

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bayou Cocodrie

National Wildlife Refuge



Conserving some of the last remaining, least disturbed and largest stands of bottomland hardwoods in the Lower Mississippi River Delta, Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is a home for wood ducks, songbirds, turkey, deer and a myriad of other wildlife. It is part of a network of over 500 refuges throughout the country managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for wildlife and people to enjoy.



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

Introduction

Established in 1992 to preserve, improve and create habitat primarily for waterfowl, Bayou Cocodrie NWR encompasses more than 13,000 acres in east central Louisiana, near the town of Ferriday. Named after the bayou meandering through it, Bayou Cocodrie NWR has a diversity of habitats. Managing these habitats will focus on providing excellent wintering and resting areas for waterfowl in the Lower Mississippi River Valley.

Wildlife

Bayou Cocodrie NWR's habitat diversity results in a wide variety of wildlife living on and using the refuge. Wildlife includes many species typically found in bottomland hardwood forests. White-tailed deer and small mammals such as squirrels and raccoons can be seen throughout the refuge. Turkey are often spotted feeding in agricultural fields adjacent to the refuge.



photo: USFWS

Waterfowl such as mallards, shovelers, pintail, and teal use the refuge as a migratory stop during the winter months. Wood ducks call the refuge woodlands home throughout

the year, nesting in both natural cavity trees and wood duck boxes. One of the reasons that Bayou Cocodrie NWR was established was to manage and provide habitat for wood ducks.

In addition to mammals and waterfowl, Bayou Cocodrie provides a place for woodstorks, herons and egrets to live. These long-legged waders can be seen stalking small fish and large insects along the



water's edge. Ospreys and swallow-tailed kites can occasionally be seen swooping down on prey in open waters and fields. The refuge also plays a role in providing much needed habitat for declining species of migratory songbirds such as Kentucky, Swainson's, hooded and prothonotary warblers.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Three protected species use the refuge from time to time. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons can be observed usually during the winter months perched in high trees. Because of its large contiguous stand of bottomland hardwood forest, Bayou Cocodrie NWR serves as a corridor for the Louisiana black bear between Tensas River NWR and Red River Wildlife Management Area. Bears may be spotted at any time of year.



photo: Charlie Hiedecker



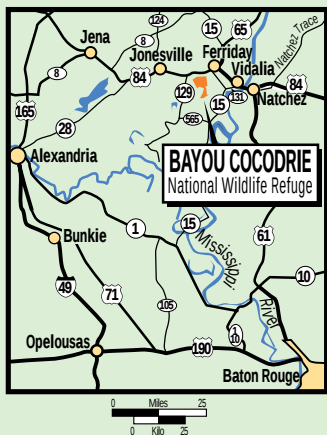
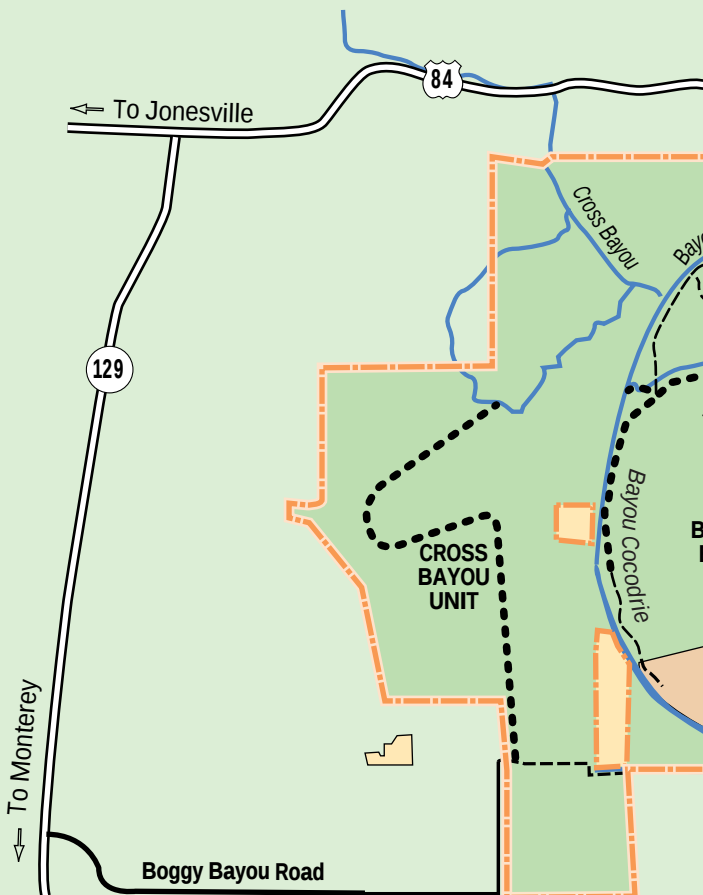
photo: Tim McCabe

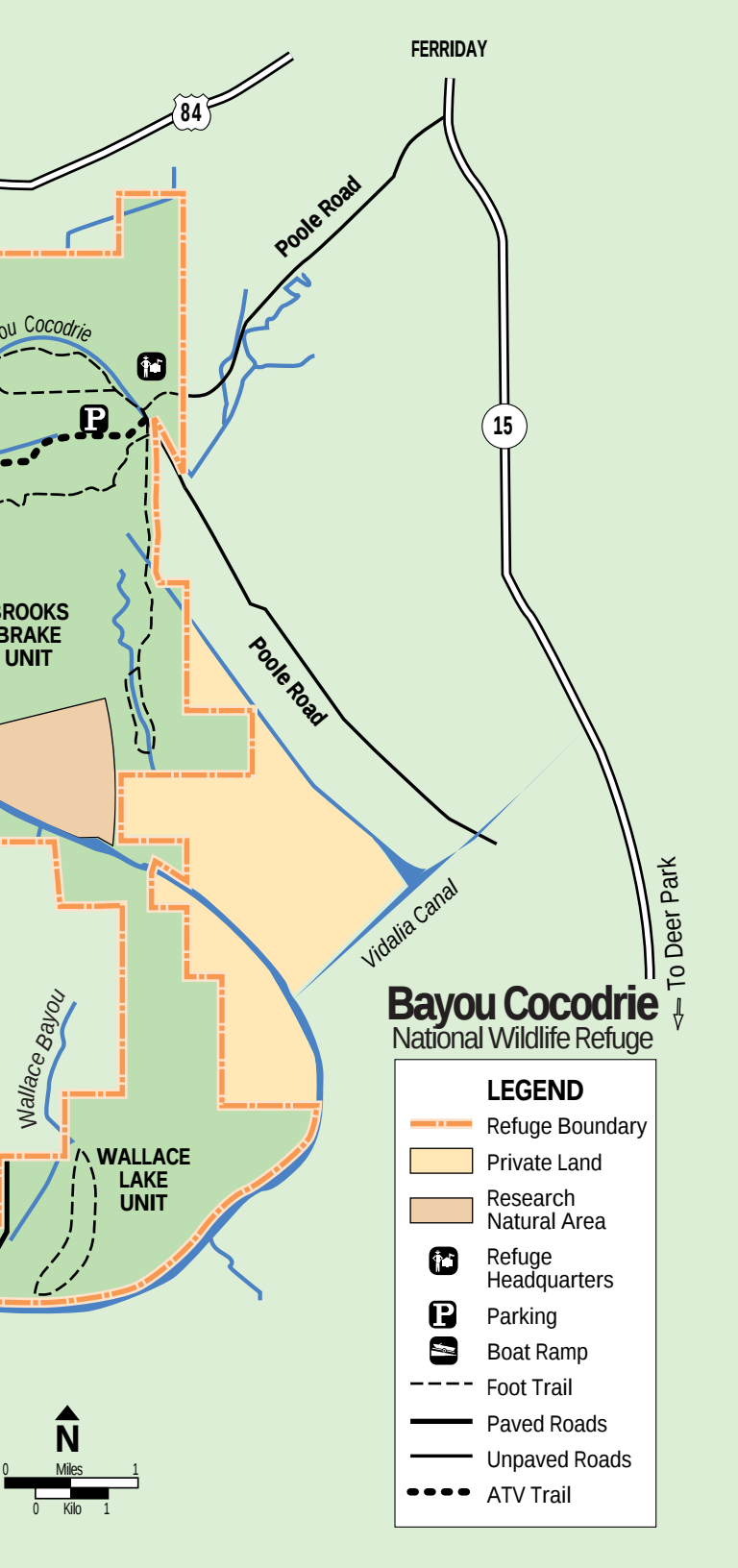


Habitat

Habitat within Bayou Cocodrie NWR offers a variety of ecological niches for wildlife. Cypress swamps and hardwood forests teeming with oak, gum, elm and ash comprise more than three quarters of the refuge. Within the refuge is one of the last remaining stands of relatively undisturbed bottomland hardwood forests. Due to its significance, this approximately 1000 acre site has been designated as a Natural Resource Area. It will be monitored and studied to learn more about managing and restoring this viable habitat.

The rest of the refuge are wetlands providing much needed wintering waterfowl habitat and to fulfill the refuge's role in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Seasonal rains fill depressions and basins throughout the refuge creating a protected wintering ground for waterfowl as well as unique habitat for other forms of wildlife. Natural water bodies and a multitude of beaver ponds create an ideal home during the spring and summer for nesting wood ducks.





Reforestation

As late as the 1960's the Lower Mississippi River Valley consisted primarily of bottomland hardwood forests. Not until the early 1970s , which marked an era when the farm economy was at its peak, were the dense forests cut and cleared to give way to agricultural development and the high values on the soybean and cotton markets. Prime wildlife habitats and a valuable timber resources that supported wildlife such as neotropical songbirds and the Louisiana black bear were lost.



photo: S. Maslowski

Reforestation efforts are occurring all throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley, including Bayou Cocodrie NWR. Current refuge management strategies aim to restore major portions of the

refuge with several hardwood species including oaks and bald cypress that grew before man's intervention. It



photo: Garland Pardue

photo: Joe Doherty



photo: Larry Richardson



will take from 20 to 30 years or more for trees being planted today to restore the bottomland hardwoods to their former resource values as a home for wildlife. There are many benefits to reforestation efforts such as enhancing wildlife diversity as well as preventing loss of valuable soil as a result of wind and erosion.

Waterfowl Habitat Improvement

One of the primary objectives of Bayou Cocodrie NWR is to enhance the potential of the refuge's wetland areas to support migrating and wintering waterfowl. The ridge and swale topography of Bayou Cocodrie NWR produces interior flooding when it rains during the fall and winter months.

Refuge management efforts include installing water control structures and culverts. Several of the low sites retaining water are managed for production of moist soil vegetation such as smartweed, common millet, sprangletop and rushes while other areas of the refuge are farmed.

The farmers on the refuge are required to leave a portion of the crop unharvested or provide a wildlife food such as millet or buckwheat. The combination of natural and agricultural foods provides the nutrition and energy needed by wintering waterfowl and other wildlife using the refuge. Management activities include

lowering the water level in waterfowl impoundments in the spring to providing feeding and resting areas for shorebirds and other migrant species.

Enjoy the Refuge

Refuge Headquarters

The public is welcome to visit the refuge headquarters. The Refuge visitor contact station is located approximately 3.5 miles east of Highway 15 on Poole Road outside of Ferriday. Hours of operation are 7:30 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday.



Wildlife Observation/Photography

There are roads and trails open throughout the refuge, see the map for locations. Also Bayou Cocodrie is open for canoeing. Check with the refuge headquarters regarding water levels, at certain times of the year canoes may need to be portaged.



Environmental Education/Group Tours

Environmental education is a very important program. Programs can be arranged by contacting the refuge headquarters in advance for programs and tours.



Hunting

Hunting is permitted for small game and deer in designated areas during specific times. A permit is required. Contact the refuge headquarters for more information.



Fishing

The refuge is open for fishing although opportunities are limited. There is a boating access at the southern end of the refuge.



Motor Vehicles/ATVs

All motor vehicles are restricted to refuge parking areas or parish roads. ATVs are restricted to designated trails as indicated on the map. Only



ATVs with a maximum tire pressure of 5 psi are permitted. Parking areas and roads are closed periodically due to adverse weather conditions.



Other Refuge Regulations

Firearms and archery tackle prohibited except during designated hunts.

Disturbing, feeding or collecting wildlife or plants is prohibited.



Pets on a leash are permitted.

Searching for or removing any object of antiquity including arrowheads and pottery shards is prohibited.

Cutting firewood or trimming any vegetation is prohibited.



Camping or overnight parking and fires are prohibited.

Consumption or use of alcoholic beverages while hunting or in plain view is prohibited.

Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuge

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