

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Lower Suwannee

National Wildlife Refuge



Located along the southern edge of the Big Bend Region of Florida's west coast, Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 52,257 acres of land in Dixie and Levy Counties. The historic Suwannee River, made famous by Stephen Foster, bisects the refuge.



This blue goose, designed by "Ding" Darling, has become a symbol of the Refuge System.

Introduction

Lower Suwannee Refuge was established on April 10, 1979, for the purpose of protecting, maintaining, and enhancing a beautiful and rare natural ecosystem. Purchase of the lands was made possible through the cooperative efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and Florida's Suwannee River Water Management District.

Along the river and its tributary creeks, the habitat consists of majestic cypress trees and floodplain hardwood forests; scrub oak communities and pine plantations are found on the upland sites.



photo: RJ Lemaire

From the mouth of the Suwannee River, the refuge fronts 26 miles of the Gulf of Mexico where the habitat changes to scenic tidal marshes dotted with coastal islands. Each of these diverse vegetative communities contributes to making Lower

Suwannee Refuge one of the largest undeveloped river delta-estuarine systems in the United States.

The overall goal of Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge is to provide conditions desirable to wildlife through scientific management. Specific objectives developed for the area include providing habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species as well as migrating birds and resident wildlife. The refuge also provides opportunities for environmental education and wildlife oriented recreation.

*cover photo:
LW Richardson*

*photo at left:
Jerry Gamble*

photo: Bruce Colin ©



Wildlife

A constant influx of nutrients from the river system coupled with numerous offshore islands and tidal creeks create excellent wildlife habitat. Marine mammals such as bottlenose dolphin and the endangered West Indian Manatee, along with several species of marine turtles, utilize the coastal waters of the Suwannee Sound. Natural salt marshes and tidal flats attract thousands of shorebirds and diving ducks while acting as a valuable nursery area for fish, shrimp and shellfish. Freshwater fish including largemouth bass, Suwannee bass, bluegill, redear sunfish and channel catfish are found in the Suwannee River and its creeks.

Floodplain wetlands such as bottomland hardwood forests, wooded swamps and freshwater marsh support nesting wood ducks, black bear, otter, alligator, wading birds, raccoons and several species of wintering waterfowl. Mixed hardwood pine forests and uplands offer cover to turkey and white-tailed deer.

photo: Bruce Colin ©



photo: Bruce Colin ©



In addition to these animals, other species (including several that are classified as endangered or threatened) utilize various habitat

photo: Bruce Colin ©



types present on Lower Suwannee Refuge.

Over 250 species of birds have been identified on the refuge. Osprey, swallow-tailed kite and bald eagles are among the ninety species that nest on the area.

Managing Forest and Water

Forest and water management techniques are utilized on Lower Suwannee Refuge to maintain or enhance habitat conditions for the various wildlife species present on the area.

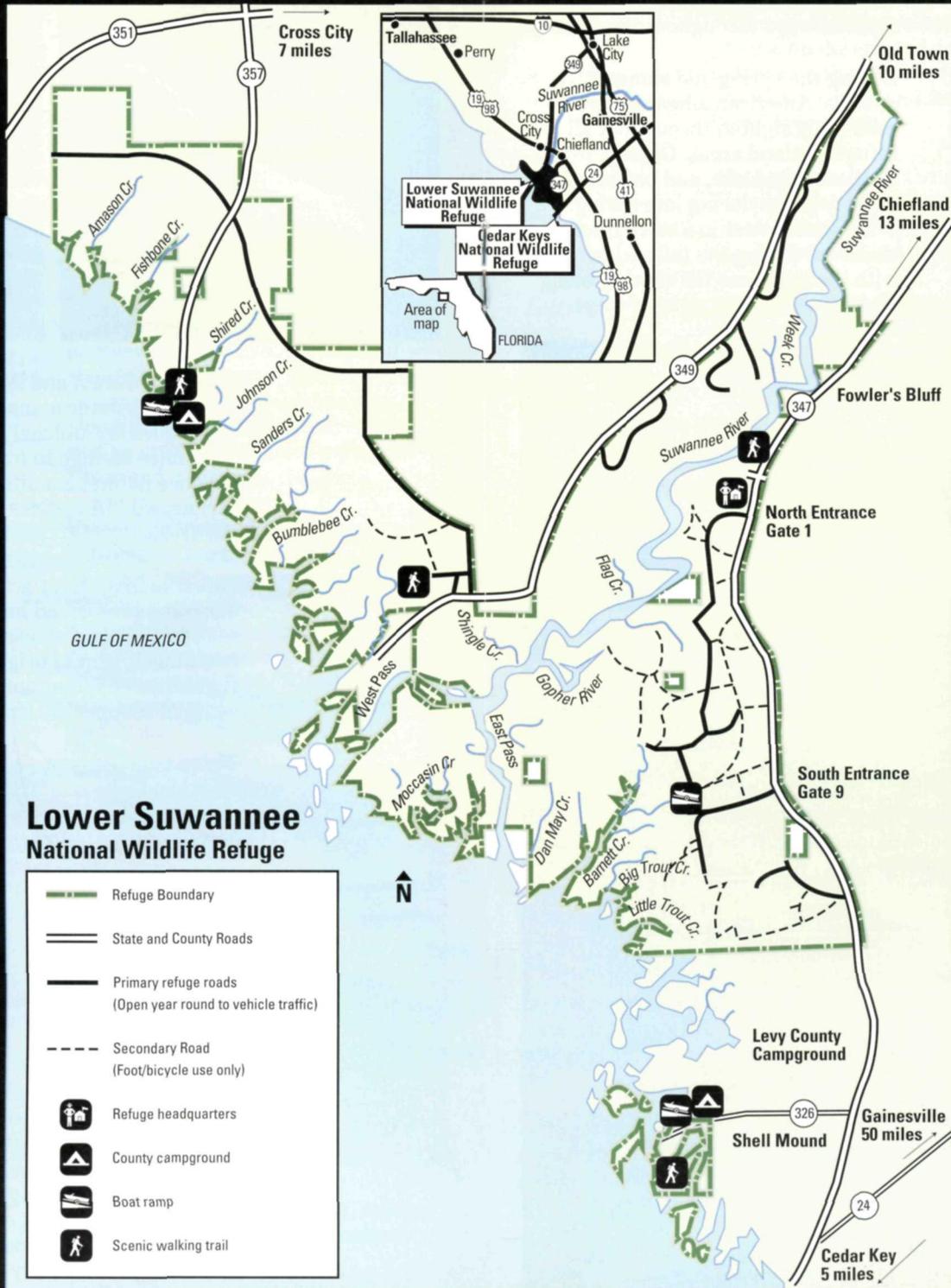
Forest management activities, including prescribed burning and selective cutting, stress the reestablishment of original vegetative communities altered by years of commercial timber cutting.

Water management activities create additional seasonal habitat for wading birds such as white ibis, herons, egrets, and wood storks.

Wood duck nesting habitat is enhanced by placement of nesting boxes at various sites throughout the area. Nest platforms erected on offshore islands provide additional nesting sites for osprey.

Wildlife Observation

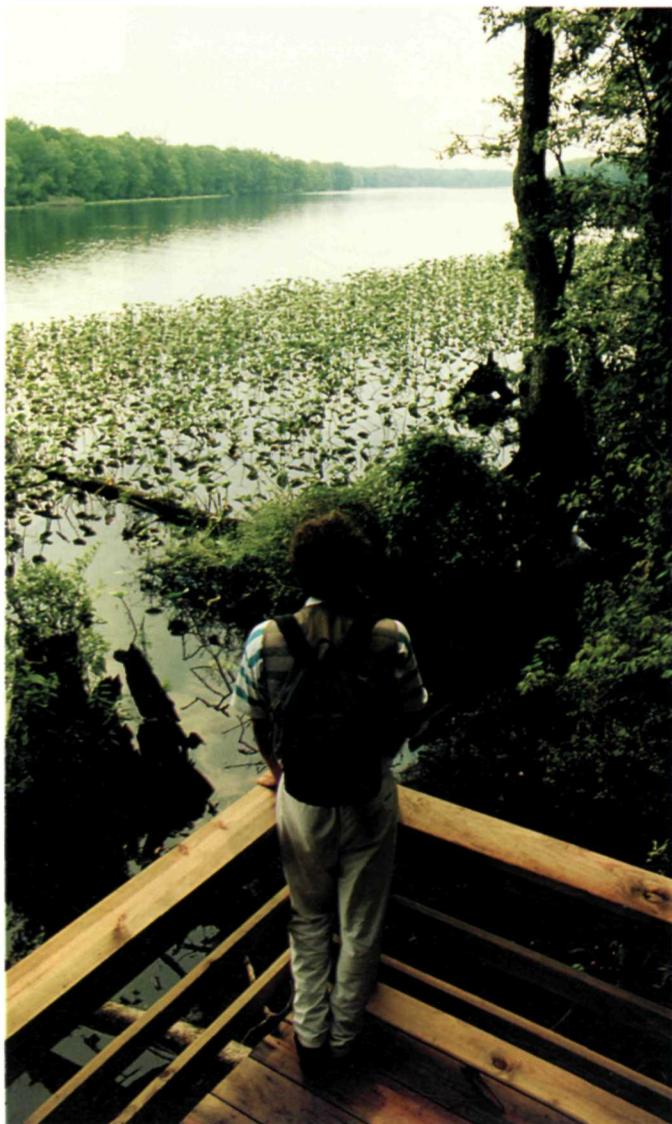
Wildlife observation is best during early morning and evening hours with the better viewing opportunities occurring during the winter and spring months. Wading birds such as white ibis, herons and egrets are often found along roadside ditches and sloughs from early spring through mid-November. Wild turkeys



are frequently sighted along road right-of-ways throughout the year.

During the spring and summer months, American alligators are commonly sighted throughout all refuge wetland areas. Osprey, swallow-tailed kite, and bald eagle activity peaks during late spring. White-tailed deer are more readily observed during the fall and winter with the best time for viewing being at dusk along road right-of-ways.

photo: Ken Sourbeer©



Vehicles:

Refuge Regulations

All motorized vehicles are restricted to use on designated roads as shown on the attached map. The use of ATV's (three and four wheelers, etc.) is prohibited.

Camping:

Not permitted on the refuge, but is available at county campgrounds located on CR 326 near Shell Mound and Shired Island off CR 357.

Littering:

Prohibited. Please dispose of in a responsible manner.

Fires:

Not permitted on refuge.

Collecting:

Taking of government property, any artifact, natural feature, animal or plant is prohibited. Metal detectors are prohibited.

*Firearms/
weapons:*

Firearms/weapons are prohibited except during refuge hunting seasons.

Pets:

Must be on a leash and under control of owner at all times.

Horses:

Not permitted on refuge.



How to Enjoy Your Visit

The refuge is open year-round for wildlife observation, hiking and photography. There are 40 miles of improved roads (primary) scattered through the refuge that are open to motorized vehicles, which provide the visitor a glimpse of the various forest and wetland habitats within the refuge. Hiking and bicycling are allowed on all refuge roads. An additional 50 miles of unimproved roads (secondary) are available for hiking and bicycling only.

Several walking trails are available on the refuge. The historic Suwannee River and its hardwood swamps can be viewed along the 0.6-mile River Trail located just north of the refuge headquarters.

The Dennis Creek Trail (1.0-mile loop) and the Shell Mound Trail (0.3-mile loop) are located at Shell Mound at the end of County Road 326. The Dennis Creek trail takes you through a coastal island where you will see various bird life and unique coastal habitat. The Shell Mound Trail crosses over an ancient Indian shell midden (reaching 28 feet above mean sea level), where a spectacular view of the coastal estuary and Gulf of Mexico awaits you.

A handicapped accessible fishing boardwalk/observation pier is also available at Shell Mound. The Salt Creek observation trail (.1 mile) and fishing boardwalk provides a breath taking view of the salt marsh and coastal pine islands. This trail is located off of CR 349 about one mile from the town of Suwannee.

Note: Biting insects are particularly numerous along these trails during the summer months. Use of an insect repellent is advised.

Coastal waters, tidal creeks, interior ponds and the Suwannee River are open year-round to fishing. Public boat ramps providing access to the Suwannee River are located at nearby Fowler's Bluff and the town of

Suwannee in Dixie County. Access to coastal waters is available at Cedar Key, Shell Mound, Shired Island and the town of Suwannee.

Hunting of small game (squirrel, raccoon) big game (turkey, deer and hog), and waterfowl is permitted

during designated seasons. A special brochure and permit is required for hunting. Information is available at the refuge headquarters.

The Refuge System

Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 510 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the system is to preserve a national network of lands and waters for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources of

the United States for the benefit of present and future generations. The refuge System encompasses over 92 million acres administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior.

In addition to the refuge system, the Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for the endangered species program, National Fish Hatcheries, certain marine mammals and migratory birds, as well as other wildlife programs. The refuge office is open Monday-Friday from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.

For more information

Contact:
 Refuge Manager
 Lower Suwannee
 National Wildlife Refuge
 16450 NW 31 Place
 Chiefland, FL 32626
 352/493 0238

photo: Ken Litzzenberger



photo: Henry Sansing



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October 1997



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