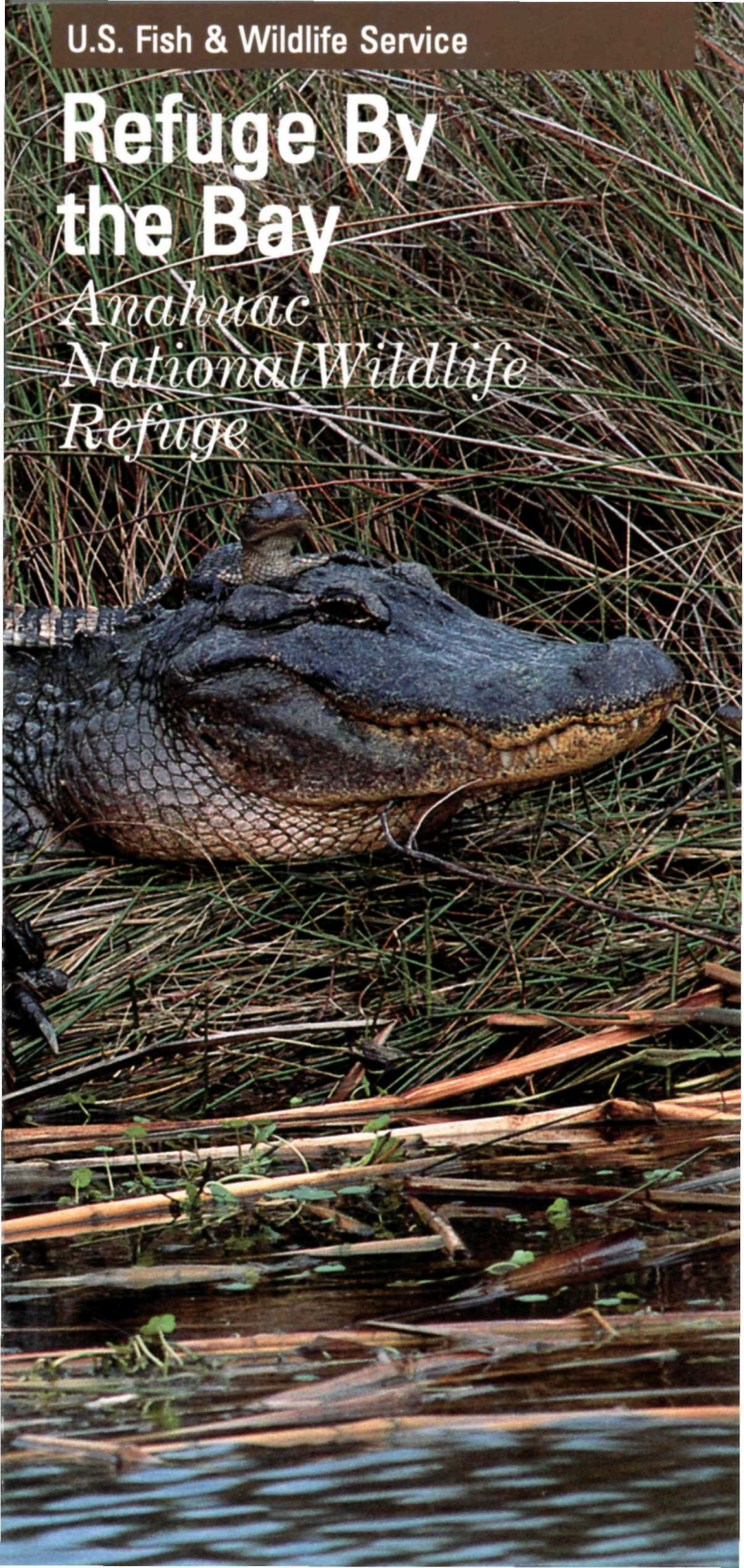
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Refuge By the Bay

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge



The 34,000-acre Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 500 refuges throughout the United States. These national wildlife refuges are administrated by the Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. The mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is to work with others "to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitat."

Introduction

The cackle of thousands of waterfowl, the splash of an alligator going for a swim, the rustle of wind moving through coastal prairie, the high-pitched call of a fulvous whistling duck. These are just some of the sounds you may hear when visiting Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, a haven for wildlife on the upper Texas gulf coast.

Great Egret

The meandering bayous of Anahuac NWR cut through ancient floodplains, creating expanses of coastal marsh and prairie bordering Galveston Bay. Prevailing breezes bring in moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in high humidity and an average annual rainfall of over 51 inches. Coastal marshes act as a huge sponge, holding and dispersing water from tropical storm tides and upstream flooding. These marshes, combined with the coastal prairie, provide a home for an abundance of wildlife, from migratory birds to alligators.

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anahuac NWR is an important link in the chain of national wildlife refuges extending along the gulf coast of Texas and Louisiana. The goal of refuge management is to provide habitat for native fish and wildlife. Management tools used include grazing, farming, prescribed burning, exotic plant control, shoreline stabilization and water level manipulation. Burning and grazing practices clear away dense, old vegetation that is quickly replaced by the new green growth preferred by many species of wildlife. Exotic plant control helps maintain the natural diversity present in coastal ecosystems. Water level manipulations can change the habitat to provide food and cover for fish and wildlife.

Cultural History

Anahuac NWR was once inhabited by the Atakapa and perhaps Karankawa Indians. These tribes ate shellfish that were abundant along the coast, and discarded the shells at village sites along East Galveston Bay. Over many years villages became elevated above the marsh by mounds of discarded shells. Many of these areas, called shell middens, now dot coastal marshes as small groves of trees in an otherwise treeless landscape.

Things to Do at the Refuge

Wildlife Watching

Between October and March, visitors to Anahuac are likely to see as many as 27 species of ducks, including green-winged teal, gadwall, shoveler, ruddy duck, and northern pintail. Huge groups of snow geese, sometimes in excess of 80,000, feed on rice fields and moist soil units found near Shoveler Pond and FM 1985. Most waterfowl can be seen on the auto tour around Shoveler Pond.

Viewing Tips

Dawn and dusk are the best times to see wildlife. In warmer climates, little is moving on hot humid summer afternoons or on windy days.

Observe from the sidelines. Leave "abandoned" young animals alone. Its parent is probably close by waiting for you to leave. Don't offer snacks; your lunch could disrupt wild digestive systems.

Cars make good observation blinds. Use binoculars or a long lens for a closer look. Try sitting quietly in one good location. Let wildlife get used to your presence.

Teach children quiet observation. Other wildlife watchers will appreciate your consideration.

Roseate spoonbill, great egrets, snowy egrets, white-faced ibis, and white ibis are just some of the long-legged waterbirds that can be seen on ponds, rice fields, and moist soil units throughout the refuge. Listen and look closely on Yellow Rail Prairie for the secretive yellow rails that winter in the salty prairies. Yellow rails are one of six rail species that occur on the refuge.

During spring and fall migrations, warblers and other songbirds can be seen or heard on walks in small wooded areas throughout Anahuac NWR. The willows near Shoveler Pond, the salt cedar hedgerow north of Teal Slough, and the narrow hackberry woodland along East Bay Bayou offer some of the best birding opportunities in the area.

Prothonotary Warbler

East Bay Bayou offers an opportunity to view wildlife along the bayou and in moist soil units and rice fields. During spring migration, visitors can view dowitchers, western sandpipers, black-necked stilts, and other shorebirds in moist soil units or rice fields or walk the trail along the wooded banks of East Bay Bayou to see orioles, tanagers, warblers, and other songbirds. Surveys show that the narrow hackberry woodland along the bayou has the most diverse number of songbirds on the refuge. This is also an excellent area to see anhinga, green-backed herons, and yellow and black-crowned night herons. A van

accessible parking and nature observation area is located at the southern end of the trail on an old wooden bridge overlooking East Bay Bayou.

Endangered in the 1960s, American alligators are now an abundant resident of the refuge. Alligators are most easily seen during the spring but are often visible during the summer and fall. Shoveler Pond, in the northwest corner of the refuge, is the best place to see them. It is illegal to feed or disturb alligators or any plant or wildlife on the refuge.

Muskrat, nutria, and bobcat are some of the common refuge furbearers. Raccoon, opossum, skunk, and river otter are found on the refuge, but are rarely seen during daylight hours. Red wolves once roamed Anahuac NWR, but are now extinct in this part of their historical range because of cross breeding with more numerous coyotes. Characteristics of red wolves are occasionally seen in some coyotes roaming roads and levees on the refuge.

Auto Tour

Driving the 12 miles of graveled roads can offer excellent opportunities to observe marsh wildlife. Main roads can accommodate buses and recreational vehicles. During wet weather, however, travel may be restricted to prevent damage to refuge roads. Visitors should be aware there are no gasoline stations on or near the refuge. Off road travel is prohibited.

Hiking

Visitors are welcome to walk on designated roads and trails, but are cautioned to watch out for snakes, fire ants, and alligators. Visitors not wishing to feed the seemingly ever present mosquitoes should consider insect repellent an absolute necessity during all but the coldest days of the year.

Fishing and Boating

Some of the best wade fishing (for speckled trout, redfish and southern flounder) in Texas can be found on the refuge shorelines along East Galveston Bay. Fishing is allowed in East Galveston Bay, bayous, and other locations designated by refuge signs. Access to East Bay is permitted 24 hours a day along designated roads. Spotlighting on the refuge is illegal except for bay fishing on the shoreline along Galveston Bay. Boating is not permitted in inland waters of the refuge except for the boat canal. Small non-motorized boats may be launched along East Bay Bayou near the accessible fishing and wildlife viewing areas.

Anglers can fish for freshwater species from the banks or by canoe or rowboat at East Bay Bayou. This new area offers anglers without a boat an opportunity to catch crappie, largemouth bass, gar, bowfin, channel catfish, and blue catfish. An accessible parking and fishing area is located at the south end of the East Bay Bayou area.

Van accessible parking and boat launch facilities are located at the canal boat launch.

Hunting

Waterfowl hunting is permitted in designated areas on the refuge, including the Pace Tract and parts of the East Unit and Middleton Tract. Hunters must contact refuge headquarters in the fall before waterfowl season to obtain current hunting regulations and maps. Possession of firearms on the refuge is unlawful except in designated areas during hunting season.

Facilities

Restroom facilities are provided at the refuge entrance. There is no drinking water on the refuge. Public camping areas are available at Fort Anahuac Park in Anahuac and White Memorial Park, north of town along Interstate 10. Motel accommodations are available in Anahuac, Winnie, and High Island.

Yellow Rail

Friends of Anahuac Refuge

In August of 1996, a group of volunteers at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge created the Friends of Anahuac Refuge. The Friends are committed to preserving and enhancing the refuge through conservation, research, and education. The group will serve as a liaison between the refuge and the public. The Friends membership represents the diverse users of the refuge and interested public. It includes hunters, anglers, birdwatchers, wildlife enthusiasts, farmers, and ranchers.

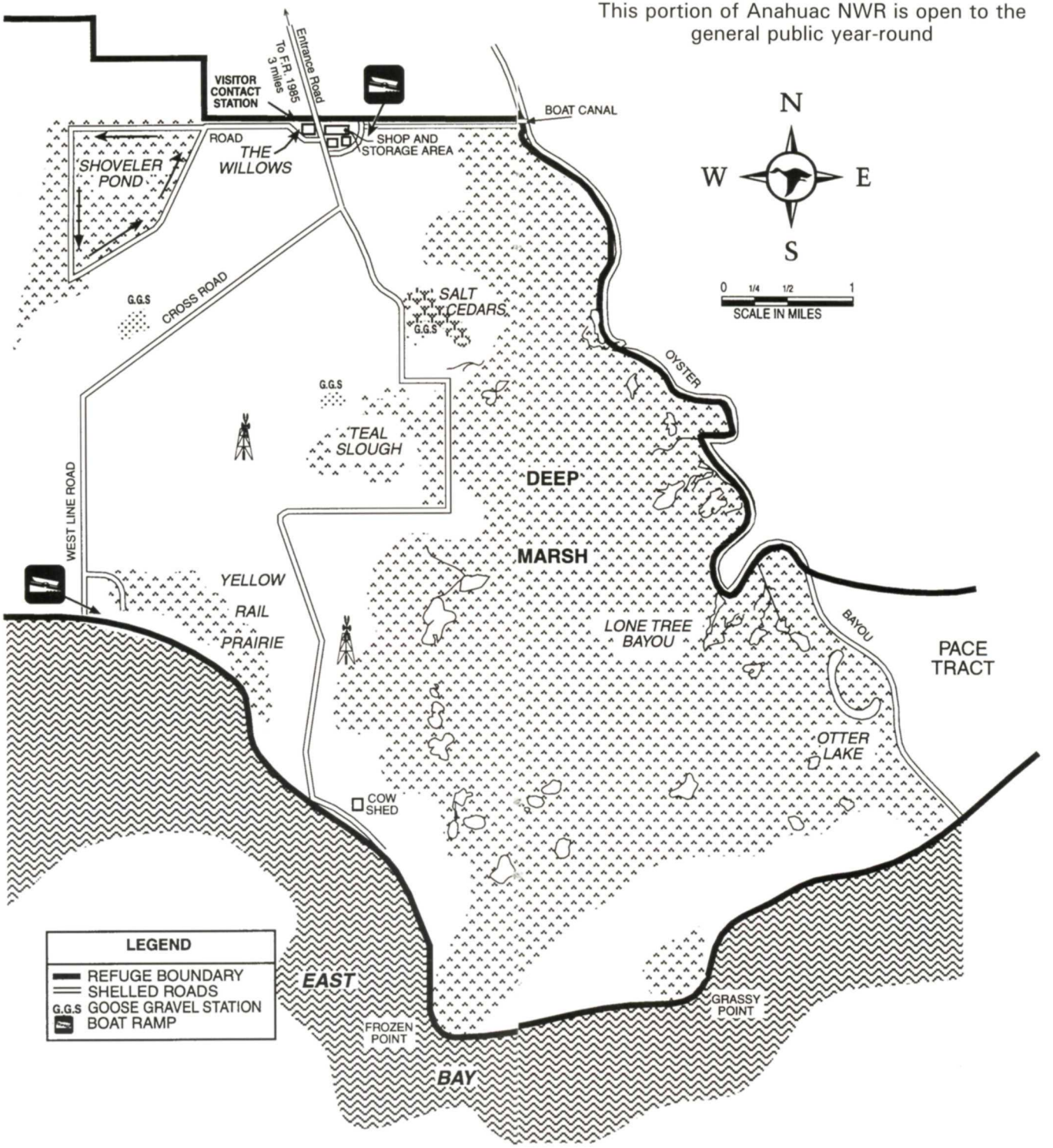
The Friends have contributed time, monies, materials, and services to support and complete projects on the refuge. Future projects include new wildlife observation facilities including hiking trails and viewing platforms, new interpretive signs, improved access for waterfowl hunting, habitat management including wetlands and native grassland restoration, and assisting with wildlife surveys and studies. For more information on Friends of Anahuac Refuge, contact:

Friends of Anahuac Refuge
P.O. Box 1348
Anahuac, Texas 77514
409/267-3337

For general information on volunteer opportunities on the refuge, call 409/267-3337.

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge

This portion of Anahuac NWR is open to the general public year-round



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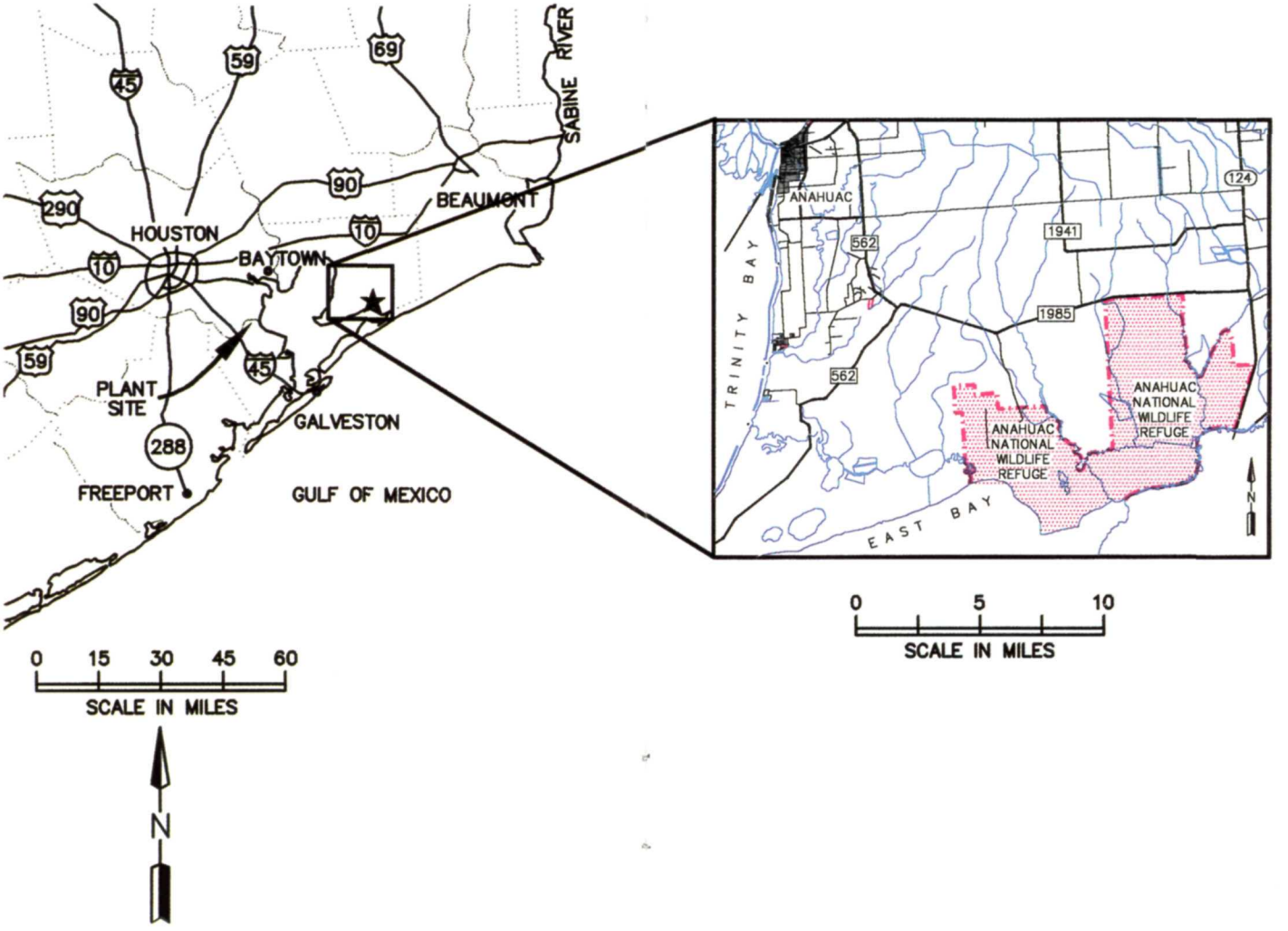
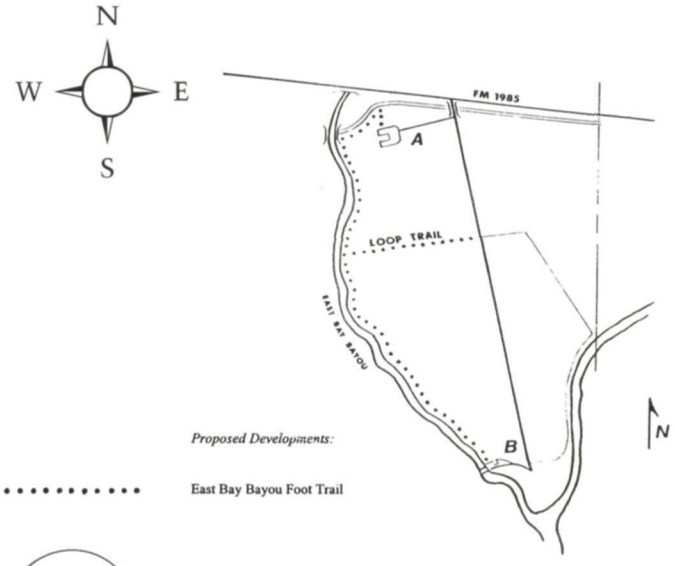


Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge
East Bay Bayou



Proposed Developments:

East Bay Bayou Foot Trail

A - Observation Tower/Blind, Interpretive Kiosk, and Rest Rooms

B - Van Accessible Parking Area, Accessible Fishing and Nature Observation Area

Anahuac NWR Facts

Where is it?	Refuge headquarters are located in the town of Anahuac, Texas, on the corner of Trinity Street and Washington Avenue near the County Courthouse. Office hours are from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.
When was it established?	In 1963.
How big is it?	Over 34,000 acres.
How was it paid for?	Mostly from revenues from the sale of Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (Duck Stamps).
Why is it here?	To provide wintering and migration habitat for ducks and geese of the Central Flyway, as well as other migratory bird species.

Mottled Ducks

Cover photograph by Dan Griggs
Great Egret, Prothonotary Warbler, and Yellow Rail
by John and Karen Hollingsworth.
Mottled Ducks by Mike Lange, FWS

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