures as the black bear, bobcat, wild turkey, and wood duck. The otter, raccoon, mink, and squirrel also make the bottomland forest their home.

Within the Tensas woods remains the remnant population of the Louisiana black bear. This animal is unusually difficult to see and only the careful observer is rewarded with a passing glimpse.

Other animals that are more frequently seen on roadsides include the alligator, white-tailed deer, barred owl and pileated woodpecker.



photo: Ken Boylan



photo: USFWS



photo: Bruce Eilerts

The hardwood forest also offers protection and food to the seasonal visitors. Migratory ducks use the forest in the winter while many song and wading birds arrive in the spring.

Refuge waters abound with valuable gamefish such as channel catfish, largemouth bass, and black crappie.

Endangered species

Endangered species numbers are few, but their mere presence is always marked with special interest. The bald eagle and the peregrine falcon are occasional visitors to the refuge. They are usually in the open wetlands associated with waterfowl concentrations during the winter months. In the woodlands, the Bachman's warbler may be a rare visitor.

A permanent resident of the Tensas Basin is the threatened Louisiana black bear. The future existence of the bear is dependent on the proper management and protection of the bears and their habitat. Research projects are currently underway to learn more about this illusive animal.

Possibly lost forever on the refuge are the endangered red wolf, Florida panther and the ivory-billed woodpecker. These three species, along with many others, have been greatly affected by the loss of bottomland hardwoods. The wolf and panther were once common in the river bottoms and forests of the southeast, but have dwindled in numbers over the years.

North America's largest woodpecker, the ivory bill, is thought to be extinct by most scientists. The bird required large tracts of very old trees. One of the last verified recordings of the ivory-bill occurred in the early 1940's on what is now refuge property.

photo: Jon and Karen Hollingsworth



photo: USFWS

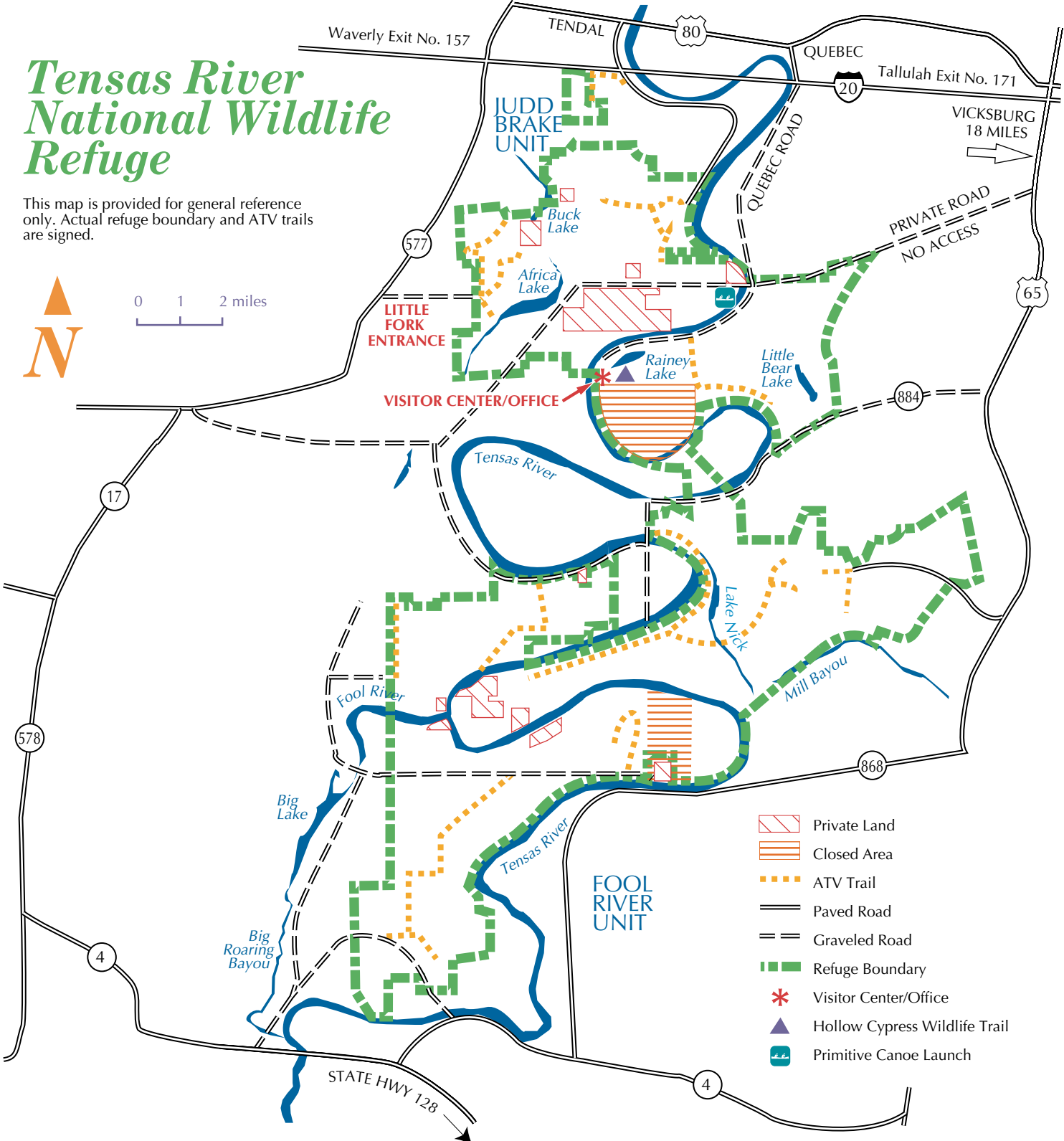











Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge

This map is provided for general reference only. Actual refuge boundary and ATV trails are signed.



0 1 2 miles



-  Private Land
-  Closed Area
-  ATV Trail
-  Paved Road
-  Graveled Road
-  Refuge Boundary
-  Visitor Center/Office
-  Hollow Cypress Wildlife Trail
-  Primitive Canoe Launch

Shaping the forest

Maintaining a unique area

Several management techniques are undertaken by foresters on the refuge to preserve the dynamic bottomland hardwood forest. New trees are planted to restore land once converted to agriculture. Trees are selectively removed in designated areas. This thinning operation allows sunlight to penetrate the forest floor, stimulating plant growth of important wildlife foods.



photo: USFWS

Forests are continually protected from devastating wildfires. Small plots of old, declining trees are removed to allow diversity of habitat types that are important to the Louisiana black bear. These and other forest management practices are used to improve and maintain the productivity of the bottomland hardwood forest.

The refuge has approximately 4,000 acres of open lands ranging in size from one-fourth acre to 1,000 acres.

Providing diversity

photo: USFWS



photo: Larry Richardson



These areas provide important habitat diversity needed by many animals.

In larger areas, farming and moist-soil management are methods used to provide additional foods for thousands of wintering waterfowl. Local farmers manage the croplands on a share basis, leaving part of their crops in the fields for wildlife. Moist-soil areas are managed by lowering and raising water levels.

During the summer months, when low areas are dry, natural moist-soil plants are produced. During the fall and winter, these plants and cropland are flooded, thus “setting the table.”

photo: USFWS



photo: Nell B. Balatcechino



A system of smaller openings throughout the forest is maintained by periodic mowing or discing. These areas provide cover and special foods for animals such as wild turkeys, deer and some songbirds.

Enjoy the refuge

The public is welcome to visit the refuge any time of the year. You are encouraged to stop at the Visitor Center when you arrive and view our life-sized exhibits. A Boardwalk Wildlife Trail, information and refuge map are also available at the Visitor Center.

A variety of wildlife may be observed, the best times being early morning or dusk. Primitive canoe launching offers a unique opportunity to explore the bottomland hardwoods by boat. A primitive canoe launching area is marked on the refuge map.

Public hunting is allowed on the refuge for migratory waterfowl, upland and big game species. The refuge is especially popular for hunting white-tailed deer.



The refuge is open year-round for fishing. Anglers and hunters must be familiar with current refuge and state fishing and hunting regulations. See our hunting and fishing brochure for information.

Refuge Regulations

Unleashed pets are not permitted on the refuge.

Littering on the refuge is prohibited.

Firearms are prohibited on the refuge except during refuge hunts.

All vehicles are confined to public roads and designated parking areas.

Camping and open fires are prohibited on the refuge.

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are permitted only on designated ATV trails during the period designated in the hunting and fishing brochure.



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National Wildlife Refuge
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