

Lake Drummond

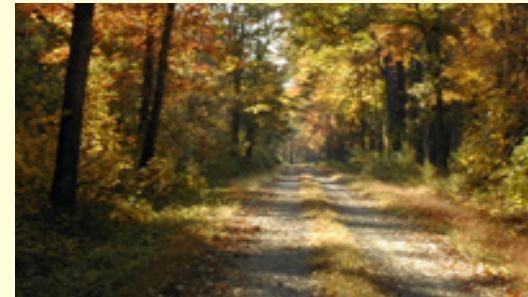
Lake Drummond, at 3,100 acres, is the largest natural lake in Virginia. The lake was formed about 4,000 years ago after a wildfire burned away several feet of peat soil.

The swamp's peat soil is the reason the lake's water is a dark brown color. As ground water perches through the peat toward the lake basin, it is stained just as tea in a teacup. Despite its murky appearance, the water is very pure. The lake is home to several species of fish, including mud sunfish, yellow perch, brown and yellow bullhead catfish, bowfin, and crappie. Contrary to popular myth, *there are no alligators in the lake!*



In the winter the lake provides a resting place for thousands of migratory birds including Tundra Swans and Snow Geese. In the summer it is home to Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets. Look for Northern Harriers, Northern Parula and Prothonotary Warblers darting in the brush. Bald Eagles have productive nests around the lake's shoreline and can be seen fishing for their young.

Lake Drummond is the main source of water for the Dismal Swamp Canal. The historic canal borders the eastern edge of the refuge. Initially proposed by George Washington, funded by Patrick Henry, and excavated by slaves, it was an important strategic holding during the American Civil War. Still in use today by pleasure craft, it is the oldest continually-operating canal in America.



The Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive gate is open every day unless there is a necessary temporary closing. Access hours are April 1 to September 30, 7am-7pm and October 1 to March 31, 7:30am-5:00pm. The entry gate closes one hour earlier to allow all vehicles to exit on time. Permit and fee required. Self-serve permit and fee schedule can be found at Railroad Permit Station, 1/2 mile from entrance gate.

Boat launching is allowed every day, year round, by use of and by terms of the Wildlife Drive permit. Permit and fee required.

Hiking and biking are allowed every day on refuge trails, including the Railroad Ditch Trail, sunrise to sunset. Permit and fee are not required for hiking and biking.

The Railroad Ditch Trail and Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive are occasionally closed for hunts, maintenance, prescribed burns, and other management events. For the most current information on closings, follow us on our facebook page.

The refuge office is open Monday-Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. The office is closed on weekends and federal holidays.

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
3100 Desert Road, Suffolk, VA 23434
(757) 986-3705
www.fws.gov/refuge/Great_Dismal_Swamp

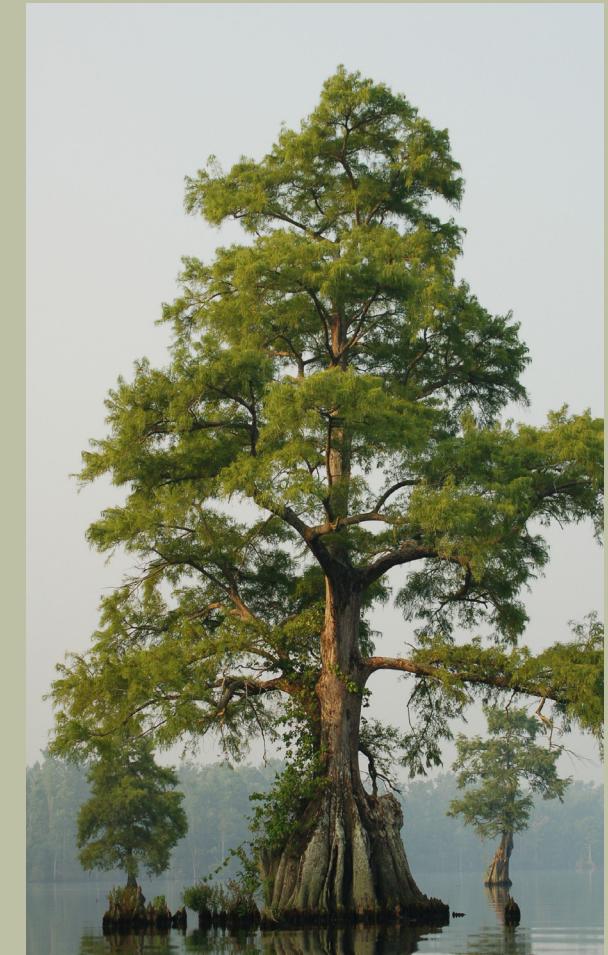


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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge



Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive

3120 Desert Road, Suffolk, VA
Sights and stops along the way to Lake Drummond

Welcome to the Great Dismal Swamp!

The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is a place of both ecological importance and historical significance. The refuge is the largest intact remnant of a vast habitat that once covered more than one million acres of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. Over 200 species of birds and nearly 100 species of butterflies and skippers have been identified on the refuge. It is home to one of the largest black bear populations on the east coast. The refuge is an official stop on the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

The Wildlife Drive is a popular way to visit Lake Drummond, although along the six mile route there are plenty of other things to see. But first: Parking is allowed on the road sides and at the areas designed with parking signs. Please be mindful of soft shoulders and do not block thru traffic. Also, as you travel the route, please watch out for snakes and turtles sunning themselves in the road.



Pines Trail

Begin your tour of the refuge by walking the Pines Trail, a quarter mile loop around the headquarters complex. The trail winds through a stand of pines, including recently planted long leaf pines. Long leaf pines once dominated the Southeast, but logging and development have reduced them to a fraction of their original range.

The Refuge conducts prescribed burns in this area every few years. Carefully burning of the forest under controlled conditions prevents the buildup of dead branches and decaying plant matter that could fuel a larger more destructive fire. Burns also create a more diverse habitat that is attractive to a greater variety of animals. It is common to see a re-growth of beautiful wildflowers appearing a few weeks after a spring burn. Look for the Pink Lady Slippers and tiny varieties of orchid.

Some animals to look for along the Pines Trail include: Redheaded Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Summer Tanagers, black rat snakes, and white-tailed deer.

Permit Station and Underground Railroad Pavilion

Soon after you begin your travel up the Railroad Ditch, you will come to the Permit Station and the Underground Railroad Pavilion. A self-serve permit will be necessary to complete the



route to the Lake. Complete the envelope, deposit payment into the Iron Ranger, and keep your receipt.

A short trek on the boardwalk will take you to the Underground Railroad Pavilion. The pavilion was built to showcase the Great

Dismal Swamp's role as a stop on the Underground Railroad and as a home for a hidden community of freedom seekers and escaped slaves known as maroons. The story of the Dismal Swamp maroons is told in a featured exhibit in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. Be sure to take this short walk to the pavilion to learn more about this important piece of American history.

Cypress Marsh

At the intersection of Railroad and West Ditch Roads lies an area where the dense forest is replaced by tall marsh grass and cypress trees. This 10-acre marsh was created through a series of prescribed fires. The fires were used to simulate wildfires. Just as in nature, after a burn a different habitat will emerge, one that will favor different plants and animals.

The Cypress Marsh is home to several beaver lodges, including one that is visible from West Ditch Road. It is also possible to see river otter, turtles, wood ducks, herons, and mallards.

Take a stroll on the boardwalk. Listen to the chatter of birds, the activity of beavers, or the glide of a snake through the water. Sounds so rich and abundant here, but lost in the openness of the ditch roads.



West Ditch Boardwalk Trail

Midway on West Ditch Road, you will see a small bridge and another boardwalk trail to the right. The short trail leads to a Bald Cypress tree that is perhaps as much as 800 years old. Although the entire Dismal Swamp has been logged, a few old-growth trees like this one remain. The tree was topped by lightning, possibly numerous times, and is only about half of its original height. Centuries ago, much of the swamp was dominated by giant cypress like this.



Lateral West Fire Scar

In recent years several severe wildfires have impacted the swamp. The 2008 *South One Fire* lasted 121 days and burned 4,800 acres. It was followed in 2011 by the *Lateral West Fire*, burning 6,300 acres, much of which was in the *South One* fire scar. The Lateral West Fire smoldered for nearly four months. The elevation of the organic soils in the fire scar is now two to five feet lower than it was before the fires. It will take centuries for the peat depth to recover in the burned areas.



Fire has always been a part of the Dismal Swamp history, especially during times of drought. Wildfires in the swamp are difficult to put out. The swamp's organic peat soil actually burns away during a hot fire. In the early part of the 20th century, a ground fire raged for three years. As the area surrounding the swamp has become more populated, fire suppression and prevention have become a priority.

Have your binoculars and cameras ready!