



ADMINISTRATION

Savannah National Wildlife Refuge Complex is administered by the U. S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. Questions regarding the Complex should be directed to the Complex office (address mail to P. O. Box 8487, Savannah, Georgia 31412).

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historic places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department evaluates our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interest of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservations and for people who live in island territories under U. S. administration.

SAVANNAH COASTAL REFUGES



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



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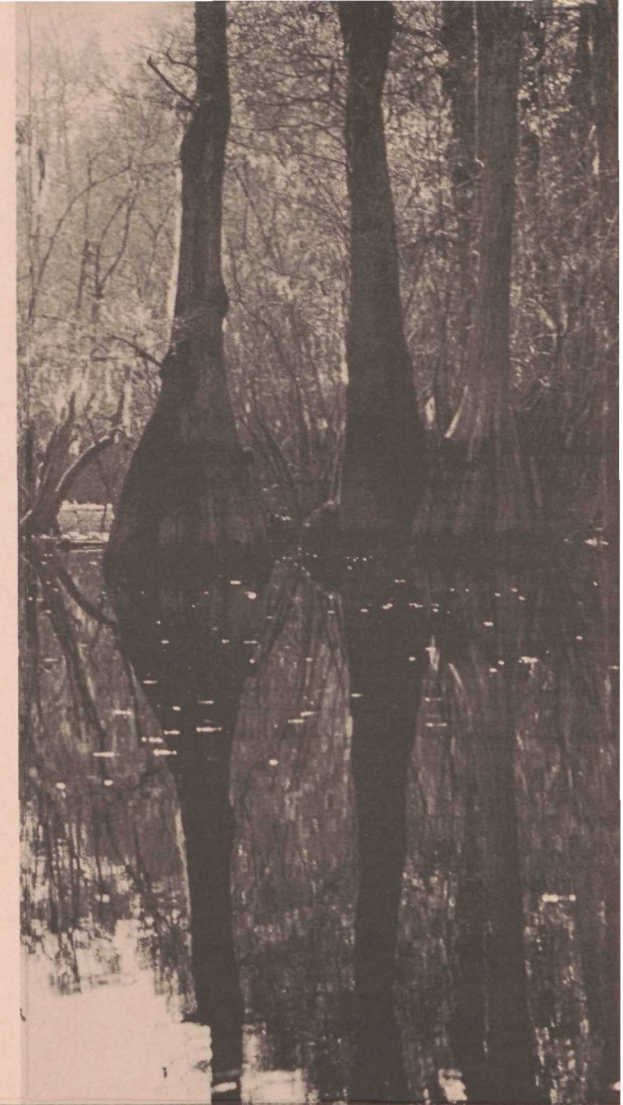
THE LOW-COUNTRY

Bordered on the west by sandhill ridges and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, lies a band of low land extending from Georgetown, South Carolina, to St. Mary's, Georgia, known locally as the Low-country. For over two centuries the diversity of fauna and flora within this region has attracted such naturalists as Alexander Wilson, Mark Catesby, John James Audubon, and William Bartram. While the Carolina parakeets and ivory-billed woodpeckers which once inhabited the fresh water swamps within this coastal lowland have vanished, many rare and uncommon species remain. The southern bald eagle still soars majestically over remnants of vast river bottom hardwood swamps such as those contained within the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. Egrets and herons, once hunted nearly to extinction by the plume hunters of the early 1900's, continue to nest by the thousands in rookeries such as those on Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge.

The variety of birdlife within the Low-country is enhanced by its location on the Atlantic flyway. During the winter months, thousands of mallards, pintails, teal and as many as ten other species of ducks migrate into the area, joining resident wood ducks on the coastal refuges. In the spring and fall transient songbirds and shorebirds stop briefly on their journey to and from northern nesting grounds. Among these casual visitors are the

diminutive warblers (magnolia, prairie, black-poll . . .) and sandpipers (buff-breasted, white-rumped, pectoral . . .). Many migrant songbirds and shorebirds terminate their southern journey and spend the winter. The hermit thrush, ruby-crowned kinglet, yellow-rumped warbler, black-bellied plover, and sanderling, are a few of the winter residents.

In the heat of the humid summer months, the Low-country's native flora ripens. The sweet magnolia blossoms, symbolic of the deep South, are abundant and lush beards of Spanish moss thicken with every rain. The live oak trees sport vibrant green manes of resurrection fern. Visions of the Old South when rice was king in the Low-country best come to mind during these lazy summer months. The plantation homes and the associated gracious manner of living are gone, but the vast rice fields which made them possible live on. Though rice is no longer grown, the old fields have found new service as habitat for waterfowl and wading birds. Nothing remains of Laurel Hill Plantation which once stood at the present main entrance to Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, but many of the dikes originally built by slaves -- and itinerant Irishmen -- and reconstructed rice trunks (water control structures) continue to serve in management of the historic Low-country's marshland.



BARRIER ISLANDS

The Spanish called them Guale, these Golden Isles, and since the 1500's they have unfolded a continuing drama of both regional and national significance. The islands have been battlegrounds and playgrounds; have provided solace and inspiration; enjoyed fabulous prosperity; suffered ruin and abandonment; and yet still retain the character that makes them the truly unique places they are.

Scientifically speaking, these are barrier islands, so named because they form a barrier between the ocean and the mainland. They are an integral part of a continuous chain of similar islands and beaches, stretching from Maine to Texas that protects the coast from hurricanes and storms. No where, however, is there a more completely developed system of large barrier islands than on the Georgia Coast.

Behind the barrier islands lie Georgia's salt marshes, described by some as the world's most productive acreage. Here nutrients from both fresh and salt water mix, providing organic material that moves into the sea to become a major link in the marine food chain. These marshes are also the nurseries for countless marine organisms, including shrimp, oysters, crabs, striped bass, and other commercial and sport species that are particularly important to the coastal economy. Without the protection afforded by the barrier islands, the tidal creeks and salt marshes would be no place for the delicate juvenile stages of so many species.

Such an abundance of life in the salt marsh invites other animals to rest, feed, or nest. Located on the Atlantic Flyway, the islands are important to migrating waterfowl, especially those displaced from the rapidly disappearing marshes further up the Atlantic coast. The islands themselves provide ideal habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals, including endangered species like the American alligator, peregrine falcon, loggerhead sea turtle, and southern bald eagle.

Anyone who has spent time at the beach is at once aware of two major forces which affect barrier islands--wind and tides. The energy released by these natural elements is awesome indeed, and has battered our coastline unceasingly for thousands of years. To counter this force, nature has come up with a remarkable defense system--sand. Sand offers enough resistance to absorb and dissipate the tremendous energy of coastal storms and yet responds predictably to gentler wind and waves. Thus, man and his structures on the mainland are protected from the full violence of storms by the barrier islands.



NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

National Wildlife Refuges play an important role in the conservation story of the United States. Together they comprise the National Wildlife Refuge System. These areas represent a diverse collection of lands and waters selected for their value to America's wildlife populations; particularly migratory birds and rare animals.

As administrator of the system, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior manages over 400 refuges totaling 34 million acres. Visitors are welcome when their activities do not interfere with primary wildlife management programs. Wildlife trails, observation facilities and interpretive centers are provided at many refuges.

SAVANNAH COASTAL REFUGES

There are seven National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) administered from headquarters in downtown Savannah, Georgia (Federal Building). The chain of coastal refuges comprising the Complex extends from Pinckney Island NWR near Hilton Head, South Carolina to Wolf Island NWR near Darien, Georgia. Between these lie Savannah (the largest unit in the Complex), Wassaw Island, Tybee Island, Harris Neck, and Blackbeard Island refuges. Together they span a 100-mile stretch of coastline and total over 53,340 acres.

SAVANNAH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Savannah NWR, established April 6, 1927, consists of 25,608 acres of freshwater marshes, tidal rivers and creeks, and river bottom hardwood swamp. The 3,000 acres of freshwater impoundments managed for migratory waterfowl were formerly the rice fields of plantations dating back to the mid or late 1700's. Many of the dikes enclosing these pools were originally built with slave labor. All dikes are open to foot travel during daylight hours unless otherwise posted and provide excellent wildlife observation points. About half the refuge is river bottom hardwood swamp composed primarily of cypress, gum and maple species. Access to this area is by boat only.

Waterfowl are most abundant from November through February while alligators and other reptiles are common from March through October. Birdwatching opportunities are good all year but are best from October through April when temperatures are mild and many species of waterfowl and other wintering birds are present. Motorists are welcome on Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive, off U.S. 17, which meanders along four miles of earthen dikes between managed freshwater pools and through old hardwood hammocks. Cistern Trail and other walking routes are also available to the visiting public. Fishing is permitted in the freshwater pools from March 15 to October 25 and is governed by South Carolina and refuge regulations. The refuge administers deer, feral hog, squirrel, and waterfowl hunts during the fall and winter. Permits to hunt on the refuge must be obtained from the Coastal office in Savannah. Requests for permits must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Savannah NWR is located on U.S. 17 eight miles south of Hardeeville, South Carolina, Exit 5 off I-95 (or four miles north of Port Wentworth, GA on U.S. 17 - take I-95 Exit 19 to U.S. 17 North).

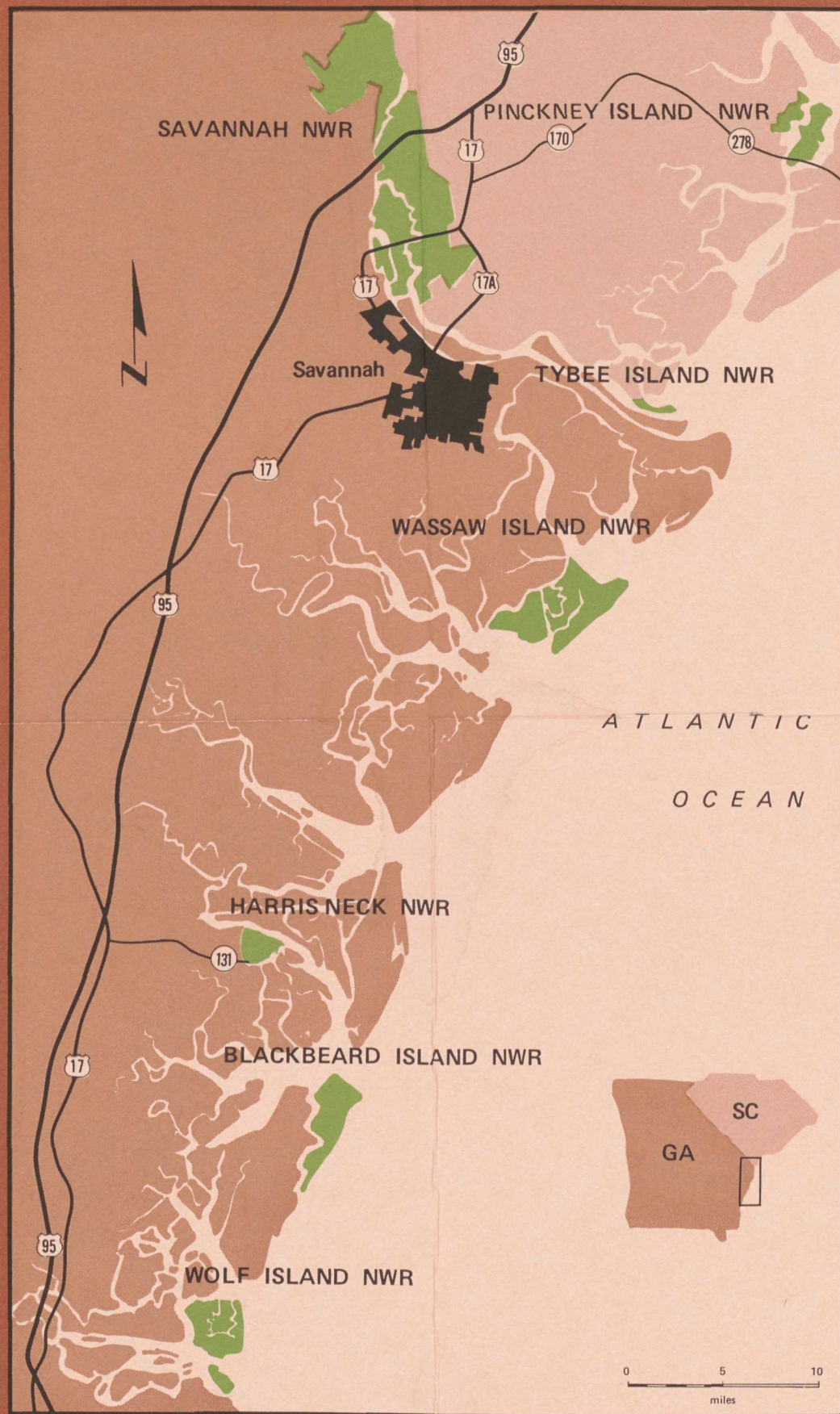
BLACKBEARD ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Blackbeard Island was acquired by the Navy Department at public auction in 1800 as a source of live oak timber for ship building. A Presidential Proclamation in 1940 changed its designation from Blackbeard Island Reservation to Blackbeard Island National Wildlife Refuge. Today, the island's 5,618 acres are characterized by a series of long, low parallel ridges forested mainly with live oaks and slash pines. In 1975, three thousand acres of the refuge were set aside as National Wilderness.

Blackbeard Island offers a variety of recreational activities year-round. Wildlife observation, especially birdwatching, is excellent throughout the year. In winter months waterfowl utilize the freshwater pools and marshland while songbirds abound in the wooded areas in the spring and fall. The existing trails and roads provide hikers with scenic paths ideal for nature study. From March 15 to October 25, fishing is allowed on two large freshwater ponds. Saltwater creeks which pass through refuge marshland are open to fishing the entire year. Presently, two archery hunts for deer are scheduled on the island in the fall and winter (for exact dates and permits contact the Coastal Refuges' headquarters - submit a stamped, self-addressed envelope for permit applications).

Blackbeard Island is accessible only by boat. Transportation to the island is not provided by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Arrangements for trips to the refuge can be made at Shellman's Bluff. To reach Shellman's Bluff, travel south from Savannah on U.S. 17 for approximately 51 miles to Shellman's Bluff Road which terminates at Shellman's Bluff on the Julienton River.

A public boat ramp on Harris Neck NWR (Barbour River Landing) may also be used as a launching site for trips to the island.



SAVANNAH COASTAL REFUGES

WOLF ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Wolf Island NWR, which includes Egg Island and Little Egg Island, was established on April 3, 1930. The Refuge consists of a long narrow strip of ocean front beach backed by a broad band of salt marsh. Over 75% of the refuge's 5,126 acres are composed of salt water marshes.

Wolf Island NWR was designated a National Wilderness in 1975, therefore no public use facilities are planned on the refuge. Recreational opportunities are generally restricted to the beach due to the island's densely vegetated interior. Beachcombing and birdwatching are always popular activities at low tide. Fishing in the salt waters bordering the refuge is a major attraction. Visitors are permitted on the island from sunrise to sunset.

The refuge is accessible by boat only. Visitors must make their own arrangements to reach the island. Marinas in the Darien, Georgia area may offer transportation to Wolf Island.

REGULATIONS

Questions regarding specific regulations for individual refuges should be directed to the Coastal office. Here, in brief, are some general regulations:

- Defacement, damage, or removal of any Government structure, sign, or marker is prohibited.
- Feeding, capturing or hunting wildlife is strictly prohibited unless otherwise authorized.

TYBEE ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Tybee Island NWR was established on May 5, 1933 as a breeding area for migratory birds and other wildlife. The majority of the 100-acre refuge is covered with sand deposited from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging activities in the Savannah River. The more stable portions of the island are densely covered with such woody species as eastern red cedar, wax myrtle, and groundsel. Salt water marsh borders parts of the island. At low tide the shoreline provides a resting and feeding place for many species of migratory birds including the endangered brown pelican.

The refuge is located in the mouth of the Savannah River directly opposite Fort Pulaski National Monument which is 12 miles from Savannah on U. S. 80. Heavy traffic in the river combined with treacherous currents make navigation to the refuge hazardous. The Fish and Wildlife Service does not provide transportation to the island.

- All of the refuge's historical, archeological, and natural resources are protected. Antique and artifact hunting is not allowed. Do not pick flowers or cut vegetation.
- Shell collectors are asked to take no live shells and to limit their collection to a handful or so.
- Please help keep the refuges clean by taking food and drink containers and other litter with you.

PINCKNEY ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Pinckney Island NWR, established December 4, 1975, was once included in the plantation of Major General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a prominent lawyer active in South Carolina politics from 1801 to 1815. Few traces of the island's plantation life in the 1800's exist today.

The 4,053-acre refuge includes Pinckney Island, Corn Island, Big and Little Harry Islands, Buzzard Island and numerous small hammocks. Pinckney is the largest of the islands and the only one open to public use. Nearly 67% of the refuge consists of salt marsh and tidal creeks. A wide variety of land types are found on Pinckney Island alone; salt marsh, forestland, brushland, fallow fields and freshwater ponds. In combination, these habitats support a diversity of bird and plant life. Studying, viewing and photographing the island's wildlife and scenery are popular activities throughout the year. Over fourteen miles of trails are open to hiking and bicycling. No automobiles are allowed north of the public parking lot.

When necessary for management purposes, a deer hunt is held on Pinckney Island (for hunt dates and permits contact the Coastal Refuges' office - submit a stamped, self-addressed envelope for permit applications).

The refuge entrance is located on U.S. 278, 18 miles east of Hardeeville, South Carolina, or .5 miles west of Hilton Head Island.

WASSAW ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Wassaw Island, one of Georgia's coastal barrier islands, was designated a National Wildlife Refuge on October 30, 1968. Unlike many of Georgia's Golden Isles, little development and few management practices have modified Wassaw's primitive character. The 10,070-acre refuge includes beaches with rolling dunes, live oak and slash pine woodlands and vast salt marshes.

Refuge visitors may enjoy recreational activities such as birdwatching, beachcombing, hiking and general nature studies. The 20 miles of dirt roads on Wassaw Island and seven miles of beach provide an ideal wildlife trail system for hikers. Birdwatching is particularly fruitful during the spring and fall migrations. The island supports rookeries for egrets and herons, and a variety of wading birds are abundant in the summer months. Several endangered species can often be seen including the southern bald eagle and brown pelican.

In summer, telltale tracks on Wassaw's beach attest to nocturnal visits by the threatened loggerhead sea turtles which come ashore for egg laying and then return secretly to the sea. The Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with the Savannah Science Museum, monitors the nesting activities of the giant loggerheads. Under the supervision of qualified museum personnel, the public is permitted to assist in this ongoing research project. Selected participants must pay a fee covering transportation and lodging expenses.

Deer hunts (both bow and gun) are scheduled in the fall and winter. The Coastal Refuges' office can provide a schedule of hunt dates and issue applications for permits to hunt on the island (requests for permit applications must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope). The salt waters of the refuge marshland are open to fishing throughout the year.

Wassaw is accessible only by boat. Transportation to the island must be arranged by the visitor. Several local marinas in the Savannah area (at Coffee Bluff and Isle of Hope), and a public boat ramp on Skidaway Island can serve as launching sites for trips to Wassaw.

HARRIS NECK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Harris Neck NWR was established in 1962 by transfer of federal lands formerly managed by the Federal Aviation Agency as a WWII Army airfield. The refuge's 2,765 acres consist of salt water marsh, grassland, mixed deciduous woods and cropland. Because of this great variety in habitat, many different species of birds are attracted to the refuge throughout the year. In the summer, hundreds of egrets and herons nest in the swamps while in the winter large concentrations of ducks (especially mallards, gadwall and teal), gather in the marshland and freshwater pools. Over 15 miles of paved roads and trails provide the visitor easy access to these areas. White-tailed deer and a resident flock of Canada geese can be easily viewed year-round.

Fishing is allowed in the tidal creeks bordering the refuge. Piers have been constructed for public use on Harris Neck Creek at the Ga. Route 131 entrance. Access to refuge tidal waters and Blackbeard Island can be gained from a public boat ramp located on the Barbour River (at the termination of Ga. Route 131). The Barbour River Landing is open daily from 4:00 AM to midnight.

Deer hunts are managed on the refuge in the fall and winter. Hunters may obtain applications for permits from the Coastal Office - a stamped, self-addressed envelope should be included with written requests for applications.

To reach Harris Neck, take Exit 12 off I-95 and travel south on U.S. 17 for approximately one mile, then east on Ga. Route 131 for seven miles to the main entrance gate.