

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Horicon

*National
Wildlife Refuge*



Over 32,000 acres in size, Horicon Marsh is the largest freshwater cattail marsh in the United States. The marsh provides habitat for endangered species and is a critical rest stop for thousands of migrating ducks and Canada geese. It has been recognized as a Wetland of International Importance, a Globally Important Bird Area, and a unit of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve.

John and Karen Hollingsworth



Canada goose

More than Geese

Many visitors enjoy watching migrating Canada geese in the fall. Several hundred thousand interior Canada geese migrate between Hudson Bay and southern Illinois, stopping at Horicon Marsh. These birds are part of the Mississippi Valley population of Canada geese.

But geese are just part of the picture. Over 219 species of birds, along with white-tailed deer, red fox, river otters, muskrats, snapping turtles, garter snakes, and other animals call the marsh home. Horicon National Wildlife Refuge supports the largest nesting population of redhead ducks east of the Mississippi River. Thousands of redheads use the marsh each year.

Photo: John and Karen Hollingsworth



Great egret

Besides waterfowl, you may observe other types of birds at Horicon Refuge, like shorebirds, marsh birds, terns, raptors, and songbirds. Notable species include American white pelicans, sandhill cranes, dowitchers, Forster's terns, wild turkeys, northern harriers, and yellow-headed blackbirds. The marsh supports the largest great blue heron nesting rookery in Wisconsin.

Cover photo:
Redhead ducks
Jack R. Bartholmai

Wetland habitat makes up the majority of the Refuge, but valuable upland habitats, like prairie and woods, provide the diversity needed to support many types of wildlife through the seasons.

Horicon National Wildlife Refuge (21,000 acres) makes up the northern two-thirds of the marsh and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The southern one-third is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as the Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area (11,000 acres). Both agencies work together to manage the marsh as one wetland ecosystem.

Horicon Marsh



From Glacier to Refuge

Horicon Marsh is a shallow, peat-filled lake bed scoured out of limestone by the Green Bay lobe of the massive Wisconsin glacier. Look for the hills rising on the east side of this 14-mile long depression, survivors of an ancient, frozen past. The glacier entered this area about 70,000 years ago and receded about 10,000 years ago.

A source of food for many different Native American groups for thousands of years, Horicon Marsh attracted European immigrants, too. In the early 1800s, logging opened the uplands for farming. In 1846, a new settlement called Hubbard's Rapids at the south end of the marsh was renamed Horicon, meaning pure, clean water. That same year, settlers built a dam on the Rock River in Horicon that changed the marsh into the largest artificial lake in the world at the time, Horicon Lake. People used the lake to float logs and move farm products by steamboat. Water from this dam also powered a saw mill and a grist mill.

After the dam was removed in 1869, the lake reverted to a marsh once again. Over the next 30 years, people used the Horicon Marsh for unregulated recreational and commercial hunting. Attempts to convert it to farmland about 100 years ago ultimately failed because the soil was simply too wet and peaty. Following a 20-year struggle by conservationists, especially the Izaak Walton League, Congress established the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge on July 16, 1941, for the protection and conservation of migratory birds.

Working for Wildlife

Horicon Refuge staff actively manage the Refuge to benefit a diversity of wildlife for your enjoyment. Management activities include restoring upland habitat, monitoring waterfowl populations, providing artificial nesting structures, controlling invasive exotic species, and providing public use opportunities.

Manipulating water levels is the most vital management tool used to benefit waterfowl and shorebirds. The presence or absence of water, water depth, and timing are all coordinated to eliminate carp and produce various stages of marsh plant succession upon which these birds rely. Various impoundments, which have been subdivided from the main pool of the marsh using a system of dikes and water control structures, are managed on seasonal, annual, and multiple-year cycles. Because of changing water levels, you may notice some wetland areas of open, deep water, others with dense cattails, and still others with bare mud.



Tern platform

Special care is taken to protect endangered and threatened species that use the Refuge. For example, nesting platforms are provided and monitored for Forster's terns and osprey. Essential habitat is provided for trumpeter swans, great egrets, peregrine falcons, and bald eagles.

You can help by reporting interesting wildlife sightings at the Visitor Center. Also, learn how to properly identify endangered species, especially trumpeter swans, so they are not accidentally shot while hunting.

The Refuge System and You

Horicon National Wildlife Refuge is one refuge of over 500 national wildlife refuges and 3,000 waterfowl production areas. These lands span more than 93 million acres across the continent. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of lands primarily dedicated to the preservation and management of fish and wildlife resources. It is home to thousands of species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, plants and many endangered species.

The Refuge System is for people, too. About 400,000 people visit Horicon Refuge each year to enjoy wildlife-dependent activities. Horicon Refuge is accessible to persons with disabilities. Call or write before visiting to schedule a tour, obtain special event schedules, reserve a photo blind, or inquire about other details.

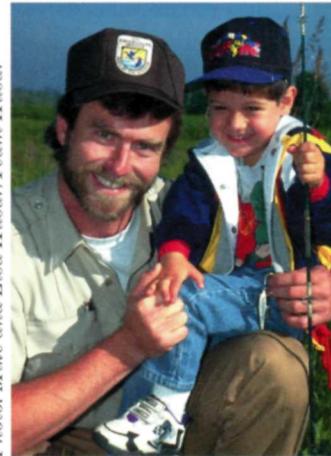


Photo: Mike and Lisa Husar/Team Husar

Fishing at Horicon Refuge



Photo: John and Karen Hollingsworth

American coot



Muskrat

Things to Enjoy on the Refuge

Horicon National Wildlife Refuge is open during daylight hours only. There are a number of activities for you to enjoy during your visit.

- Auto touring
- Hiking
- Cross-country skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Bicycling
- Bird watching
- Wildlife observation
- Fishing
- Hunting
- Trapping
- Nature photography and art
- Environmental education
- Talks and tours
- Special events
- Educational resources

Wisconsin state regulations apply, as well as special Refuge rules. The separate Horicon Marsh Visitor Map provides current details on these opportunities.

November is typically, but not always, the best month to observe peak numbers of migrating Canada geese. Most people visit in October, however, since the weather is warmer and fall colors are peaking. In spring, the marsh comes alive after the quieter winter season. Duck and warbler watching is best in April and May respectively, as these birds wear colorful breeding plumage.

During your trip to Horicon Refuge, be sure to stop at the Visitor Center. Here you can pick up maps, ask questions, enjoy marsh exhibits, view wildlife through spotting scopes, and shop for souvenirs and gifts at Coot's Corner. Proceeds help support public use activities on the Refuge. The Visitor Center is located on the east side of Horicon Marsh, 3.5 miles south of State Highway 49, and is open year-round.

If you have binoculars, be sure to bring them with you. The animals that use Horicon Marsh are wild and will flee if you come too close. Using binoculars brings wildlife closer to you without disturbing them and allows everyone to enjoy watching them feed, fly, swim, dive, and play.

Other local wildlife viewing areas include Dodge and Fond du Lac County Parks, Kettle Moraine State Forest, and Theresa Marsh State Wildlife Area.

Nearby towns provide an array of restaurants, hotels, special events, and shopping opportunities to help you feel right at home. Several campgrounds are located within a 30-minute drive. Contact the Refuge Visitor Center or a local chamber of commerce for details.



Photo: USFWS

Visitor Center

Help Protect Wildlife

Everything on the Refuge is either a home or food for wildlife. Therefore, please remember ...

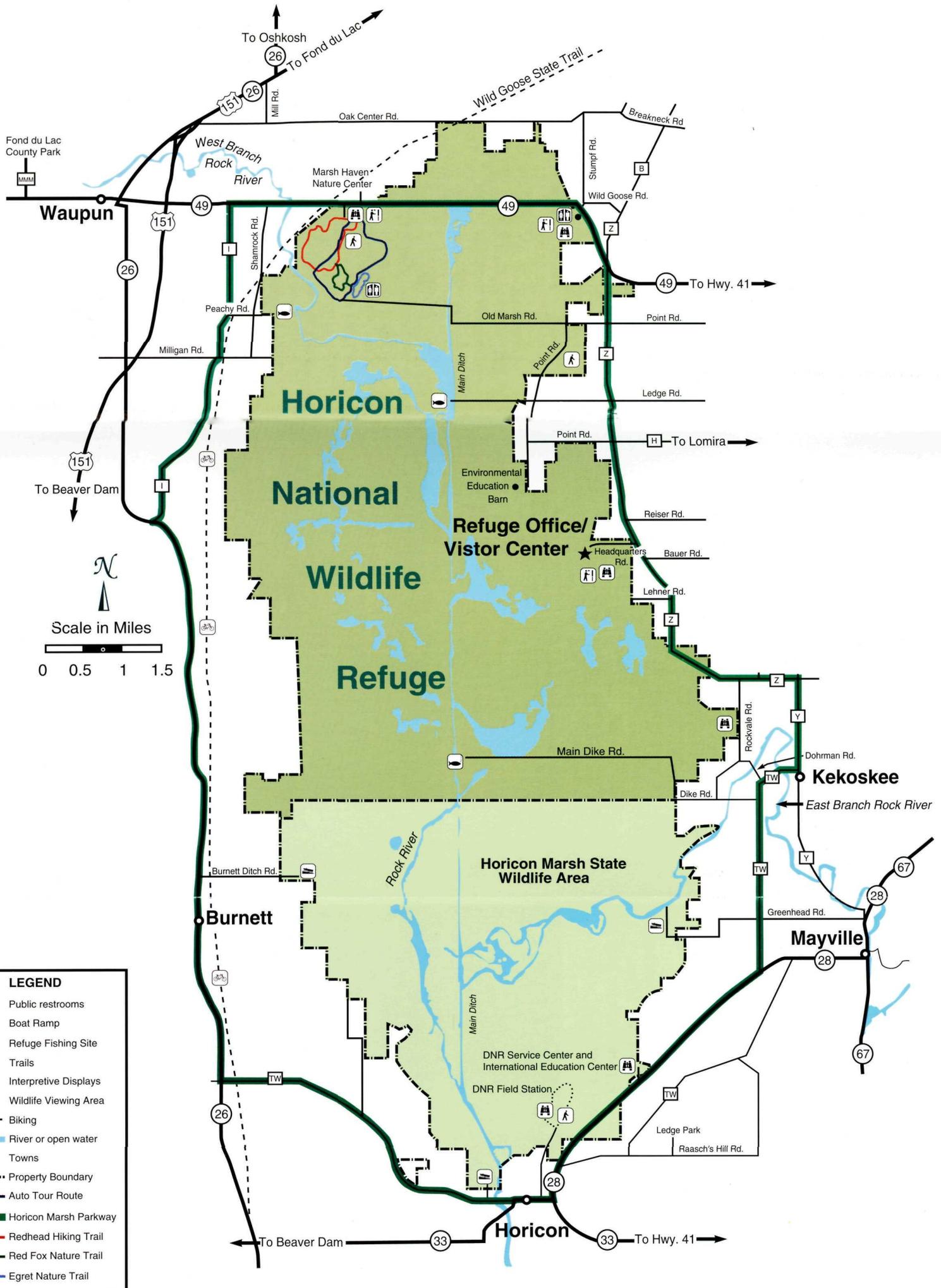
- Take only pictures, leave only footprints.
- Use official trails only.
- Respect Refuge boundary signs, closed areas, and private property.
- Keep dogs leashed at all times.
- Keep your distance – respect nesting wildlife.
- Pack your garbage out with you.

It is your responsibility to know and follow Refuge regulations. If you need assistance, please ask for help at the Visitor Center.



Photo: Jack R. Bartholmai

Horicon Marsh



Horicon National Wildlife Refuge
W4279 Headquarters Road
Mayville, WI 53050
920/387-2658

Deaf/hard of hearing individuals
may reach Horicon NWR through
Wisconsin's Relay Service at
1-800/947-3529 (V/TTY)
<http://www.fws.gov/horicon.html>

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



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