U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wichita Mountains

National Wildlife Refuge

The Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 500 refuges throughout the United States. These National Wildlife Refuges are administrated by the Department of the Interior; Fish and Wildlife Service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service mission is to work with others "to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitat."

Introduction

The Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge – wild, rugged, and weathered – is a symbol of the old west standing at the threshold of modern times. For centuries, this remarkable land was the province of a few nomadic hunters and food gatherers. Today the refuge serves all Americans by conserving part of our nation's wildlife heritage.

The natural attractions of the refuge are many and varied. In addition to viewing and photographing wildlife in their natural setting, visitors find the lakes, streams, canyons, mountains, and grasslands ideal for hiking, fishing, and other outdoor activities.

Refuge Headquarters

Headquarters are located 25 miles northwest of Lawton, Oklahoma, and serve as administrative offices on weekdays. Hours are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. A 24–hour *emergency telephone* is located at the rear of the refuge headquarters office along with an accessible entrance. Visitor assistance and permits are available at the headquarters. Information, assistance, and publications are available at the visitor center 6 miles east of headquarters.

Open Prairie

Visitor Center

The Refuge Visitor Center is located at the junction of State Highways 115 and 49. Dioramas and hands-on exhibits complement fine art, sculptures, and exquisite taxidermy. The four major habitat types, rocklands, aquatic, mixed-grass prairie, and cross timbers, are highlighted. A night exhibit reveals the sounds after dark, while a history rail overlooks mountain scenery from picture windows. The auditorium presents programs throughout the day. There is no fee for visiting the center. Maps, books, pamphlets, and other information on wildlife and wildlands are available in the center's bookstore/gift shop. Hours for the visitor center are from 10:00 am to 5:30 pm; *closed Tuesdays and major holidays.*

Picnicking

Boulder, Lost Lake, Sunset, and Mt. Scott provide visitors with a variety of settings for picnicking. Picnic hours are posted at area entrances. Help keep the refuge beautiful by putting all trash in convenient dumpsters located at each area.

Indian Blanket

Charons Garden Wilderness Area

For group picnics (20 to 60 people), the Boulder Cabin area may be reserved. Arrangements for its use can be made by contacting refuge headquarters. Accessible sites and restrooms are available at Boulder and Sunset picnic areas.

General Camping

Doris Campground, west of the visitor center, is fully developed with water, fire grills, fire grates, picnic tables, sanitary dump station, shower/restroom facility, tent sites, limited electrical hookups, and trailer spaces. Limited group camping is available by reservation. Sites are first come - first served. Fees are charged.

Backcountry Camping

Backcountry camping in the Charons Garden Wilderness Area is by reservation/permit only. To protect the area, it is necessary to limit the number of permits at one time to 10. Length of stay is two nights/three days. Permits are available at refuge headquarters.

Trails and Hiking

The refuge has 15 miles of designated hiking trails that offer the novice and the seasoned hiker a rewarding experience. The trails wind through scrub oak forest, across rocky mountains, and over grassy prairie. Wildlife abounds along these trails.

Maples, Hollis Canyon

The Dog Run Hollow Trail System, a part of the National Recreation Trail System, has trailheads at French Lake, Boulder, Lost Lake, and the Dog Run Hollow parking areas. Using the French Lake trailhead, visitors may choose among a 1-, 2-, or 4-hour hike through some of the more unique areas of the refuge.

The Elk Mountain Trail System is made up of two trails. One leads hikers through the Charons Garden Wilderness Area and ends at Post Oak/Treasure Lake parking area, while the other leads to the summit of Elk Mountain. From atop Elk Mountain, the hiker is provided with a spectacular view of much of the refuge.

Another trail leads from the Quanah Parker Lake dam to the summit of Little Baldy Mountain. A side trail from the Doris Campground joins this trail on the western edge of the lake.

Boating

Hand powered boats are permitted on Jed Johnson, Rush, Quanah Parker, and French Lakes, and sailboats are permitted on Elmer Thomas. Electric trolling motors are permitted on boats 14' and less in length on Jed Johnson, Rush, French, and Quanah Parker Lakes. Any size boat or motor is permitted on Lake Elmer Thomas, but there is a *no–wake rule* across the entire surface of the lake.

Fishing

Fishing, in accordance with state and federal regulations, is permitted in all of the refuge lakes in the public use area (see map). Largemouth bass, sunfish, crappie, and catfish can be found in refuge lakes.

Fish may be taken only with poles and lines or rods and reels. Anglers may use tube type floaters, life jackets, or buoyant vests. Wading is permitted when fishing. Taking bait, frogs, or turtles from refuge waters is prohibited.

Accessible fishing piers are available near the Environmental Education Center and Elmer Thomas Lake.

Hunting

Annual controlled hunts for white-tailed deer and elk are conducted. The application process and random drawings are administrated through the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Applications must be submitted in April. For all regulations, contact the refuge headquarters.

Tours and Special Programs

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge offers many unique programs and tours, some of which venture into the Special Use Area of the refuge. A current schedule of programs is available at headquarters and the visitor center.

Elk

Enjoy the Refuge Safely

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is a natural and wild area. Visitors must be prepared to meet nature on its terms. Due to open range management, motorists must drive defensively and be alert for hazards caused by wandering buffalo, longhorn, deer, and elk. Reduced night speed is enforced because of the difficulty of seeing wildlife on the roads at night.

A Few Simple Rules

To protect wildlife, please observe posted speed limits.

Motorized vehicles are allowed only on developed roads and parking areas. Driving on roads closed by sign or barrier, and stopping on roadways are not allowed. Vehicles found parked in closed areas, or in any area after the hours of authorized activity, will be impounded. Impoundment fees will be borne by the owner of the vehicle.

Picnicking and cooking fires are allowed in designated areas only. Fires must be built in grates and grills and dead fallen timber may be used. Fires must not be left unattended and must be completely extinguished before leaving the area.

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge should be a quiet place to enjoy nature—please leave fireworks, loud radios, and other sound equipment at home.

Alcoholic beverages, including beer, are not allowed on the refuge.

Help us protect wildlife habitat – swimming is not allowed on the refuge.

Keep wild things wild – all plants, animals, and minerals (rocks) are protected and should not be disturbed or collected (except fish and wildlife legally taken during the refuge hunting and fishing seasons).

Elmer Thomas Lake

Aircraft landings or take-offs are not allowed on the refuge. This includes sail planes, hang-gliders, and hot-air balloons.

Please keep all pets on a leash; or better yet, leave pets at home.

Bicycles are allowed on paved roads. Mountain biking is allowed on the dirt road behind Mt. Scott. *Bicycles are not allowed on other trails.*

No person other than campers shall enter or remain in a camping camping area between the hours of 10:00 pm to 6:00 am. Exceeding posted capacities or allowable lengths of stay is prohibited.

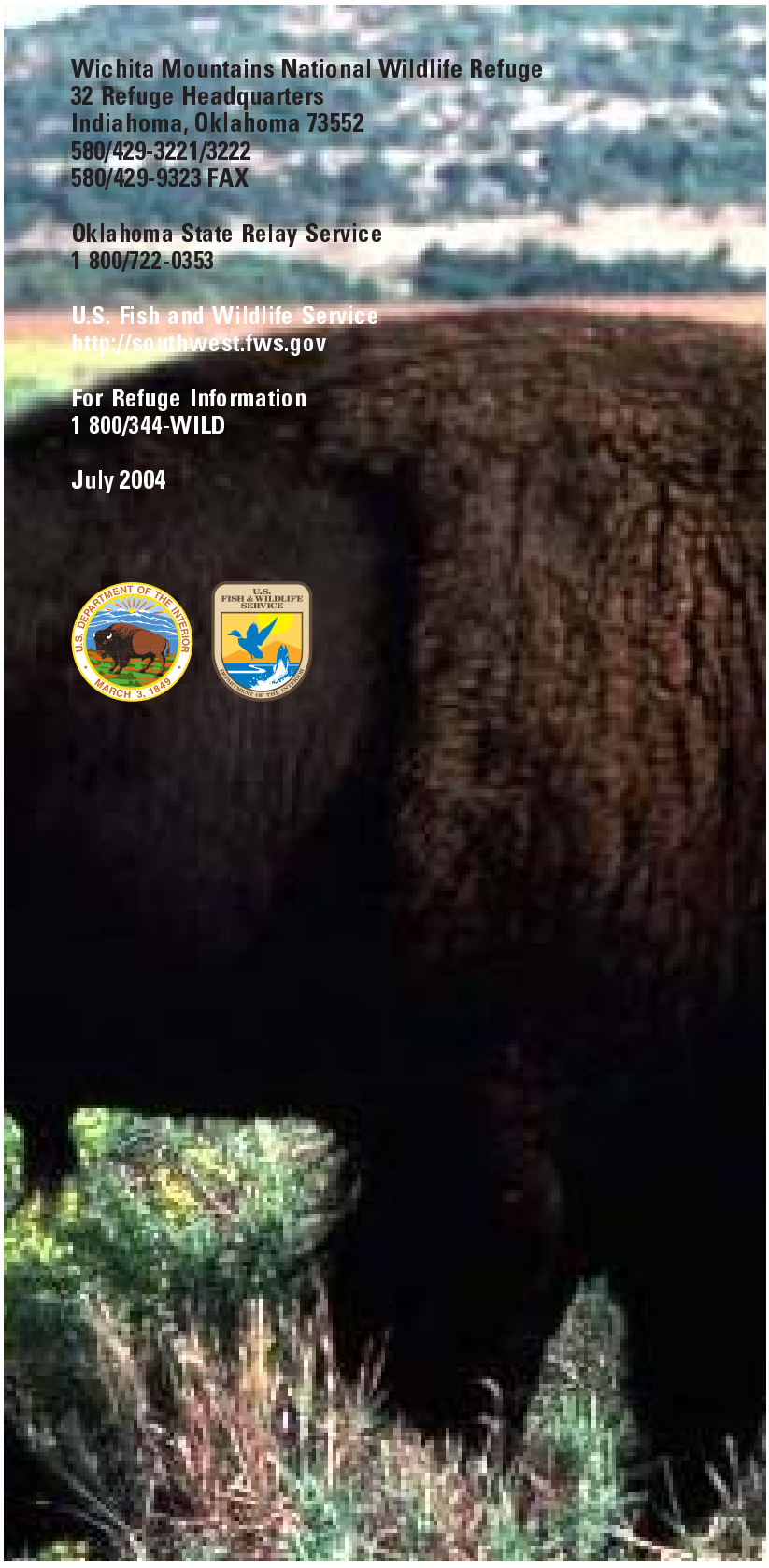
Hiking is limited to daylight hours only.

Nighttime use on the Refuge is restricted.

Firearms and other weapons are prohibited.

Buffalo and longhorn can be dangerous! Keep your distance.

All photographs by Elise Smith



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For Refuge Information
1 800/344-WILD

July 2004