

Rice Lake

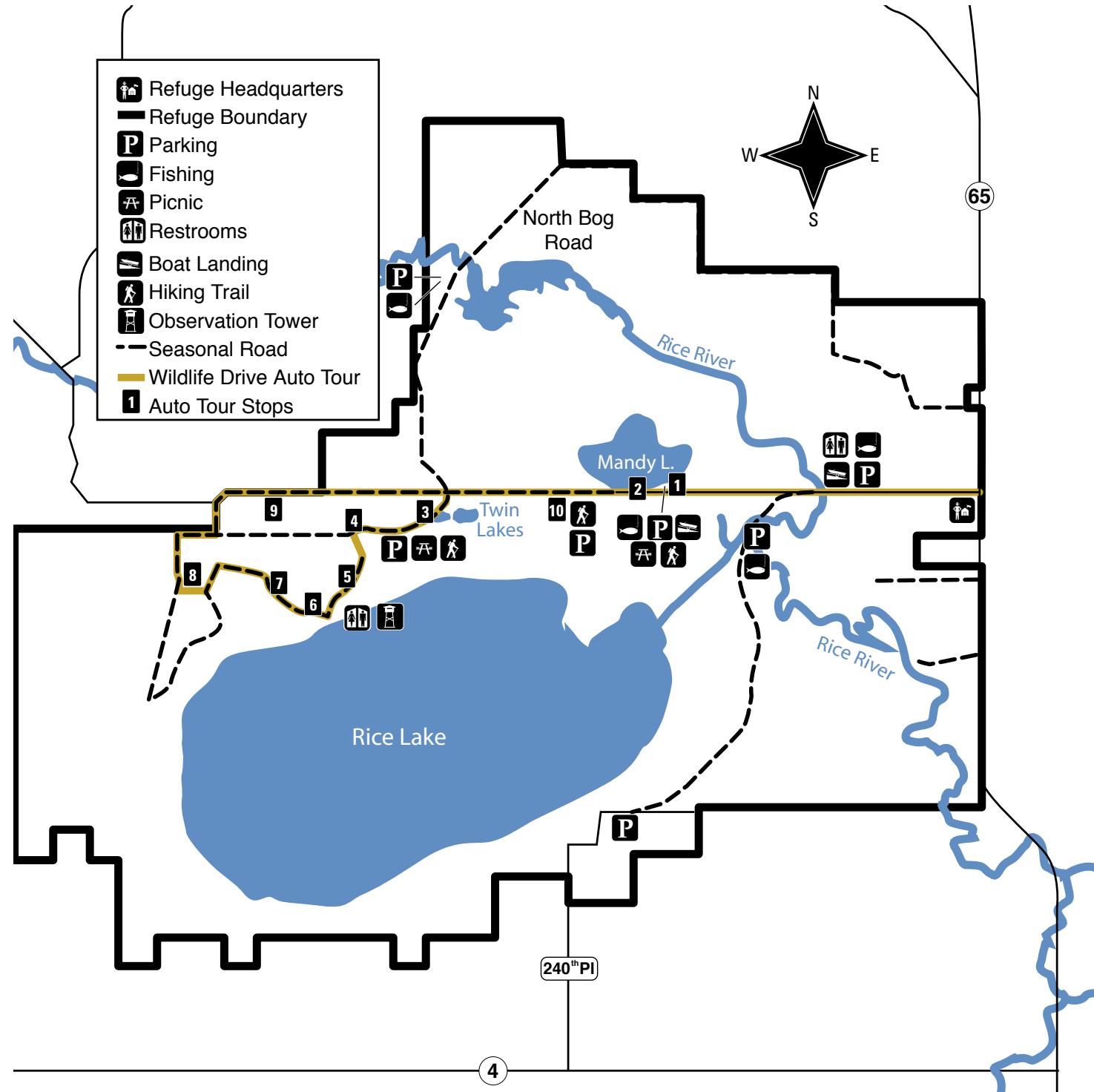
National Wildlife Refuge Auto Tour



Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge
36289 State Highway 65
McGregor, MN 55760

Phone: 218/768 2402
People with hearing disabilities may contact the
refuge via the Federal Information Relay System at
1 800/877 8339.

Website:
<http://www.fws.gov/ricelake>



Changing Times - Changing Uses

For an eon they have come here to gather what the land provided. We do not know how they named themselves, those first people to follow retreating glaciers to this place. But, they kept coming, and lived here, for generations unnumbered.

More recently the Dakota and the Ojibwe Indians came and lived here. They collected wild rice from the lake, maple syrup from the forest, and other foods and materials they needed to survive. Later, Europeans and their descendants settled here and cut timber and dug drainage ditches to convert this place to farmland.

Today, Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge is managed for wildlife and for people who come to enjoy these wildlands.

The land retains traces of how people have used it. This 9.5-mile self-guiding tour draws your attention to the changing uses people have put to this area. The tour takes about 45 minutes - longer if you stop to hike or watch for wildlife. Follow the arrows and stop at the numbered posts.



1

As you travel the auto tour and learn how humans have used the area, you may see the waterfowl, deer, grouse, bear and other wildlife that continue to be a part of Rice Lake's attraction.

2

As the last glaciers melted 10,000 years ago, they left behind poorly drained soils and basins created by chunks of melting ice. The resulting watery landscape contains a mixture of cedar swamp, tamarack bog and lakes. The ridge you are now on, between Mandy Lake before you, and Rice Lake to the south, was one of the few high grounds close to the abundant wild rice crops of the lakes. A 1.5-mile long hiking trail skirts the edge of Mandy Lake to the North Bog Road, rewarding the hiker with excellent wildlife viewing.

3

Evidence suggests the Eastern Dakota Indians occupied the Rice Lake area 300-400 years ago. Attracted by wild rice and plentiful game, the Dakota probably lived here in temporary hunting and ricing camps. Archaeologists believe their main villages were at Mille Lacs Lake, southwest of here. In Twin Lake, located down the road to your left, an ancient dugout canoe was discovered in 1969. Perhaps, the canoe was used by Indians to gather wild rice and hunt game. A short, scenic hiking trail begins at the east end of the picnic area and makes a short loop on the north side of Twin Lake.

4

The Dakota and Ojibwe people took resources from the land which were renewed each year; maple syrup, wild rice and game. But in the late 1800s the use of the land changed dramatically.

5

As the railroads extended westward, more European settlers moved into the area. The resources, which for centuries were used for subsistence, became commodities.

6

In 1900, a livestock ranch began operating in and around Rice Lake. Wanting to harvest Rice Lake's marsh hay with machinery, the ranchers made two unsuccessful attempts to drain the lake. The ditch they dug was too small to be effective.

7

For a few weeks in the fall, Indians centered their activities around the harvest of wild rice. They poled their canoes through dense stands of wild rice, bending the stalks over their boats, tapping the stalks with sticks, dislodging the grain into the bottom of the boats. On shore, they parched the rice over a fire, placed the grain in shallow holes in the ground, tramped out the kernels from the husk, and winnowed out the grain. They took the wild rice back to their villages where they stored it in pits for use during winter. A local band of Ojibwe still gather wild rice here each September.

Climb the observation tower for a vista of the 18,000-acre refuge. In the fall Rice Lake holds concentrations of between 50,000 and 100,000 ring-necked ducks.

8

the logs through Rice Creek and on to the Mississippi River, 20 miles to the northwest.

9

While many of the area's fields were cleared by early European settlers, these fields were cleared by refuge staff many years ago to provide habitat for Canada geese and sharp-tailed grouse. Instead of mowing, this open area is now maintained with the periodic use of prescribed fire. While no longer a haven for Canada geese it still provides important habitat for sandhill cranes, bobolinks, and other grassland birds.

10

A branch of the Soo Line Railroad, known as the Cuyuna and Iron Range, was constructed in 1910. This line carried ore from the iron mines of the nearby Cuyuna Range, and timber from the surrounding area to Lake Superior ports. This line was abandoned in the 1920s and a portion of the rail bed is now used as the main refuge road. You are now on it.

President Franklin Roosevelt established the Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge in 1935. To help restore wildlife and to provide employment during the depression, the Federal Government operated a Civilian Conservation Corps camp here in the late 1930s. In the clearing to your right there were 24 camp buildings. While almost nothing is left of the camp's buildings, the product of the corpsmen's work still remains. Through their labor, water control structures were built on Rice River, providing the refuge with a lasting tool for improving wildlife habitat.

Today, the refuge is managed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, providing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife species.

The refuge staff hopes that you have enjoyed your tour!