

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Mattamuskeet

*National Wildlife Refuge*



*The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is "To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generation of Americans." (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997) Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 refuges scattered throughout the country, all administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*



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

Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge, located on the Albemarle-Pamlico Peninsula in Hyde County, North Carolina, was established in 1934. The Refuge consists of 50,180 acres of open water, marsh, timber, and croplands. The Refuge's main feature is the shallow 40,000-acre Lake Mattamuskeet, the largest natural lake in North Carolina.

Mattamuskeet Refuge provides habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, as well as wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for visitors. The refuge is known among wildlife enthusiasts for the thousands of wintering waterfowl that it attracts each year.



photo: Larry Ditto, USFWS

#### **History**

The formation of Lake Mattamuskeet remains a mystery. Some say fires burning deep into the peat soil formed the lake. Another account describes Lake Mattamuskeet and other nearby smaller lakes as being scoured out by a shower of meteors that struck the Carolina coastal plain. A final theory is that the lake remained after the historical Carolina Bays gradually receded from the area.

For many years the idea of draining the shallow Lake Mattamuskeet intrigued farmers and developers. Patterned after similar projects in Holland, large scale drainage operations to convert the lake bottom to farmland began in 1914. The world's largest pumping plant at the time was built, and the lake was

cover photo:  
Larry Ditto, USFWS



actually drained for periods of time. Eventually, the scheme was abandoned as impractical and too expensive.

In 1934 the land was acquired by the United States Government, and the refuge was established. The Civilian Conservation Corps converted the former pumping plant into a hunting lodge which was operated until 1974. The Mattamuskeet Lodge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. It continues to

impress visitors with its unique architecture and historical significance.

### Habitat Types

Lake Mattamuskeet, dotted with bald cypress trees, is 18 miles long and 6 miles wide and



varies in depth from 0.5 to 5 feet with an average depth of 1.5 feet. Dense beds of submerged aquatic vegetation desired by swans, diving ducks, and some puddle ducks are produced naturally. The lake level fluctuates with rainfall, wind tides, and evapotranspiration.



A system of 10 man-made marsh impoundments totaling nearly 2,600 acres surround the south and east sides of the lake, providing feeding and resting areas for many species of migratory birds as well as

resident wildlife. Three farm areas contribute another 400 acres to the diversity of habitat types on the refuge.

Refuge forests consist of approximately 1,000 acres of loblolly pine, including the 153-acre Salyer's Ridge Natural Area, and the 2,000 acres of mixed hardwoods and bald cypress. These woodlands occur in narrow strips along the refuge boundary between the marsh and higher private lands.

### Wildlife

Thousands of Canada geese, snow geese, tundra swans, and 22 species of ducks overwinter on the refuge annually. Mattamuskeet Refuge's position along the Atlantic Flyway makes it a prime location for providing a valuable wintering area for waterfowl.

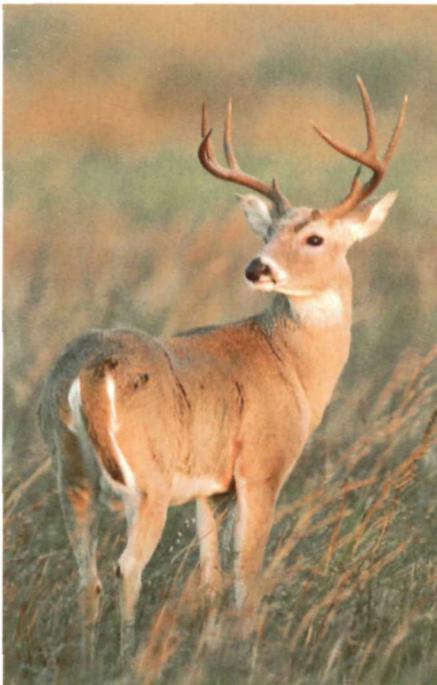
Although noted primarily for its waterfowl, Mattamuskeet also

photo: USFWS



provides habitat for threatened and endangered species such as the peregrine falcon, bald eagle, and red wolf. Mammals such as deer, bobcats, otters, and an occasional black bear find refuge here. A variety of amphibians including frogs, toads, and salamanders are common throughout the refuge.

photo: Larry Ditto, USFWS



The rich diversity of habitats on Mattamuskeet provides a veritable haven for reptiles including snapping turtles, yellowbelly turtles, eastern fence lizards, and 31 species of snakes. The only poisonous snakes are the copperhead, cottonmouth, canebrake rattlesnake, and the Carolina pigmy rattlesnake.

photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



photo: Larry Ditto, USFWS



The lake, marsh, and woodlands provide habitat for over 240 bird species. Ospreys nest in low cypress trees near the edge of the lake. Hundreds of migratory shorebirds find resting and feeding spots along the edge of the lake and throughout the marsh impoundments. Migrating warblers are popular subjects for bird watchers in the spring and fall.

### Management

The 2,600 acres of marsh impoundments are intensively managed by

using moist-soil techniques to produce stands of natural waterfowl foods such as wild millet, panic grasses, and spikerushes. Water levels are controlled by pumps and water control structures. Impoundments are manipulated every few years by burning, disking, or mowing to maintain these early successional wetland plants.

Corn, soybeans, and winter wheat are farmed by cooperative farmers with a portion of the crop left in the field for Canada geese, snow geese, ducks, and swans to use. Forest management techniques such as prescribed burning and selective thinning are used to enhance wildlife habitat.

## Recreational Opportunities

Mattamuskeet Refuge is a popular place for visitors to enjoy a variety of wildlife-dependent recreation.

During fall and winter, concentrations of geese, swans, and ducks are a delight to both wildlife observers and photographers. Viewing waterfowl and other wildlife species is particularly good from the refuge entrance road which runs from Highway 94 to the refuge headquarters, the Wildlife Drive on the south side of the lake, and an observation area on the lake along Highway 94. Visitors are welcome to walk or bicycle throughout the refuge. Each December the refuge co-hosts the annual Swan Days Festival at which visitors enjoy tours of the refuge, wildlife arts and crafts, workshops, and lectures.



photo: Kelly Davis



photo: Larry Ditto, USFWS

Boating and sport fishing for largemouth bass, striped bass, catfish, bream, and other species is permitted on Lake Mattamuskeet and the adjacent canals from March 1 to November 1. Taking blue crabs at the water control structures is a very popular sport enjoyed by all age groups. All fishing

activities must be conducted in accordance with state regulations. Additional refuge regulations are available at the refuge headquarters.

Mattamuskeet Refuge provides for quality public hunting of white-tailed



deer, swans, ducks, and coots. For current information on hunting dates and procedures contact the refuge headquarters.

The historic Mattamuskeet Lodge is open during certain hours for public touring. Call 252-926-1422 to check hours or to schedule an event.

## Regulations

Prohibited activities include: camping, littering, air boating, jet skiing, all terrain vehicles, swimming, sailing, sailboarding, molesting wildlife, and collecting plants, flowers, nuts, or berries.

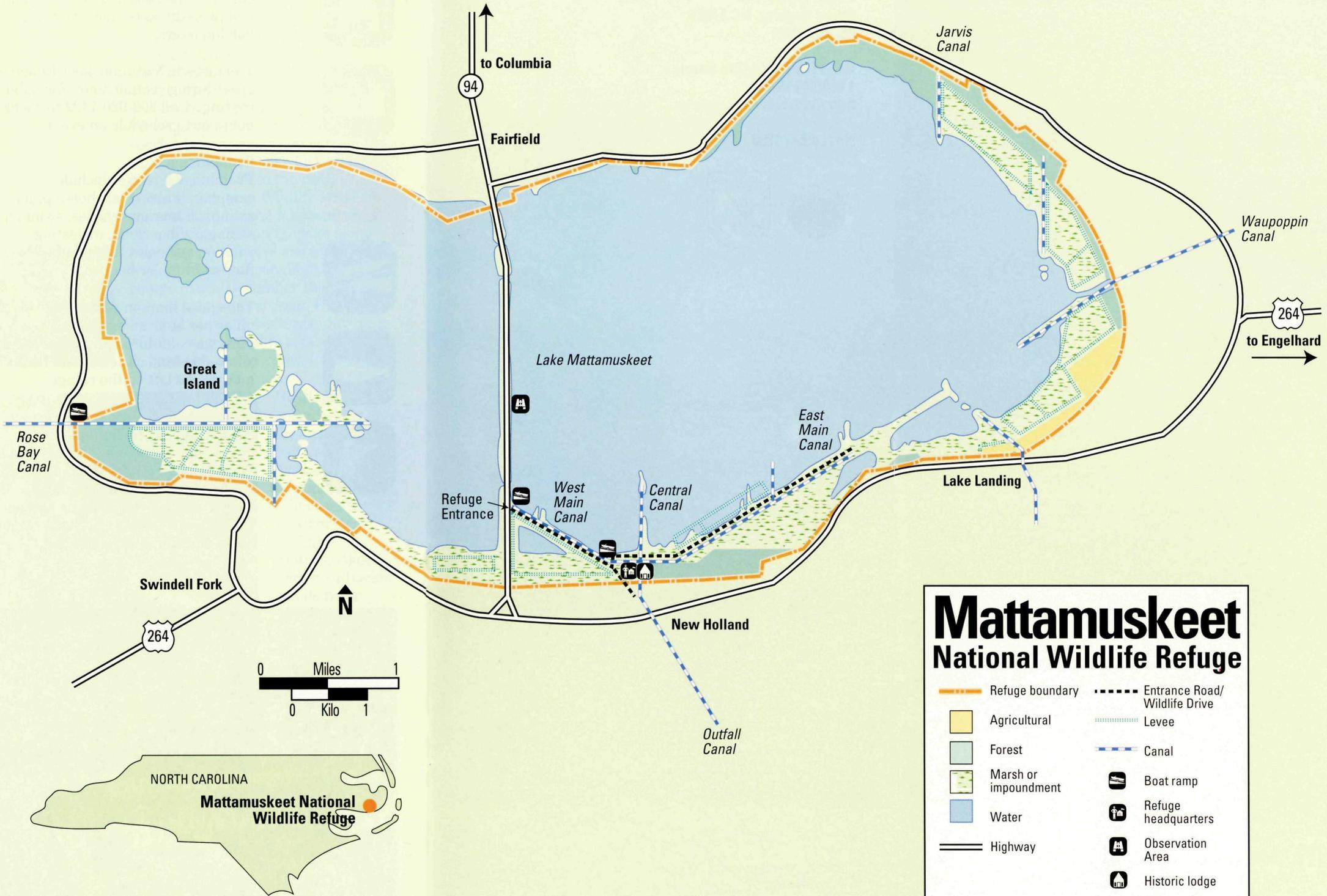
The speed limit on refuge roads is 25 miles per hour unless posted otherwise. Motorized vehicles are not allowed behind closed gates. Boats may not be left on the refuge overnight.

## How To Reach The Refuge

The refuge lies about 70 miles east of Washington, North Carolina. The headquarters entrance road is located off Highway 94, one and one-half miles north of U.S. 264 between Swan Quarter and Engelhard.



photo: USFWS



Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge  
Route 1, Box N-2  
Swan Quarter, NC 27885  
252/926 4021

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov/r4eao>

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