

Lake Drummond

Lake Drummond, at 3,100 acres, is the largest natural lake in Virginia. The lake was formed about 4,000 years ago after a fire burned away several feet of peat soil.

The swamp's peat soils are the reason the lake's water is a dark brown color. As groundwater perks through the peat, it is stained just as tea in a teacup. Despite its murky appearance, the water is very pure. The lake is home to several species of fish, including mud sunfish, yellow perch, brown and yellow bullhead catfish, bowfin, and crappie. Contrary to popular myth, there are no alligators in the lake.



Lake Drummond/USFWS

In the winter, the lake provides a resting place for thousands of migratory birds including tundra swans and snow geese. In the summer, you should keep an eye out for great blue heron and great egret, as well as northern parula and prothonotary warblers nesting in the cypress trees. Bald eagle often build nests and raise their young around the lake's shoreline.

Lake Drummond is the main source of water for the Dismal Swamp Canal, which forms the eastern boundary of the refuge. The canal was initially proposed by George Washington and later funded by then Virginia governor, Patrick Henry. Hand dug by slaves and an important strategic holding during the American Civil War, it is the oldest continually-operating canal in America.



The Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive gate is open every day unless there is a necessity for a temporary closing. Access hours are April 1 to September 30, 7:00am-7:00pm and October 1 to March 31, 7:30am-5:00pm. The electronic entry gate closes one hour earlier to allow all vehicles to exit on time. Permit and fee required. Self-serve permit and fee schedule can be found at Railroad Permit Station, 1/2 mile from Desert Road.

Boat launching is allowed every day, year round, by use of and by terms of the Wildlife Drive permit. Daily permit and fee required.

Hiking and biking are allowed every day on refuge trails, including the Railroad Ditch Trail, sunrise to sunset. Permit and fee are not required for hiking and biking.

The Railroad Ditch Trail and Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive are occasionally closed for hunts, maintenance, controlled burns, and other management events. For the most current information on closings, follow us on our Facebook page.

The refuge office is open Monday-Friday from 8:00am to 4:00pm. The office is closed on weekends and Federal holidays.

**Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
Headquarters**
3100 Desert Road, Suffolk, VA 23434
(757) 986-3705
www.fws.gov/refuge/Great_Dismal_Swamp



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

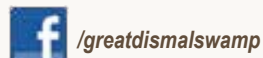


Lake Drummond/USFWS

Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive

3120 Desert Road, Suffolk, VA
**Sights and Stops Along the Way
to Lake Drummond**

February 2022



Welcome to Great Dismal Swamp!

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge contains some of the most important wildlife habitat in the mid-Atlantic region. At near 113,000 acres, the refuge is the largest intact remnant of a vast swamp that once covered more than one million acres. It is home to some 200 species of birds, nearly 100 species of butterflies and skippers, and to one of the largest black bear populations on the east coast. The swamp's history includes land deeds for George Washington and evidence of large communities of freedom seekers, known as maroons, that once lived deep within the swamp.

The Wildlife Drive is a popular way to see Lake Drummond and there are plenty of other sights along the way. But first, use caution while traveling the route. Watch out for snakes and turtles sunning themselves in the road.



Pines Trail/USFWS

Pines Trail

Begin your tour by walking the Pines Trail, a ¼ mile loop around the refuge headquarters through a stand of tall pines.

You may notice a few young Long Leaf Pines, a species that once dominated the southeast, but due to logging and development have been reduced to only a fraction of their original range.

The refuge conducts controlled burns in this area every few years. Careful burning of the forest prevents the build up of plant litter on the forest floor which could fuel a larger, more destructive fire. Burns also aid in creating a more diverse habitat for a variety of animal and plant species. It is common to see a re-growth of wildflowers a few weeks after each burn. Look for the pink lady slippers and other tiny orchids if you are here at that time.

Some animals you might spot along the Pines Trail include: red-headed woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, summer tanager, wild turkey, king and black rat snakes, and white-tailed deer.

Permit Station and Underground Railroad Pavilion

About ½ mile up the Railroad Ditch Road from the entrance on Desert Road you will come to the self-serve permit station and the Underground Railroad Pavilion. The pavilion was built to showcase Great Dismal Swamp's role as a home for maroons.

In 2004, Great Dismal Swamp became the first national wildlife refuge designated as a site on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

The Dismal Swamp maroon story is also a featured exhibit in the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, DC.



Underground Railroad Boardwalk/USFWS

A permit for your vehicle access will be necessary to complete the tour to the lake from this point. Complete the envelope by making your payment or pass option, detach and keep the receipt, and then deposit the envelope into the brown vault.

Cypress Marsh and Boardwalk

At the intersection of Railroad and West Ditch Roads lies an area where the dense forest is replaced by tall marsh grasses and young cypress trees. This 10-acre marsh was created by a series of controlled burns, mimicking the effect of wildfires, and allowing a different habitat to take hold.

The Cypress Marsh is home to several beaver lodges, including one that is visible from West Ditch Road. Look for river otters, turtles, wood ducks, great blue herons, mallards, and especially in the spring, many varieties of songbirds.



Beaver Lodge in Cypress Marsh/USFWS

West Ditch Boardwalk Trail

Near the midway of West Ditch Road, you will come to another boardwalk trail on the right. The short trail leads to a bald cypress tree that is approximately 800 years old. Although the entire Dismal Swamp has been logged, a few old-growth trees like this one remain. The top of this tree was broken off by a lightning strike, and is only about one-half of its original height. Centuries ago, much of the swamp was dominated by giant cypress like these.

Water, Fire, and Wind

As you venture through Wildlife Drive, look for the effects of wildfires and hurricanes on the landscape. Management strategies focus on forest recovery.

In 2020, a tornado formed off Hurricane Isaias and caused nearly 600 acres of damage in the refuge. Where there was once a forest there is now a large swath of toppled trees and mangled vegetation.

Severe wildfires have also left a mark on the swamp. In 2008, the South One Fire lasted 121 days and burned 4,8000 acres. It was followed in 2011 by the Lateral West Fire, which burned 6,300 acres.



Lateral West Fire/USFWS

The Lateral West Fire smoldered for nearly four months. The swamp's peat soil actually burned away. The surface of the ground in the fire scar is now two to five feet lower than it was before the fires. It will take centuries for the peat to regenerate.

Fire has always been a part of nature's cycle in Dismal Swamp, especially during periods of drought. And, peat wildfires are particularly difficult to put out. Today's fires are fought viciously due to the smoke they put in the air impacting air quality in the surrounding communities.