

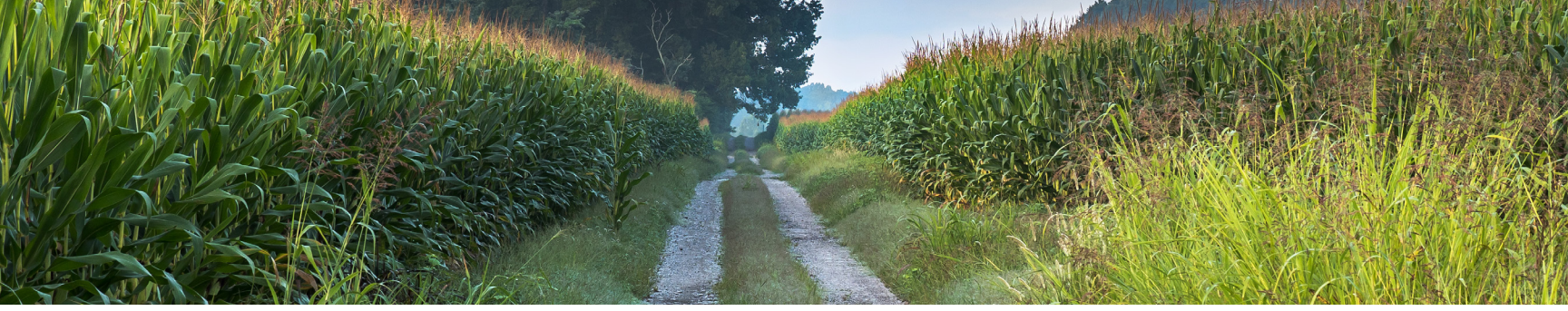
BIKING & HIKING GUIDE

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge



Promoting the conservation of national resources
on Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.





Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is a 35,000 acre refuge on the Tennessee River. The refuge is famous for the huge numbers of ducks, geese and cranes that congregate in the numerous wetlands and backwater areas during the winter. More than 60,000 ducks and geese and 20,000 sandhill cranes have wintered at Wheeler NWR. Whooping cranes, river otters, beaver, coyotes, white-tailed deer, bald eagles, hawks, owls and alligators may be spotted on the refuge. The refuge's swamps, hardwood and pine forests, wetlands, fields, creeks and sloughs are an outdoor lover's dream.

Hiking and biking have become increasingly popular on the refuge—with good reason. Both activities are easy and fun with relatively flat-going on gravel dual-track roads. There are no steep slopes and the lack of elevation changes, the quality of the roads and the natural beauty of the refuge offer relaxed pedaling and hiking. Yet the ability to link together multiple routes will appeal to advanced hikers and bikers who want to attempt more challenging multi-mile treks. Wheeler has five nature trails but no dedicated hiking trails on the refuge, however, three routes described in this brochure (White Springs Dike, Eagles Nest Island and Dinsmore Slough) are closed to traffic year-round and are great hiking options.

Some roads are closed seasonally or year-round to motorized traffic (See Appendix for closures). There are no single-track trails on the refuge, and biking off established roads is illegal. None of the refuge roads described in this guide are paved. Fat tire multi-speed off-road bikes rule here. One-speed "beach cruisers" and road bikes with narrow, high pressure tires are not suitable on the refuge. You will be using maintained roads so jumping logs, fording creeks and dodging boulders are not on the agenda.

You may encounter other outdoor enthusiasts during your ride. Anglers, runners, hunters, kayakers and birdwatchers frequent the refuge. Respect their activities as they would yours. Year-round hiking and biking are possible as winter temperatures are usually above freezing. Summer can be dangerously hot with triple digit temperatures and high humidity. For this reason, each route description includes whether it is open or shaded. For wildlife viewing, winter is the best time to visit.

Refuge Rules:

- Stay on established roads. Off-road biking is illegal on the refuge.
- Do not litter. Pack it in and pack it out.
- Some areas and roads are closed to the public during certain times of the year. Respect these closed areas and do not enter. Check with the Wheeler NWR Visitor Center 256-350-6639 if in doubt. You may be ticketed if caught in a closed area. See Appendix for road closings.
- The area around the Observation Building is closed to the public year round.
- Bikers should obey all traffic rules and signs.
- No overnight camping is allowed. Refuge lands are open to visitors from dawn to dusk.
- Wildlife always has the right of way. Give them plenty of space.
- Do not block gates when parking. You may be towed.

To make your experience more enjoyable consider the following:

- Use sunscreen.
- Morning and late afternoon/evening are the best times to view wildlife.
- Wear a helmet when biking!
- Don't forget insect repellent.
- Pack water, especially in summer.
- Watch for venomous snakes and alligators.
- Silence! A quiet approach will ensure a better wildlife viewing experience.
- Some roads may be open to motorized traffic. Use caution and watch for vehicles.
- Areas of the refuge are open for deer and small game hunting. Be aware of hunters and respect their space.
- Consider wearing hunter orange in season.

About This Guide

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge has over 100 miles of roads. This guide lists the most scenic and enjoyable routes. For ease of use, the guide contains two sections: North of the Tennessee River and South of the Tennessee River.

For each route the following is provided:

- A short description.
- Directions to access points.
- Mileage to points of interest and road intersections.
- Terrain guide (steep, flat, hilly, etc.).
- Description as either loop, one-way or out-and-back.
- Either shaded or open.
- Some routes allow for linking multiple roads for longer trips. Where this is possible the guide describes options.
- A few routes will include brief stretches on public roads that are outside refuge boundaries. These are noted in the description.

Loop: Route will return to access point.

One-way: Access and departure points are different.

Out-and-back: Route will retrace to return to access point. Distance listed is total out-and-back length.

Thank you for visiting!

Maps and more information are available at the refuge:
Visitor Center, 3121 Visitor Center Road, Decatur AL 35603
or call 256-350-6639.

This is your public land. Treat it like the valuable asset it is!
Practice **Leave No Trace!**



North of the Tennessee River



Blackwell Swamp Loop

Distance: 7.5 miles loop

Terrain: Slight uphill grades.

Type: Loop

Cover: Shaded

This is a tree-shaded loop around a large swamp full of huge cypress trees and beaver lodges. The loop is heavily vegetated and views are limited for much of the way. Great blue herons, red-tailed hawks, deer, beaver and turtles are common here and this is one of the best places on the refuge to spot alligators. During summer and fall butterflies tend to congregate here in large numbers. Blackwell Swamp is picturesque, ringed by wildflowers and full of lotus and lily-pads floating on tea-colored water. The north end of the refuge is full of dead trees that attract large numbers of woodpeckers.

Directions to Starting Point: Take County Line Road (Exit 7) from Interstate 565. Drive south for 5.5 miles. Look for Jolly B Road on the left and follow it for 0.5 miles and you will see a refuge welcome sign as you enter refuge lands. Continue for 0.5 miles past the refuge sign to the gravel parking on the right.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 From the parking area go south.
- 0.2 Gate and canoe launch ramp. A good place to look for birds and alligators.
- 0.7 Road on right.
- 0.9 Road splits. Bear left. Tennessee River visible on right for next 1.5 miles.
- 2.7 Pass a pump house on the right at the top of a small rise.
- 3.1 Water treatment plant on right.
- 5.2 Block structure on right. Blackwell Swamp is visible on the left and a short trail leads to swamp edge with good views. This is the north edge of the swamp and the dead trees here are favorite perches for flycatchers, woodpeckers and raptors.
- 6.9 Rejoin Jolly B Road. Turn left.
- 7.0 Refuge sign.
- 7.5 Arrive back at parking area.

HGH Road/JTT Road

Distance: 6.4 miles one-way.

Note: There are multiple options to extend this outing:

1. Combine with Rockhouse Bottoms road for a 11.7 mile one-way.

2. Combine with Penny Bottoms/Skinner Springs.

Terrain: Slight uphill/downhill grades.

Type: One-way

Cover: Shaded

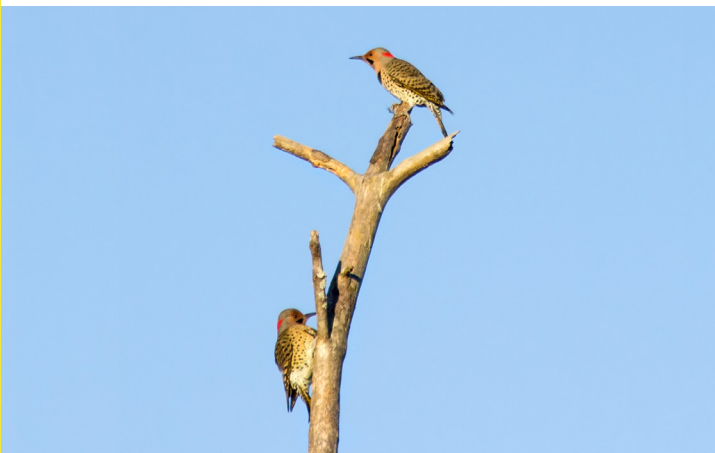
A relatively easy route through hardwood forests with a pretty rest stop at Buckeye Impoundment conveniently located at about 4.2 miles. Some slight uphill and downhill grades, nothing strenuous.

Directions to Starting Point: Start at the same parking area as Blackwell Swamp loop.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 Go west (instead of south for the Blackwell Swamp Loop) past the refuge gate.
- 0.7 Road on left. Stay straight.
- 1.5 Road splits at refuge gate. Bear right (an option is to bear left through gate. Left road will transect across Buckeye Impoundment for 2.5 miles. Road is subject to flooding during high water periods. Rejoins HGH/JTT Road at 4.4 miles).
- 3.0 Bear left after second gate. You will begin a gentle downhill grade for next mile or so.
- 3.9 The road comes to a T. Turn left.
- 4.2 Road comes to a T. Turn right. Option is to turn left for short way to dead end at Buckeye Impoundment. Nice scenic place to stop for a rest.
- 4.3 Road turns left at intersection with New Hope Road.
- 4.4 Gate on left. This is where the optional Buckeye Impoundment transect rejoins.
- 5.1 Spur road on left for 200 yards to water. Continue straight.
- 6.1 Gate on left. Bear right.
- 6.4 Road comes to a T at Rockhouse Road (paved).



Rockhouse Road

Distance: 5.3 miles

Terrain: Flat

Type: One-way

Cover: Partially shaded

This route hugs the north bank of the Tennessee River and is a good place to spot great blue herons, common loons, and various duck species on the Tennessee River on your left and sparrows and killdeer in the fields on your right. Rockhouse Road is heavily used by anglers and vehicles are usually present.

Directions to Starting Point: Start at the same parking area as Blackwell Swamp loop.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 Go south.
- 0.2 Gate and canoe launch ramp. A good place to look for birds and alligators.
- 0.9 Road splits. Bear right.
- 2.6 Water control structure.
- 4.5 Gate and pumphouse on right. Short spur road on right leads to open water. Continue straight on main road.
- 5.3 Rockhouse Road (paved). HGH/JTT Road on right.

Arrowhead Landing

Distance: 4.8 miles

Terrain: Flat

Type: Out-and-back

Cover: Shaded

Arrowhead Landing Road parallels the western shore of Limestone Bay, a large, shallow bay that connects to the Tennessee River. The bay is often full of thousands of snow geese and American white pelicans in the winter. This road is used by fishermen and local running clubs and Limestone Bay is popular with kayakers.

Directions to Starting Point: Take Mooresville Exit 2 south from Interstate 565 South to the stop sign. Turn right on old Highway 20 west for 0.6 miles and turn left onto the gravel road at the boat ramp sign. Park in the small parking area on your left. This is off the refuge and you will be on a public gravel road for the first mile or so.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 Head South.
- 1.6 Road splits. Keep left.
- 2.0 Arrowhead Landing boat ramp on left.
- 2.4 Refuge gate. This is the start of White Springs Dike road.

Skinner Springs Road/ Penney Bottoms Road

Distance: 8.0 Miles (both sections)

Terrain: Mostly flat

Type: Out-and-back

Cover: Shaded

Due to limited parking, this route starts in the middle of the two sections. You can either do the Penny Bottoms or Skinner Springs sections or both.

Penny Bottoms: Hardwood forests and leafy wetlands line both sides of the road for the first mile. The road then crosses open agricultural fields before once again transitioning into hardwood forests. The dike at the water control structure offers unobstructed views of Limestone Bay. The optional spur that begins at 0.3 miles is a nice addition to the route and is a good place to spot wildlife, although it can be rough and muddy depending on weather.

Skinner Springs: Mixed forest/agricultural fields.

Directions to Starting Point: Take Greenbriar Road (Exit 3) from Interstate 565. Drive south for 2.5 miles and turn right on Rockhouse Road. After 1.6 miles turn right on Henderson Road. Henderson Road will turn to gravel at 1.1 miles. Continue another 0.3 miles to a refuge gate. Park at side of gate.

Road Mileage (Penny Bottoms):

Mile

- 0.0 Start at refuge gate. Head west.
- 0.3 Continue straight. Road to the right leads to a small seasonal wetland area that hosts large numbers of waterfowl in the winter. This road continues another 0.7 miles to a split. Left goes 300 yards to open field, right goes 500 yards to gate and open field. (Field past gate is private property, do not enter).
- 0.9 A ninety degree left turn at tree line. A large hidden bay on your left is a good spot to find ducks and geese. The road takes another ninety degree right turn after another 300 feet. Take the road to the left to a shady respite by the water. Go right to continue main route.
- 1.4 Gate. Water structure and dike road beyond spans Limestone Bay on left, shallow wetlands on right. Good vantage point to look for birds.
- 1.9 Road ends at a turnaround at beginning of an agricultural field.

Road Mileage (Skinner Springs):

Mile

- 0.0 Start at refuge gate. Head East.
- 0.3 Turn right to Skinner Bottoms Road. Refuge gate at start of road.
- 2.1 Ends at Rockhouse Road (paved).

White Springs Dike

Distance: 7.0 miles

Terrain: Flat

Type: One-way

Cover: Eastern portion (East of Interstate 65) shaded, western portion (West of Interstate 65) open

A picturesque route along the banks of the Tennessee River with unobstructed views of the main river channel for almost the entire distance. The dike hugs the north bank of the river for most of the way and you will enjoy the sparkling waters of the river on one side of the road and expansive wetlands or wooded swamps on the other side. White Springs is a favorite gathering place for thousands of ducks in the winter and red-tailed hawks, northern harriers, osprey and bald eagles are often spotted here. The road is closed to motorized vehicles year round.

Directions to Starting Point: Access is from Highway 20 north of Decatur. Drive north from Decatur on Highway 31, crossing the bridge over the Tennessee River. One mile north of the bridge the road splits, Highway 31 goes north, Highway 20 goes east. Take the eastern split. Immediately after the split there is a gate on the right. The ride starts at the gate. There is very limited parking. Alternate starting point is at Arrowhead Landing.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 Follow the gravel road atop the dike.
- 1.4 Eagles Nest Island Road goes left. Continue straight on the main dike road.
- 4.6 You will pass under the Interstate 65 bridges. A road to the left continues north between the bridges. This road joins Eagles Nest Island Road. Continue straight.
- 7.0 White Springs Dike road ends at the locked gate just south of Arrowhead Landing and can be combined with that route for another 2.4 miles.

Eagles Nest Island Road

Distance: 5.0 miles

Terrain: Flat

Type: One-way

Cover: Shaded

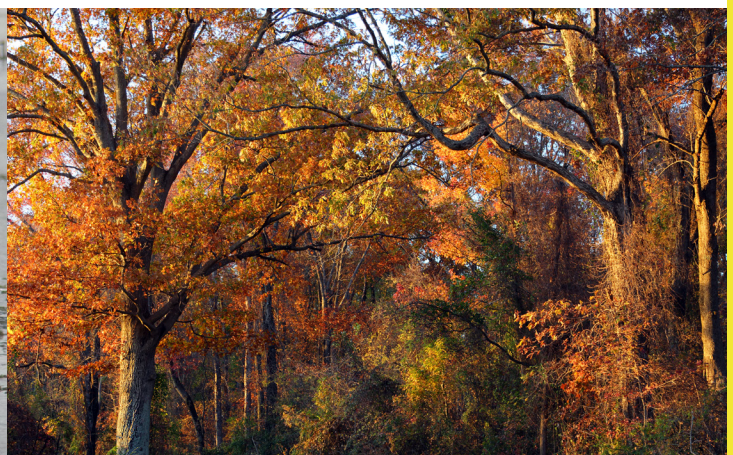
A picturesque route through a canopy of towering hardwood trees. One of the best roads on the refuge for scenic photography. The fall foliage is spectacular. The canopy of trees keeps this road cooler in the summer. The road is closed to motorized vehicles year round.

Directions to Starting Point: Same as access to White Springs Dike.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 Follow the gravel road atop the dike.
- 1.4 You will see a road angle off to the left and a sign for Eagles Nest Island Road. Follow this road. The first 300 yards has water on both sides, a good place to spot ducks and geese.
- 4.3 I-65 bridges. Go straight. Road to right joins White Springs Dike.
- 4.9 Turn left at T.
- 5.0 Gate to Arrowhead Landing. White Springs Dike road ends at the locked gate just south of Arrowhead Landing and can be combined with that route for another 2.4 miles.



Beaverdam Peninsula Loop

Distance: 2.5 miles

Terrain: Flat

Type: Loop

Cover: Shaded

This is an easy loop that skirts the eastern edge of Limestone Bay and is a good place to spot sandhill cranes, American white pelicans and snow geese in season.

Directions to Starting Point: Take the Mooresville Exit 2 south from Interstate 565. At the stop sign turn left, follow old Highway 20 east for 0.6 miles to Pryor Road and turn right. Follow Pryor Road. The road will veer 90 degrees left then 90 degrees right. There is a third 90 degree left turn. At the third turn take the gravel road straight ahead where you will see Beaverdam Platform at the edge of the field and a trailer and gate on your immediate right. Park in the lot at the base of the platform. The road begins at the gate you passed on the way in.

Road Mileage:

Mile

0.0 Keep on the main road.

0.2 Road to the left is the loop road reentering at this point.

2.3 Rejoin loop road, go right to return to starting point.

Mooresville Road

Distance: 2.8 miles

Terrain: Slight hills

Type: Out-and-back

Cover: Shaded

A beautiful shady route near Limestone Bay. The mudflats at the end are a good place to spot alligators. Be sure to take the time to walk or ride through the streets of picturesque Mooresville and take in the many historical buildings.

Directions to Starting Point: Take the Mooresville exit (Exit 2) south from Interstate 565. Go into the town of Mooresville and park at the public parking lot immediately across the road from the stop sign.

Road Mileage:

Mile

0.0 Go South on Broad Street (just east of parking lot).

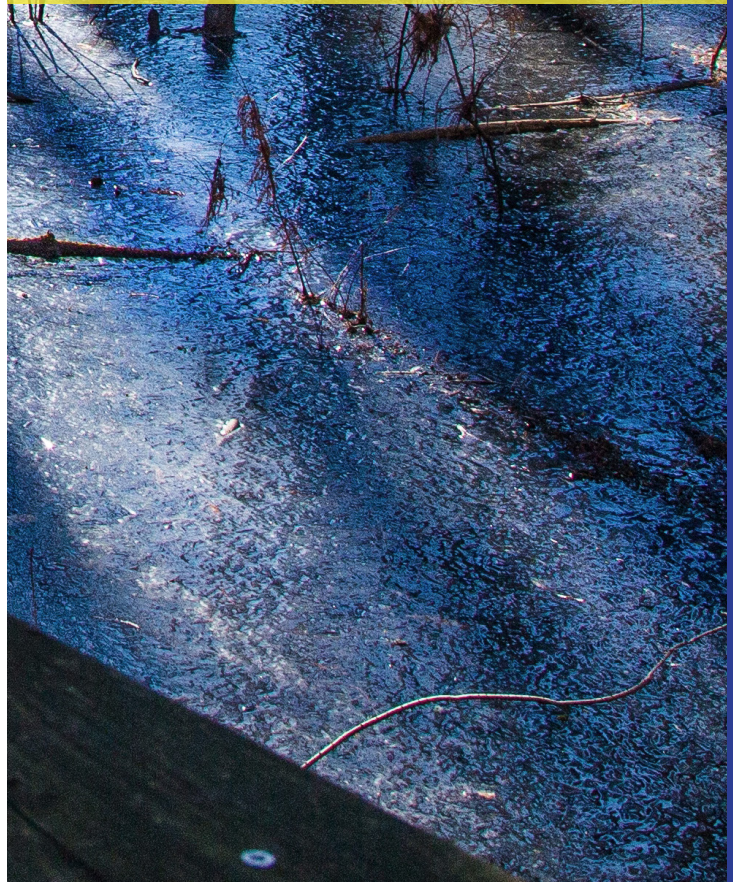
0.2 Refuge gate.

1.1 Road splits. Keep right.

1.4 Road ends at Limestone Bay.



South of the Tennessee River



Dinsmore Slough

Distance: 7.5 miles

Terrain: Flat

Type: Out-and-back

Cover: Open to Dinsmore Slough, partially shaded rest of way

This is a short road that leads to Dinsmore Slough, a secluded spot that is often full of ducks and geese. Past Dinsmore Slough the road skirts Flint Creek on the left and eventually ends at a low bridge between Flint Creek and a bay that is often full of waterfowl. The fields along Airport Road are used heavily by migrating cranes November through February. This area should not be accessed if cranes are present on or near roadway. All areas to the right (west) of Airport Road are closed to the public, year round.

Directions to Starting Point: Start at Airport Road on Highway 67 east of the Visitor Center entrance. Parking is extremely limited. Park in the Visitor Center parking lot and take the entrance road back to Highway 67. Proceed south (right) a short distance to refuge gate. This is a high traffic road, hikers should walk well away from traffic lanes and bikers should walk bikes off road.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 Go south (This is called Airport Road).
- 0.5 Short road to the left leads to Gray Field and Flint Creek. Continue straight toward Dinsmore Slough.
- 1.0 The road splits. There is a stop sign and Area Closed sign at the split. Bear left, DO NOT go right. This area is off limits year round due to bird activity.
- 1.4 Water control structure at the foot of Dinsmore Slough on your right.
- 1.5 Road splits. Go left.
- 3.0 The road ends at a bend of Flint Creek and another slough on the left.



Truck Trail

Distance: 12.8 miles

Terrain: Slight hills, curvy

Type: One-way

Cover: Shaded

If you opt to do the entire trail, this is the longest route on the refuge. If you do not want to commit to the entirety there are multiple access points that allow for doing only selected portions. Truck Trail roughly parallels the south bank of the Tennessee River for its entire length although for most of the way it is some distance away and views of the river are very limited. The road cuts through thick hardwood and pine forests and is a good place to spot deer, coyotes and woodland birds. Because of the length and the hills, this is the most strenuous route on the refuge.

Directions to Starting Point: From the refuge Visitor Center take Highway 67 south for 1.0 miles and turn left at Upper River Road at the caution light. Go 0.5 mile to Old River Road and turn left. Go 2.0 miles to refuge gate. Park on the left by river.

Road Mileage:

Mile

- 0.0 Go past refuge gate.
- 0.5 Interstate 65 bridges.
- 2.2 Bethel Road. Alternate access, limited parking.*
- 2.8 Road splits. Bear right.*
- 4.0 Old Branch Road. Alternate access, limited parking.*
- 6.7 Mussel Camp Road. Alternate access, limited parking. Spur road on left leads to Tennessee River at 1.0 mile.
- 11.2 Cain Road on right. Alternate access, limited parking.
- 12.8 Bluff City Road. Alternate access, parking near river.

**Truck Trail is closed to all entry (including hiking and biking) from the I-65 bridge to Mussel Camp Road November 15 - January 15 as part of the Garth Slough seasonal closure.*



Appendix

Road Closure Calendar

Road	Dates Open to Motorized Vehicles
Arrowhead Landing	Open all year
Beaverdam Peninsula	02/10 - 10/14
Blackwell Swamp	Open all year
Truck Trail	
Duncan Hill to Mussel Camp	02/10 - 10/14*
Mussel Camp to Bluff City	02/10 - 10/14
HGH	02/10 - 10/14
JTT	Open all year
Mooresville Road	02/10 - 05/31 10/01 - 10/14
Penny Bottoms	02/10 - 05/31 10/01 - 10/14
Rockhouse	02/10 - 10/14
Skinner Springs	02/10 - 10/14
Dinsmore Slough	Closed all year
White Springs Dike	Closed all year
Eagles Nest Island	Closed all year

*Truck Trail is closed to all entry (including hiking and biking) from the I-65 bridge to Mussel Camp Road November 15 - January 15.

