

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# North Louisiana

*Refuges Complex*



*The North Louisiana Refuges Complex is part of the 500 plus unit National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.*



*This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

**The National Wildlife Refuge System**  
Unmatched anywhere in the world, the National Wildlife Refuge System is an extensive network of lands and waters protected and managed especially for wildlife habitat and for people's enjoyment.

This unique system encompasses over 93 million acres of lands and waters from north of the Arctic Circle in Alaska to the subtropical waters of the Florida Keys and beyond to the Caribbean and South Pacific.



### **Introduction**

In 1996, D'Arbonne, Upper Ouachita, and Handy Brake National Wildlife Refuges combined to form the North Louisiana Refuges Complex. Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge was added in 1997. This refuge complex protects lakes, creeks, bayous, cypress swamps, and bottomland hardwood and upland forests in north Louisiana.

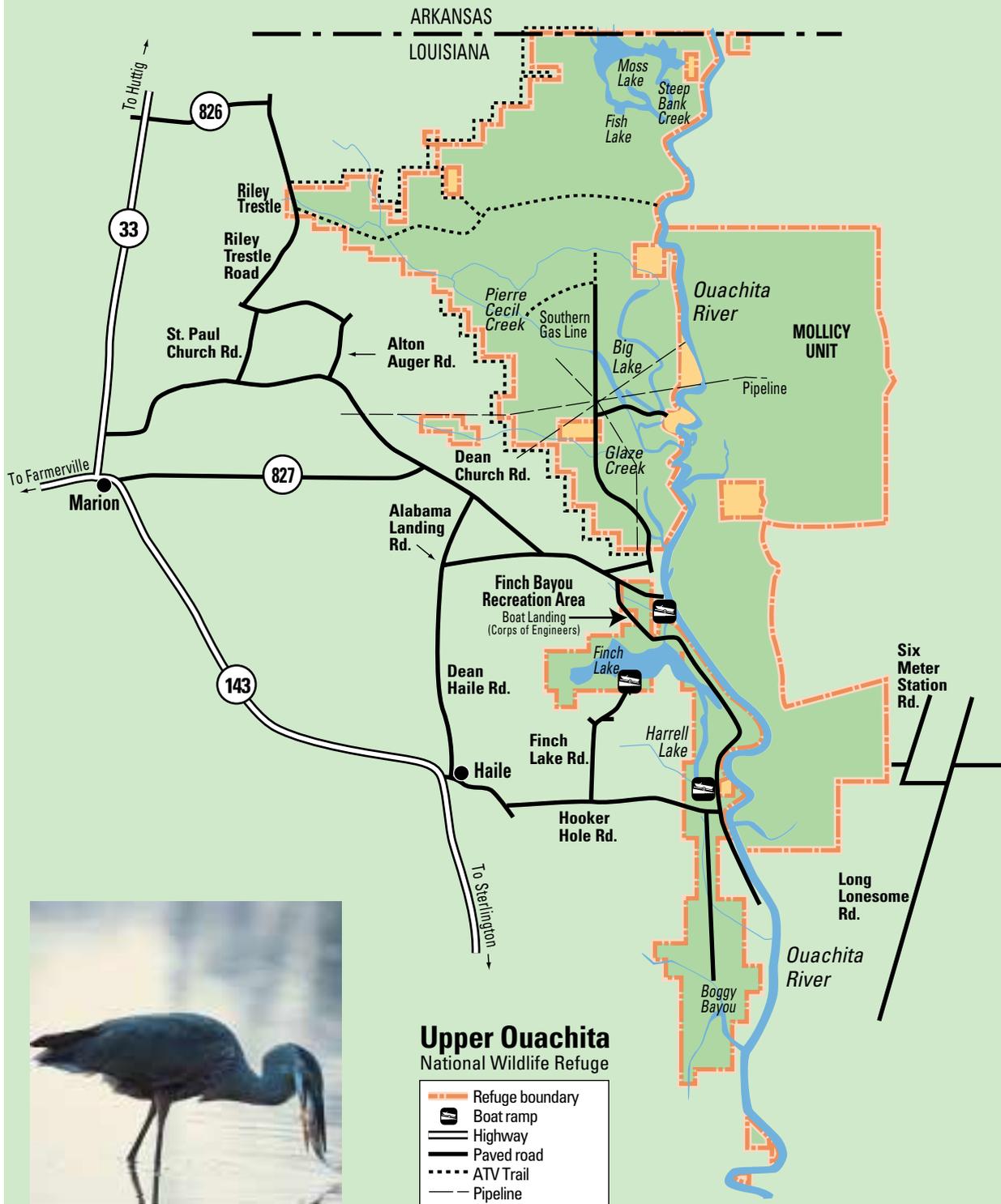


## Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge

Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge begins at the Arkansas-Louisiana border and stretches southward almost 18 miles along the floodplain of the Ouachita River. Most of the 21,000 acres west of the river is flat, bottomland hardwood forest, dissected by creeks, sloughs, and bayous. Pine hills border the western edge of the refuge. This landscape provides a home for a variety of plants and animals.

### *Mollicy Unit*

A 16,000 acre unit of Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge, the Mollicy Unit, lies east of the river and has long been recognized as a unique resource. In the fall and winter this area attracts hundreds of thousands of migrating waterfowl. Because the Mollicy Unit was cleared in the 1960s for cropland, re-establishing bottomland hardwoods on these lands is an on-going project.



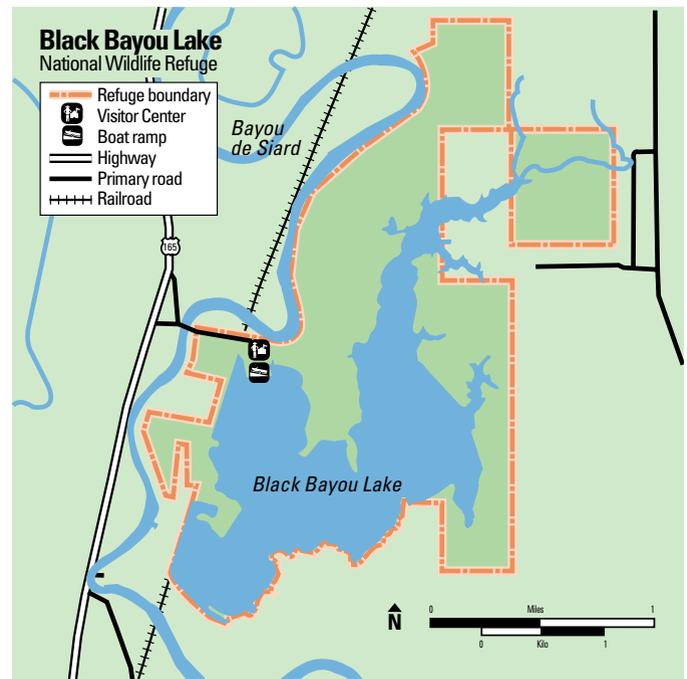
## **Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge**

Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1997 through a unique partnership with the City of Monroe. The 2,000 acre scenic lake, located approximately four miles north of Monroe, is owned by the city and serves as its secondary water source. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has a free ninety-nine year management lease. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service acquired 2,200 acres of land surrounding the lake which expanded the refuge to 4,200 acres and protected the lake's watershed.



The beautiful natural lake containing picturesque and stately cypress and tupelo trees is surrounded by swamps that graduate into bottomland hardwoods and mixed pine and hardwood uplands. The refuge supports an excellent fishery resource and provides valuable habitat for migratory waterfowl, neotropical migratory songbirds, and many resident wildlife species.

Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge is being developed to support an active environmental and wildlife education program.

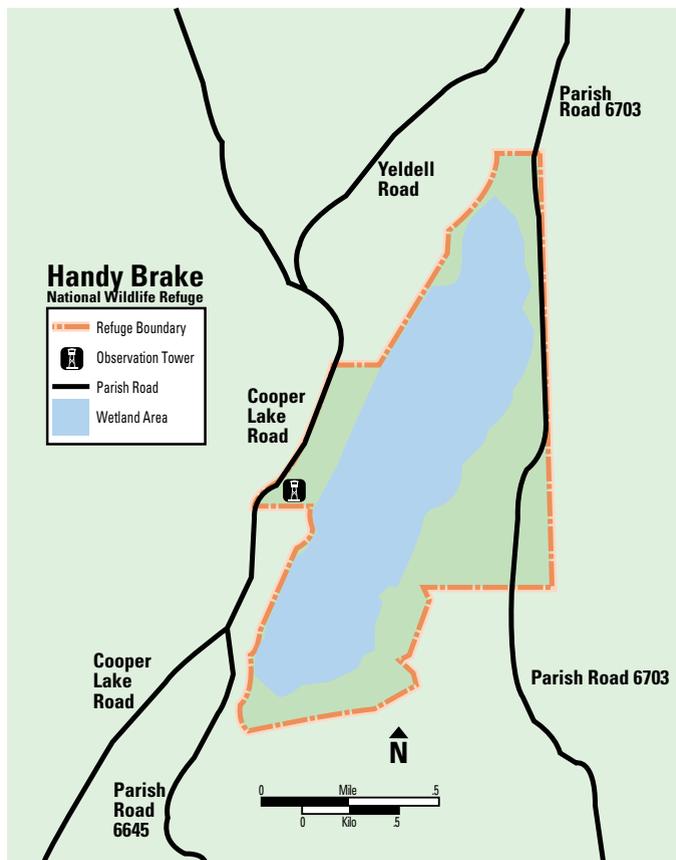


## **Handy Brake National Wildlife Refuge**

The first transfer to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service of a Farmer's Home Administration tract of land (466 acres) in the southeast resulted in Handy Brake National Wildlife Refuge. An observation platform overlooks permanent water that is home to a myriad of wetland dependant wildlife. Prairie grasses are established between the platform and wetland, and bottomland hardwoods have been replanted.

### **Other Wetland Areas**

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has land-based responsibilities off of traditional refuges. Approximately 10,500 acres (easements, fee title tracts, and leases) of wetland habitat in 20 northern Louisiana parishes are managed as part of the North Louisiana Refuges Complex. Little in the way of significant forests exist on these tracts unless one counts the hundreds of acres of former



agricultural fields that have been planted back to bottomland hardwoods in recent years. It will be years before these areas are considered to be forests instead of fields. The variety of habitats on these tracts provides excellent homes for a diversity of native plants, migratory birds, and resident wildlife species.

### *Migratory Waterfowl*

#### **Refuge Complex Wildlife**

During the winter months more than twenty species of waterfowl will find a home in northeast Louisiana. Green-winged and blue-winged teal are the first to arrive; followed by mallards, widgeon, pintail, gadwall, and ring-neck ducks. The handsome wood duck, a year round resident, nests in tree cavities and in nest boxes.



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The presence and distribution of wintering waterfowl depends largely on water levels. Low levels favor dabblers looking for the permanently flooded areas and low, flooded fields. As water levels rise and the shallow backwater moves into the bottomland hardwoods, mallards and other dabblers begin using these areas. Diving ducks utilize the deeper waters found throughout the complex.

### *Neotropical Migrants*



During the spring, summer, and early fall, North Louisiana Refuges Complex is a haven for a variety of other migratory birds. Numerous songbirds and shorebirds stop briefly in the fall and spring to replenish energy reserves for the long journey to and from wintering areas in Central and South America. Other birds, such as northern parula, prothonotary warblers, red-eyed vireos, and summer tanagers nest on the refuges. Almost 100 species of songbirds are known to nest in the area.

### *Endangered and Threatened Species*



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D'Arbonne, Upper Ouachita, and Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuges all have red-cockaded woodpecker clusters. This woodpecker, left, prefers open, park-like pine forests where it chisels nesting cavities in mature pine trees. Cavity trees are marked with white bands. Artificial nest inserts are placed in mature pine trees to supplement natural cavity trees and to encourage new clusters. Forest management practices such as selective cutting and prescribed burning improve and maintain suitable habitat for this endangered bird.



Bald eagles, left, can be seen during the winter as they follow waterfowl down the flyway. They are most commonly seen on the Mollicy Unit and Finch Lake area of Upper Ouachita and the "Beanfield" area of D'Arbonne. There have been eagle nesting attempts at Mollicy in recent years.



### *Other Wildlife*

Wetlands, uplands, bottomlands, creeks, bayous, and sloughs support the abundant wildlife that make north Louisiana their home.

Whitetail deer, raccoons, opossums, turkeys, squirrels, rabbits, coyotes, fox, river otters, mink, beaver, and bobcats thrive in these rich woodlands. Many areas serve as home to an impressive array of reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Five species of poisonous snakes inhabit the area along with the ticks, chiggers, and mosquitos which can make a visit unpleasant for the unprepared.



### **Managing the Habitat**

The focus of wetland management for D'Arbonne Refuge is the "Beanfield" where farming attempts failed while in private ownership. An open field dominated by panic grass is now maintained in this area. A few scattered young cypress trees are left in this open area as raptor perches and future cavity trees.

In addition to the permanent water, a pump provides early water for migratory birds. This moist soil management stimulates the growth of native, wetland plant species and an abundance of insects, crustaceans, and mollusks—all highly favored foods of migrating waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds.

Forest lands on the complex consist of bottomland hardwood, pine, and upland hardwood forests as well as flooded swamps containing bald cypress and water tupelo. Seasonally flooded hardwood trees with their mast (acorn, nut) crops provide vital wintering habitat for waterfowl.

Understory shrub and herbaceous species such as blueberry, greenbrier, and hawthorn (Mayhaw) support neotropical birds and many indigenous species including deer and wild turkey.



Prescribed burning, thinning, regeneration, and stand improvement are some of the techniques used to enhance and maintain optimum habitat conditions.

### *Reforestation*

Two centuries ago the Lower Mississippi River Valley contained over 24 million acres of bottomland hardwood and swamp forests. Today, only about 4 million acres of wetland forest remain; most as islands in a sea of farmland.



In efforts to re-link these fragmented forests and improve habitat, the complex conducts an extensive reforestation program. Most agricultural fields on the refuges are being planted with hardwood trees that

covered the land before human intervention. The oaks, cypress, sweetgum, and other planted trees enhance wildlife diversity and prevent soil erosion.



### **Enjoy Your Visit**

The refuge complex headquarters is located on D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge approximately six miles north of West Monroe at the intersection of Louisiana Highway 143 and Holland's Bluff Road. The office is opened Monday through Friday, 7:30 am to 4:00 pm. Refuge lands are open during daylight hours unless otherwise specified in the hunting and fishing brochures. Most of the Mollicy Unit is presently closed. Visitors should contact the office for an update on refuge conditions or if they have any questions.



### *Access*

Numerous woods roads and pipeline rights-of-way are located throughout D'Arbonne and Upper Ouachita refuges and are open year round for hiking or non-motorized bicycling. Parking areas are conveniently located on all refuges as motorized vehicles have limited access to the interior of the refuges.

### *Wildlife Observation/Photography*

All refuges except the Mollicy Unit are open year round and provide an opportunity to see deer, waterfowl, and other migratory birds. The Andy Anders memorial observation platform overlooks the "Beanfield" on D'Arbonne refuge and there is an observation platform at Handy Brake



refuge. Black Bayou Lake has an interpretive observation pier extending 400 feet into the lake. Both platforms and the pier are fully accessible.

Environmental education is an important program on the complex. Groups are welcome. Arrangements for programs may be made by calling the office.

### *Hunting*

D'Arbonne and Upper Ouachita refuges offer a variety of hunting opportunities. Other areas offer more limited opportunities. Check with the office or the current hunting/fishing regulations for site specific schedules.





*Fishing* Fishing is the most popular recreation activity on D'Arbonne, Upper Ouachita, and Black Bayou Lake refuges. It is important to check the current hunting/fishing brochure to determine exact regulations for each area. There are important variations from some state regulations.

*Boating* Boating, in conjunction with other wildlife dependent recreation activities, is permitted in accordance with state regulations on D'Arbonne, Upper Ouachita, and Black Bayou Lake refuges. Three boat ramps are available for visitor use on D'Arbonne refuge, two on Upper Ouachita, and one on Black Bayou Lake. A fee is charged for boat launching at Black Bayou Lake and motors are limited to 50 hp or less.

Use caution when operating boats. Obstructions/obstacles, both natural and man-made, may be submerged and unmarked.

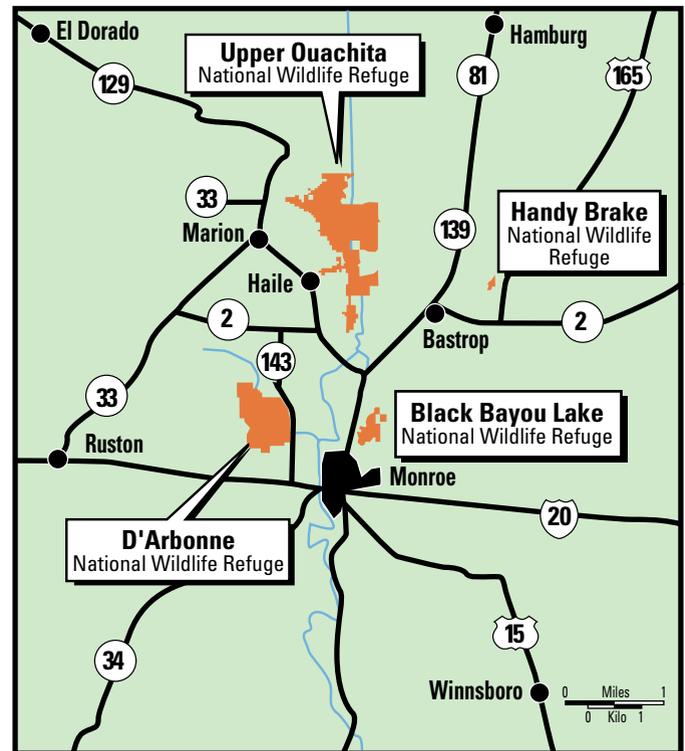
*Firearms* Firearms and archery equipment are prohibited except during designated seasons. See the hunt brochure for regulations regarding the transportation of firearms on the refuge during hunting seasons.

*Camping* No camping or open campfires are allowed on any complex lands.

*Collecting* Disturbing, feeding, or collecting of wildlife and plants is prohibited. Surface collecting or digging for archeological, historical, and/or Native American artifacts is prohibited.

*Pets* Pets must be on a leash at all times.

*Alcohol* Persons under the influence of alcohol may not enter or remain on a refuge. Possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited while hunting. Disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace and interference with other visitors is also prohibited.



Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental disability. For more information please contact the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office for Equal Opportunity, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240

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**May 2000**



**Cover: Prothonotary Warbler by**  
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