

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# DeSoto

*National Wildlife Refuge*





DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge lies on the wide plain formed by prehistoric flooding and shifting of the Missouri River. Each spring and fall since the end of the last ice age, spectacular flights of ducks and geese have marked the changing seasons along this traditional waterfowl flyway.

Vast changes have taken place in the Missouri River Valley since settlement in the early 1800s. Land clearing, drainage projects, river channelization and flood control measures during the past 150 years have transformed the Missouri River floodplain from diverse wildlife habitat to farmland.

DeSoto is part of a network of refuges devoted to preserving and restoring increasingly scarce habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife. The "**Blue Goose**" symbol (shown below) represents this *National Wildlife Refuge System*, a collection of over 500 refuges protected and managed for wildlife, habitat and people.





### DeSoto: A Stopover for Waterfowl

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge's primary purpose is to serve as a stopover for migrating ducks and geese. During typical years, 550,000 snow geese utilize the refuge as a resting and feeding area during their fall migration between the Arctic nesting grounds and the Gulf Coast wintering areas. Peak populations of 50,000 or more ducks, mostly mallards, are common on the refuge during the fall migration. October and November are the months of peak waterfowl use, with smaller concentrations of ducks and geese returning in March and early April.



*Predator and Prey!*  
Dave Menke, USFWS

Bald eagles follow the geese into the area, with many wintering here until March. Peak numbers of bald eagles usually occur in late November and December, and again in early March. As many as 145 have been seen here at one time. Bald eagles are often seen perched in cottonwoods along DeSoto Lake when waterfowl are present, and good viewing opportunities are available from the DeSoto Visitor Center.



An interesting assortment of warblers, gulls, shorebirds and other bird life also can be observed on the refuge during the fall and spring migration.



In the summer, white-tailed deer and their fawns can be seen browsing in early morning and evening hours alongside refuge roads. Cottontails, raccoons, coyotes, opossums, and fox squirrels are also frequently observed along refuge roads and in fields. Backwater areas of DeSoto Lake and several wetlands on the refuge provide habitat for beaver, muskrat, and an occasional mink.



Woods, fields of native prairie grasses, and hedges along refuge roads attract a variety of songbirds and other wildlife, such as turkeys, pheasants and bobwhite quail. Red-headed woodpeckers abound along the woodland edge. In summer, wood ducks, perhaps the most beautiful of American waterfowl, are present in ponds throughout the refuge. Steep banks at several locations along DeSoto Lake provide burrowing sites for colonies of bank swallows.



*Photos Above:*  
*Eastern Bluebird*  
Dave Menke, USFWS

*Two Fawns*  
USFWS

*Cottontail*  
E. Smith, USFWS

*Pheasant in Snow*  
J.Jave, USFWS

*Wood Duck*  
Dave Menke, USFWS



*Red-bellied Woodpecker*  
Dave Menke, USFWS



### Managing Habitat for Wildlife

Nearly 2,000 of the refuge's 7,823 acres are farmed by neighboring farmers cooperatively. Both migrant and resident wildlife, such as deer and pheasant, use farm crops to supplement the natural foods available on the refuge.



*Deer at Dusk*  
Dave Menke, USFWS



*Prescribed  
Burning*  
J. Olmsted, USFWS

Since 1965, more than 1,500 acres of refuge fields have been reverted to grasslands that provide important nesting habitat and winter shelter for wild-life. They also provide for a more diverse natural area. Wildlife managers use fire as a management tool to maintain healthy stands of native grasses.



*Hen Woodie in Box*  
B. Angus, USFWS

Additional management activities on the refuge include the maintenance of wood duck nesting habitat. Wood duck boxes have been installed to provide nesting sites for DeSoto's principal resident duck species.

DeSoto also manages sandbar habitat to attract nesting piping plovers and interior least terns; the least tern is considered endangered throughout the United States.

*Fish Cleaning  
Demonstration,*  
Steve Van Riper,  
USFWS





### The Early Explorers

One of the first documented expeditions into this part of the Missouri River valley occurred when Lewis and Clark's corps traveled through the area seeking a land route to the Pacific. The explorers' journal entry, dated August 3, 1804, describes the party's historic meeting with Indians at the "council-bluff."

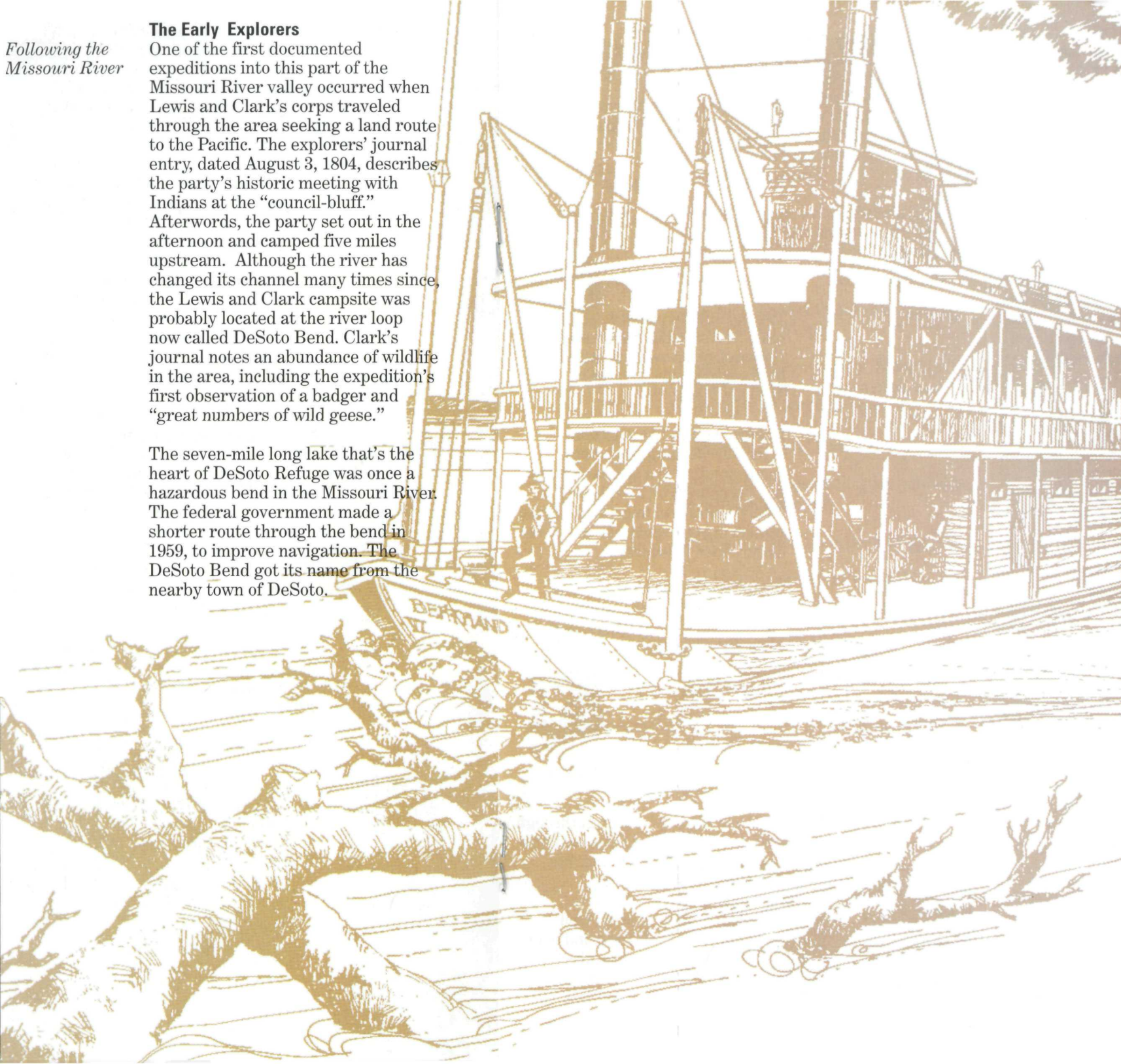
Afterwards, the party set out in the afternoon and camped five miles upstream. Although the river has changed its channel many times since, the Lewis and Clark campsite was probably located at the river loop now called DeSoto Bend. Clark's journal notes an abundance of wildlife in the area, including the expedition's first observation of a badger and "great numbers of wild geese."

The seven-mile long lake that's the heart of DeSoto Refuge was once a hazardous bend in the Missouri River. The federal government made a shorter route through the bend in 1959, to improve navigation. The DeSoto Bend got its name from the nearby town of DeSoto.

### The Steamboat Bertrand

By the mid-1800s, the Missouri River had become an artery for trade which opened the West. Steamboats carried supplies to the early fur trading posts, frontier settlements, and mining towns. But, the turbulent, snag-strewn "Big Muddy" took its toll of the early stern and side-wheelers. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, more than 800 steamboats sank or were stranded between St. Louis, Missouri, and Ft. Benton, Montana.

When the *Bertrand* sank, in April 1865, the Missouri River quickly covered the boat and its cargo in mud, creating a time-capsule of Civil War-era material. In 1968 the sternwheeler was discovered on the refuge and unearthed the following year. The cargo contained all manner of goods needed for the new Montana Territory gold mines, logging camps, farms, and households. Aside from tools and equipment, even food and clothing were recovered from the boat. These items, and more, are on exhibit in the Visitor Center. Visitors may also view the excavation site where the *Bertrand's* hull still lies buried.



Hull of the Steamboat Exposed in 1968, © Courtesy Woodmen of the World



Federal Fee Area



**Special Refuge Regulations**

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge is a federal fee area. Visitors may enter the refuge only if they have a valid entrance permit. Annual and lifetime passes are available at the DeSoto Visitor Center. People at least 62 years of age are eligible for a \$10 lifetime permit. Permanently disabled visitors are eligible for a free lifetime permit.

Daily entrance permits are \$3 per vehicle. They may be obtained at self-registration stations near each refuge entrance, or at the visitor center. The charge for commercial vans and buses is \$20, or \$30 if 21 or more people are aboard.

This federal fee area should not be confused with state parks or recreation areas, which administer similar entrance fee programs in Iowa and Nebraska. Refuge violators are subject to a minimum fine of \$50.00.

**Knowing and obeying these special regulations is your responsibility!**

For more information, contact the DeSoto Visitor Center between 9:00 am and 4:30 pm daily, or at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov).

Vehicles



Auto touring, biking and wildlife observation are encouraged.

Vehicles, including bicycles, are allowed on public roads and designated parking areas only.

*Visitor Center*

**Visitor Opportunities**

Natural and cultural interpretive exhibits.

Weekend wildlife films Saturday and Sunday at 11:00 am and 1:30 and 2:45 pm.

Environmental Education

Auditorium for films and special programs.

*Wildlife Drive*

Open 9:00 am - 4:30 pm, daily.

Twelve miles of paved & gravel roads traverse the refuge along DeSoto Lake, woods, grasslands, freshwater ponds, and the Missouri River.

During the fall, the auto tour drive follows numbered stops corresponding to a special interpretive brochure which explains the annual waterfowl migration. Please remain in your vehicle to lessen the disturbance to wildlife.

*Bertrand Excavation Site*

Visit the pond where the hull of the 178-foot *Bertrand* steamboat lies buried. Displays describe its excavation and the historic significance of the Missouri River steamboat era.

*Bertrand Trail*

This 2/5-mile trail explores the old river channel and takes the visitor through grassland and marsh habitats.

*Cottonwood Trail*

A 3/4-mile interpreted trail through the woods allows for close examination of the plant and animal life along the Missouri River.

*Wood Duck Pond Trail*

This 3/4-mile interpreted trail crosses Wood Duck Pond and leads through woods and along the grassland edge. Visitors may observe wildlife management practices demonstrated nearby.

*Missouri Meander Trail (Accessible)*

Adjacent to the DeSoto Visitor Center, this twin-looped trail is open year-round. One loop provides a 900-foot paved trail accessible to those in wheelchairs or with walking difficulties. Crossing a footbridge, a 7/8-mile trail meanders through woods and along DeSoto Lake.

*Fishing and Boating*



Both are permitted on DeSoto Lake during public use season, April 15-October 14. Please refer to regulatory section.

Boating is limited to no-wake speeds, not to exceed 5 mph.

Fish for largemouth bass, bluegill, catfish, crappie, northern pike, and walleye, from shore or boat.

Accessible fishing piers.

Archery and spearfishing are allowed for nongame species.

Ice fishing, conditions permitting.

Seasonal opportunities for archery and muzzleloader deer hunting, as well as waterfowl hunting.

Certain areas of the refuge are open to the public for mushroom picking during daylight hours from April 15 through May 31.

*Hunting*



*Mushroom Gathering*



*Mushrooming,*  
K.L. Drews, USFWS

## Fishing



Recreational Fishing,  
G. Gage, USFWS

### Anglers are Welcome on DeSoto Lake April 15 - October 14!

State and federal regulations apply. An Iowa or Nebraska license is required. Some special regulations may be posted, in addition to the following regulations:

- Digging or seining for bait is prohibited.
- Trot lines and float lines are prohibited.
- No more than two lines and two hooks per line may be used, including ice fishing.
- Catch and Release - Bass under 15" and northern pike under 24" must be immediately returned to the lake.
- Archery and spearfishing are permitted for roughfish only, April 15 - October 14.
- Boating operation is permitted in accordance with state regulations, and the following special regulations:
  - Boating is limited to no-wake speeds, *not to exceed 5 miles per hour.*
  - No boat, except sailboats shall be operated with any person sitting or riding on the gunwales or decking over the bow.
  - Airboats, houseboats and boats containing toilets that flush directly into the water are prohibited.
  - Possession of open alcoholic beverages is prohibited in powerboats while boat is in operation.
- There are a number of picnic sites with grills on the refuge. Trash disposal, except in appropriate receptacles, is prohibited.

## Picnicking

### Prohibited Activities

- Fires must be confined to grills, which are provided at picnic sites. Open fires are prohibited.
- Camping is not permitted on the refuge. Campsites are available at Wilson Island State Recreation Area, adjacent to the refuge.
- Firearms, fireworks, airguns and all other weapons are prohibited, except when used in authorized refuge hunting programs.
- Pets are not permitted on the refuge.
- Swimming is not allowed on the refuge.
- Trespassing into closed areas is prohibited.
- Collecting or destruction of plant and animal life is prohibited.
- Disorderly conduct or disturbance of the peace is prohibited. No intoxicated person shall enter or remain upon the refuge.

The funding for the **National Wildlife Refuge System** was established in 1934 through the passage of the *Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act*, which requires waterfowl hunters to purchase an annual migratory bird "duck stamp." Funds collected from the sale of these duck stamps are used to purchase valuable lands for the continuing benefit of wildlife, habitat and people.



1999-2000  
Federal Duck Stamp,  
Jim Hautmann



*Spring-  
Summer*



*Missouri Meander Trail*  
K.L. Drews, USFWS

**Public Use Calendar**

April 15 - October 14

- Fishing
- Wildlife Observation
- Photography
- Boating
- Environmental Education
- Nature Trails
- Visitor Center
- Weekend Films

Refuge Hours: Daylight Only

Visitor Center: 9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Closed Easter Day

- Mushroom collecting is allowed in designated areas, April 15 - May 31

October 15 - November

- Great opportunity for viewing migrating waterfowl spectacle!
- Nature Trails and Auto Touring
- Special hunting programs, access as designated.
- Environmental Education

Refuge Hours: Daylight Only

Visitor Center: 9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Closed Thanksgiving Day.

*Snow Geese*  
Dave Menke, USFWS

*Fall*



*Morel Mushrooms*  
Dave Menke, USFWS



*Fox Squirrel*  
Dave Menke, USFWS

*Winter*



*Snow Geese and  
Visitor Center*  
J. Olmsted, USFWS

December-February

- Ice Fishing - Conditions Permitting.
- Special hunting seasons, access as designated.
- Visitor access to the Visitor Center, Bertrand Excavation Site and adjacent trails.

Half of the refuge is closed during the winter to minimize the disturbance to wintering eagles, waterfowl, and resident game populations.

Refuge Hours: Daylight Only

Visitor Center: 9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Closed Christmas and New Year's Day.

*Early Spring*



*Cardinal*  
Dave Menke, USFWS

March 1-April 14

- Waterfowl Migration Observation
- Visitor Center
- Nature Trails
- Environmental Education

Refuge Hours: Daylight Only

Visitor Center: 9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Closed Easter Day



# DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge

To Blair, Nebraska

Refuge Entrance

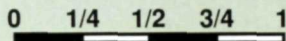
U.S. Highway 30

To Missouri Valley, Iowa

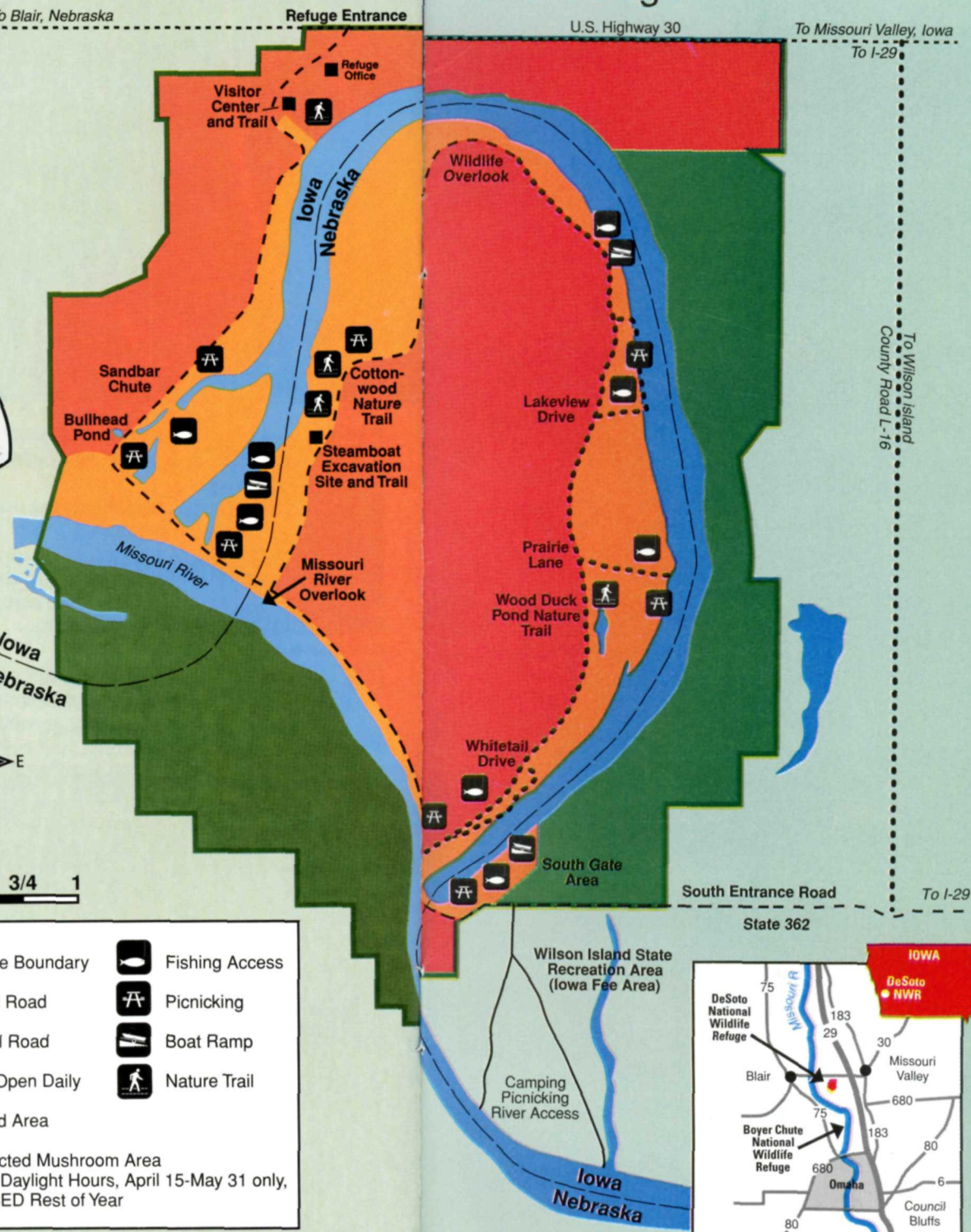
To I-29



Scale



	Refuge Boundary		Fishing Access
	Paved Road		Picnicking
	Gravel Road		Boat Ramp
	Area Open Daily		Nature Trail
	Closed Area		
	Restricted Mushroom Area Open Daylight Hours, April 15-May 31 only, CLOSED Rest of Year		





U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Refuge Manager  
DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge  
1434 316th Lane  
Missouri Valley, IA 51555  
Phone 712/642-4121

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>



*Snowgeese!*  
Dave Menke, USFWS