

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Red River

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*



*The Red River originates in the plains of New Mexico, heads east to divide Texas and Oklahoma, turns south through southwestern Arkansas, and then travels southeast through the Louisiana farm belt toward the Mississippi River. In Louisiana, the Red River Valley contains some 800,000 acres of land from the Arkansas border to Alexandria, Louisiana. Historically, the Red River Valley was forested with bottomland hardwoods, cypress sloughs, and shrub swamps.*

## **History**

The Great Raft was a significant feature of the Red River prior to European settlement and even afterwards. The raft, consisting of a series of logjams, spanned 150 miles. The raft originated near Natchitoches in the late 1400s and extended to just south of the Louisiana-Arkansas border. Cottonwoods comprised most of the raft but sweetgum, elm, oak, sycamore, willow, baldcypress and cedar were also recorded. The raft created several inland lakes including: Lake Bistineau, Bodcau,

Caddo, Cross, Soda, Ferry and Clear. By the late 1800s, the raft had been permanently cleared.



*Above: mallard;  
cover: summer  
tanager*

Early explorers to the Red River Valley in Louisiana found a beautiful river with gentle currents and steep banks. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, early settlers began to clear these areas for farms and homesteads. The valley was almost totally cleared of its forest cover beginning in the 1820s, primarily for cotton production. This forest clearing rapidly accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise in soybean prices. As a result, the Red River Valley became a highly altered and degraded watershed. The river itself was subject to extreme seasonal fluctuations and maintained a constant turbid state. Consequently, the wildlife and fishery habitats were relatively poor compared to those in other parts of the state.

## Establishment

On October 13, 2000, House Resolution 4318, the Red River National Wildlife Refuge Act, was signed into law (Public Law 106-300). This legislation authorized the establishment of the Red River NWR to provide for the restoration and conservation of fish and wildlife habitats in the Red River Valley ecosystem in northwest Louisiana. The legislation that established the refuge stated that the refuge shall consist of up to 50,000 acres of federal lands, waters, and interests therein within the boundaries of Colfax, Louisiana, to the Arkansas State line. To guide land acquisition efforts, the Service identified four focus areas. These four units comprise the refuge, with a Headquarters Unit near the Shreveport and Bossier City area. The focus areas include Lower Cane River (Natchitoches Parish); Spanish Lake Lowlands (Natchitoches Parish); Bayou Pierre Floodplain (DeSoto and Red River Parishes); and Wardview (Caddo and Bossier Parishes).

Property was acquired and the refuge was established on August 22, 2002, with the initial purchase of 1,377 acres in the Spanish Lake Lowlands Unit at a cost of one million dollars.

## Wildlife

### *Neotropical Migratory Birds*

More than 200 species of Neotropical migratory birds use Red River

NWR at various times of the year. Refuge habitats utilized include: forested wetlands, scrub/shrub, open fields, sandbars, shallow flooded fields, and mudflats.

### *Wood ducks*



### *Waterfowl*

The refuge provides habitat for thousands of wintering waterfowl and year-round habitat for nesting wood ducks. The Red River is a historic migration corridor for migratory birds that use the Central and Mississippi flyways on their journey to the Gulf Coast and beyond. At least 14 species of migratory waterfowl use the refuge during some part of the year: mallard, gadwall, American wigeon, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, northern pintail, hooded merganser, ring-necked duck, canvasback, and lesser scaup. Other species that use the refuge less frequently include: bufflehead, redhead, common merganser, red-breasted merganser, greater scaup, ruddy duck, common goldeneye, and American black duck. Wood ducks are year-round residents in Louisiana.

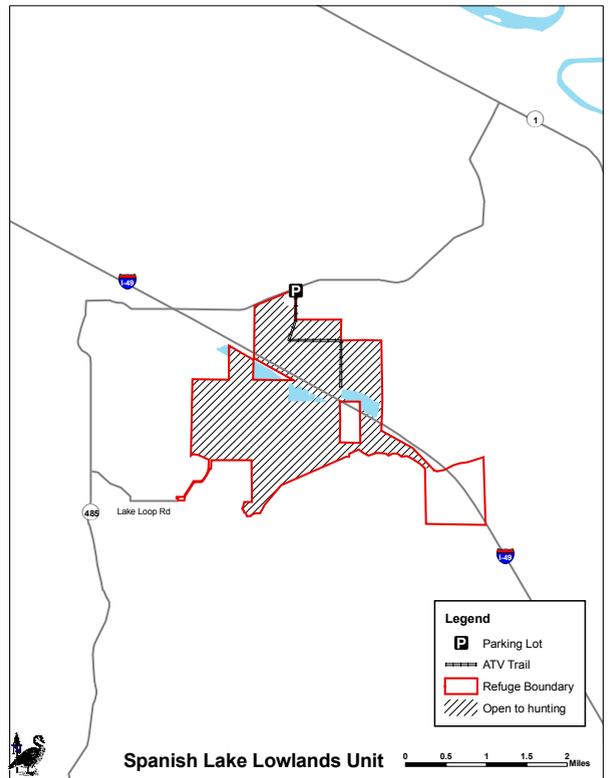
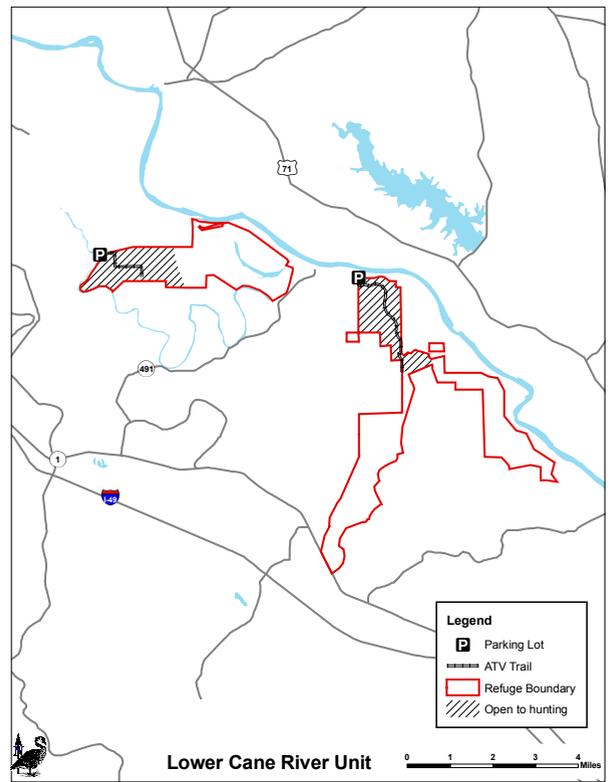
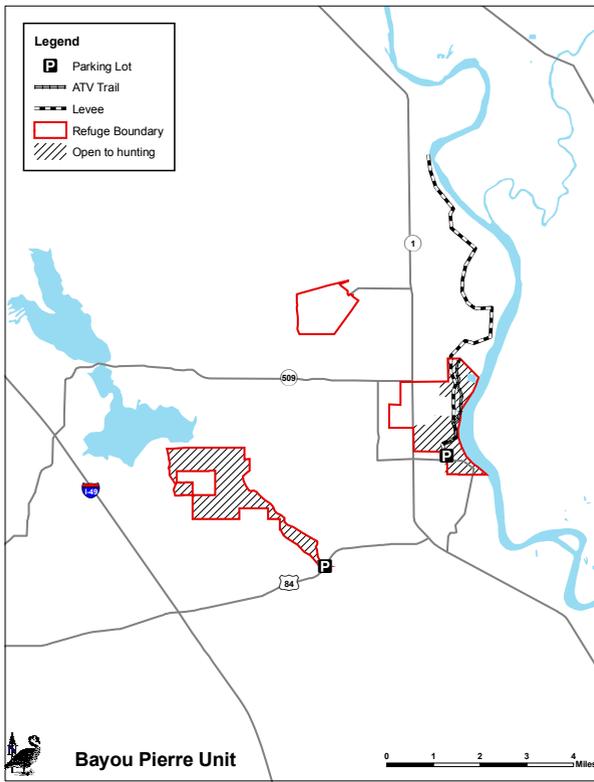


*Snowy egrets*

### *Water and Marsh Birds*

The great blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, cattle egret, little blue heron, white ibis, green heron, yellow-crowned night-

heron, black-crowned night-heron, American bittern, white-faced ibis, pied-billed grebe, common moorhen, purple gallinule, and sandhill crane use the refuge's sloughs, bayous, flooded timber, scrub/shrub, and open fields at different times of the year, depending upon the water levels. Roseate spoonbills, wood storks, and tricolored herons are seen irregularly, usually during post-breeding dispersal in late summer. Least bitterns migrate through the refuge. Concentrations of double-crested cormorants use the refuge during winter. Anhingas are found



along the river and associated oxbow lakes and sloughs during the summer. American white pelicans are sometimes seen in the open flooded fields during winter. No major rookeries are known to occur on the refuge. Sora, yellow rail, and king rail are species of concern and are known to utilize Red River NWR during some part of the year. Both king rails and yellow rails are listed as threatened or endangered in various areas of the country. American coots are present year-round and are especially abundant in winter.



*White-tailed deer*



*Raccoons*

### *Mammals*

Forty-four species of mammals are known or are likely to occur on the refuge. White-tailed deer are found in abundance on the refuge.

Furbearers found on the refuge include: Virginia opossum, raccoon, striped skunk, river otter, beaver, mink, nutria, and muskrat. Gray fox, red fox, coyote,

and bobcats are also present. Both eastern cottontail and swamp rabbits inhabit the refuge. Fox squirrels and gray squirrels are found on the refuge, with fox squirrels in the more open woods and gray squirrels inhabiting the small amount of dense forest.

Several species of bats are known or are likely to occur on the refuge. These include: the Rafinesque's big-eared bat, southeastern myotis, big

brown bat, eastern red bat, Seminole bat, evening bat and during migration, the hoary bat.

### **Public Use**

#### *Hunting*

The refuge is open to small game and large game hunting in designated areas only. Check the current refuge hunt brochure for additional information.

#### *Fishing*

Fishing on Red River National Wildlife Refuge is permitted in specified areas during daylight hours only, except during duck season. Only electric (trolling) motors are allowed to operate on refuge waterbodies. Licenses, limits and boating safety requirements are the same as those adopted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Check the current refuge hunt brochure for additional information.

*Wildlife Observation/ Photography*  
Wildlife observation and photography opportunities are available throughout the year. There are a number of hiking trails available to sneak a peek of wildlife. Waterfowl can be seen during the winter months and migratory songbirds, shorebirds, and wading birds during the spring and summer.



*Painted bunting*

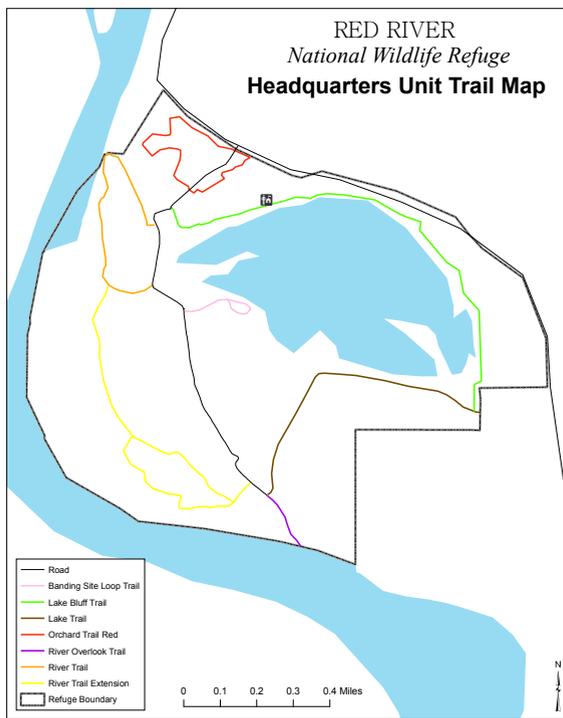
#### *Environmental Education*

Organized groups may reserve dates for presentations, wildlife tours, and outdoor classroom activities. Environmental education and interpretive programs are available at the Visitor Center.

#### *Hours of Operation*

The refuge is open during daylight hours, seven days a week. Please allow enough time to return to your vehicle before dark.

*All photographs are courtesy of Ronnie Maum/USFWS.*



### Prohibited Activities

- Camping
- Open fires
- Littering
- Overnight parking
- Target practice
- Taking of wildlife (including frogs, turtles, and mollusks) and plants other than specified in refuge regulations.
- Using motorized vehicles off the designated public access roads. This includes motorcycles, ATV's, golf carts, jeeps, cars, trucks, etc. Parking is restricted to parking areas and along public access roads.
- Possessing or using alcoholic beverages.
- Searching for or removing any object of antiquity, including arrowheads, pottery, or other artifacts.

### Signs and Boundaries

Signs are useful tools in regulating the use of a public area. The wording applies to the area behind the signs. Pay attention to the signs, watch for boundary corners, and check your location with the maps.

This sign marks the refuge boundary.



This sign means the area is closed to all entry. Do not trespass behind this sign for any reason other than an emergency.



This sign means no motorized vehicles beyond this point. This applies to all cars, trucks, jeeps, all-terrain vehicles, and motorcycles. Non-motorized bicycles are allowed.



This sign marks the boundaries of the waterfowl hunting areas on the refuge.

# U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Red River National Wildlife Refuge  
150 Eagle Bend Point  
Bossier City, LA 71112  
Phone: 318/742 1219  
Fax: 318/742 1259  
[www.fws.gov/northlouisiana/RedRiver/](http://www.fws.gov/northlouisiana/RedRiver/)

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1-800-344-WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>

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