



Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P.O. Box 67
2274 Highway 18 East
Manila, AR 72442
870/564 2429

<http://www.fws.gov/southeast>
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/big-lake>
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

June 2026

This is a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge
System, a network of lands and waters
managed for the benefit of wildlife and people.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Big Lake

National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Regulations 2026-2027

General Introduction

Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1915, is one of 571 national wildlife refuges administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The primary objective of the refuge is to provide habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. The refuge is located in Mississippi County, Arkansas.

Hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation are priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. These wildlife-dependent uses are carefully managed on Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge to ensure they are compatible with refuge purposes and provide safe, high-quality, low impact, recreational opportunities. Users of the refuge must obey all signs pertaining to visitation, access, and public use regulations. All public uses, including hunting and fishing, are conducted in accordance with state and federal regulations as supplemented by the following special refuge regulations.

Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge is located adjacent to Big Lake Wildlife Management Area, managed by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Regulations may vary between the two areas, consult the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for regulations pertaining to Big Lake Wildlife Management Area.

Access and Vehicle Use

NOTE: The refuge is open for public entry and use only from 4 a.m. to one hour after legal sunset, except for those engaged in fishing, frogging, or raccoon/possum hunting at night and possessing the appropriate equipment and required licenses. Hunters trailing or retrieving deer after hours should call the refuge office at 870/564 2429 and leave a message stating their name, phone number and the general area in which they are searching for or retrieving deer.

Access into the refuge is through an automatically time-controlled gate that opens at 4 am and closes at 8 pm. If you are locked in the refuge or need assistance, call 911 on a cell phone and you will be connected to the Sheriff's office.

Motorized boat entry into the Big Lake Wilderness is prohibited any time.

* The Refuge is closed to ALL other entry and public use Nov 7- 8, Nov. 14- 16, and Jan. 2- 3 during the Quota Gun Deer Hunts. Only Youth Quota Gun Deer Hunt and Quota Gun Deer permit holders, respectively, are allowed to enter or use the Refuge during these hunts and only for the purpose of deer hunting and incidental take of beaver, muskrat, nutria, coyote, striped skunk, fox, bobcat, river otter, mink, and feral hogs.

Only Quota Gun Youth Turkey Hunt permit holders are allowed to enter or use Wildlife Auto Drive during this hunt on April 10-11. Anglers using boats must access the lake from Bright's Landing.

The entire lake, Baker's Field Island, and the Sand-Slough Moist Soil Unit are waterfowl sanctuaries and are closed to ALL entry and public use, including hunting and fishing, from Nov. 1 - Feb. 29 annually.

Boats are prohibited Nov. 1 - Feb. 29, except in Ditch 28, Ditch 81 and south of Sand Slough Dam.

Boat access by hunters from Nov. 1 - Feb. 29 is limited to launching at Seven Mile boat ramp and boat use in Ditch 28 only.

Personal watercraft (e.g., jet-skis, etc.), hover craft, and airboats are prohibited.

Boats may be launched only in designated areas and may not be left unattended overnight.

Climbing onto and/or fishing from any water control structure and associated wingwalls and fences, or the top of the Floodway Dam south of Highway 18, or entering any closed areas (areas are designated by signs) are prohibited.

Roads may be closed at any time hazardous or poor road conditions exist or other administrative needs warrant. A locked gate or other barrier, road closed sign, or no vehicle sign means the road is closed to ALL vehicle travel, including bicycles and ebikes, but not to foot travel unless signed otherwise.

2026-2027 General Hunting and Fishing Permit – Big Lake NWR

This permit must be signed to be valid. It must be carried by the individual at all times while on the refuge and in possession of hunting and fishing gear. An electronic signed copy of the permit may also be produced on a person's own cellular phone or other type of portable electronic device that clearly displays and accurately reproduces all of the information. **This permit expires 7/31/27.**

NOTE: Quota Permit also required for Quota Deer, Youth Deer, and Youth Turkey Hunts. I have read and understand the refuge regulations and agree to obey them.

Signature (Permit not transferable)

All vehicles, including bicycles and ebikes, must stay on maintained graveled roads or established parking areas and meet all applicable federal and state requirements regulating the use of a licensed motor vehicle. Vehicles equipped with oversize tractor lug type tires are prohibited.

Motor vehicle speed limit is 25 mph unless otherwise posted.

ATVs are prohibited, except for use by mobility-impaired hunters possessing a Special Use Permit issued by the Refuge Manager.

Horses/mules are prohibited.

General Refuge Regulations

Permitted activities are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.

Nighttime use is limited to fishing, frogging, and/or raccoon/opossum hunting according to state and refuge seasons and regulations, and the appropriate licenses, tackle, or gear must be possessed.

Commercial Activities

Anyone engaged in any commercial activity, including fishing, must first obtain a Special Use Permit issued by the Refuge Manager.

Prohibited Activities Include:

- Possession of open alcohol containers on refuge roads, ATV trails, parking areas, boat ramps, fishing piers, or observation decks.
- Camping.
- Building fires.
- Cutting or defacing trees, shrubs, or other plants.
- Littering (including, but not limited to shotgun shell hulls and cigarette butts).
- Searching for or removal of artifacts.
- Horseback riding.
- Possession or use of fireworks.
- Use of firearms and possession or use of archery/crossbow equipment except during refuge hunts that allow their use.
- Loaded hunting firearms in or on a vehicle or boat under power. "Loaded" is defined as having shells in the firearm or an ignition device on/in the muzzleloader.
- Target practice or non-hunting discharge of firearms.
- Dog field trials and organized training events.
- Fishing tournaments.
- Taking or possessing turtles or mollusks.
- Use of artificial light to locate wildlife, except as authorized for fishing, frogging, and raccoon/opossum hunting.
- Failure to remove all marking materials from the Refuge after the hunt.
- Use of Drones.

Sport Fishing Regulations

A refuge permit is required for all fishing activities. Permits are non-transferable and must be signed by the individual and carried at all times while on the refuge in possession of fishing gear. A permit is located on the front of this brochure or can be downloaded and printed from the refuge website at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/big-lake>

Sport fishing, for personal use only, is permitted on all refuge waters from Mar. 1- Oct. 31 in accordance with state seasons and state and refuge- specific regulations.

Crawfishing, for personal use only, is permitted on all refuge waters from Mar. 1- Oct. 31 in accordance with state seasons and state and refuge- specific regulations.

Frogging, for personal use only, is permitted on all refuge waters from June 1- Oct. 31 in accordance with state seasons and state and refuge- specific regulations.

Bow fishing is permitted and all fish harvested with a bow must be removed from the Refuge.

The owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer ID number must be permanently affixed to each crawfish trap.

Sport fishing with the use of non-motorized boats and boats with electric trolling motors is permitted in the Sand Slough-Mud Slough area (designated on map and on the area by signs) from Nov. 1 - Feb. 29 during daylight hours only.

General Hunt Regulations

A Refuge permit is required for all hunting activities. Permits are non-transferable and must be signed by the hunter and carried at all times while on the refuge in possession of hunting gear. An electronic signed copy of the permit may also be produced on a person's own cellular phone or other type of portable electronic device that clearly displays and accurately reproduces all of the information. A permit is located on the front of this brochure or can be downloaded from the refuge website at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/big-lake>.

Bag limits for all species are the same as state limits unless specified otherwise.

- Hunter Orange or Chartreuse must be worn in accordance with Arkansas Game & Fish Commission regulations during the Quota Gun Deer Hunts.
- Portable, pop-up blinds must have 144 square inches of blaze orange or chartreuse visible from all sides of the blind during firearms big-game seasons on the Refuge.

Mobility-impaired hunters

Mobility-impaired hunters may apply for a refuge Special Use Permit allowing the use of an ATV on Oak Island Trail. For more information, please call the Refuge at 870/564-2429.

Prohibited hunting activities include:

- Trapping.
- The use of dogs for deer hunting.
- Driving or screwing any metal object into a tree or hunting from a tree in which a metal object has been driven or screwed to support a hunter.
- Building or hunting from permanent blinds or stands.
- Possession or distribution of bait or hunting over bait, salt, grain, or other feed that could serve as a lure or attraction for wildlife.
- Hunting from mowed or gravel roads.
- Hunting in Sand Slough Moist Soil Unit, Baker's Island Field, and refuge headquarters area (see map).
- FmHA Tracts: (Lawrence & Craighead Counties) Closed to ALL entry and public use.

Hunter Education and Youth Hunter Supervision

All hunters age 11 and younger who possess valid hunter education certification must remain within normal sight and voice contact with an adult age 18 or older who possesses a valid State hunting license. Hunters age 15 and younger who have not completed hunter education must be under the direct supervision (within arm's reach) of an adult age 21 or older who possesses a valid State hunting license. One adult may supervise up to two youth hunters for upland game hunting, but may supervise only one youth during big game hunting.

Migratory Birds

Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Ditch 28 are CLOSED to ALL waterfowl and migratory bird hunting.

Small Game

Only rifles and handguns chambered for rimfire cartridges, air rifles, archery tackle, or shotguns with non-toxic shot may be used for all small game hunting.

Squirrel: Sep. 1 - Feb. 29*. Dogs allowed North of Timm's Point.

Rabbit: State season*. Dogs allowed North of Timm's Point.

Raccoon: Sep. 1 – Mar. 31*. Dogs are required for hunting raccoons at night.

Opossum: Sep. 1 – Feb. 29*. Dogs are required for hunting opossums at night.

Furbearer: Beaver, muskrat, nutria, coyote, striped skunk, fox, bobcat, river otter, and mink may be taken incidental to any refuge hunt by the use of the device appropriate for that hunt and according to any applicable state seasons and regulations.

Feral Hog: In cooperation with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's Feral Hog Control Program, feral hogs may only be taken on the refuge during the Quota Gun Deer and Quota Gun Youth Deer hunts and by archery deer hunters. Feral hogs are destructive, non-native animals that are incompatible with refuge management. Live hogs may not be possessed, transported, or released on the Refuge.

Big Game

All deer and turkey harvested on the refuge must be checked according to state regulations and "Big Lake NWR" **used instead of a zone number** for tagging and checking your game.

Only portable stands may be used and the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer ID number must be permanently affixed to the stand. A portable hunting stand is any device or structure used for the purpose of hunting that can be carried in its entirety and erected by hand including but not limited to tripod stands, lean-to stands, lock-on stands, ladder stands and climbing stands. Stands may be erected 7 days prior to the refuge deer season and must be removed within 7 days of the closing of the archery hunt.

We prohibit leaving any tree stand, ground blind, or game camera on the refuge without the owner's Arkansas Game and Fish Commission license customer ID number clearly written in a conspicuous location.

The Refuge may be closed and deer hunting suspended at the discretion of the Refuge Manager during periods of severe flooding.

Deer Limits

The limit for the gun quota hunt is one either-sex deer. For the archery season the refuge bag limit is three deer. The total number of bucks that can be harvested through a combination of all refuge hunts is two. Button bucks will still be tagged and checked as button bucks; however, they will count toward a hunter's antlerless deer bag limit. **NEW**

Deer harvested on the Refuge are NOT bonus deer.

Deer (Archery/Crossbow): State Season.*Either sex. Three deer limit.

Deer (Early Buck Archery): State regulations apply, August 29-31. **NEW**

Deer (Youth Quota Gun): Nov. Nov 7-8 and **NEW*** Jan 2- 3

Quota permit is required. Only youth 6 to 15 years old may hunt during this special youth deer hunt. Youth quota deer hunt permits are free. Only shotguns with slugs, muzzleloaders shooting a single projectile, non-semiautomatic centerfire firearm which fires a straight-walled rifle cartridge .30 caliber or larger, and legal handguns and air rifles as defined by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission may be used. Either sex. One deer limit.

Deer (Quota Gun): **NEW*** Nov. 14- 16..

Quota permit is required and are currently \$12.50. Only shotguns with slugs, muzzleloaders shooting a single projectile, non-semiautomatic centerfire firearm which fires a straight-walled rifle cartridge .30 caliber or larger, and legal handguns and air rifles as defined by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission may be used. Either sex. One deer limit.

*** NOTE:** The refuge is CLOSED to all other entry and public use during Youth Quota Gun Deer and Quota Gun Deer Hunts on Nov 7- 8, Nov. 14- 16, and Jan. 2- 3. Only Youth Quota Gun Deer or Quota Gun Deer Hunt permit holders, respectively, are allowed to enter or use the refuge during these hunts and only for the purpose of deer hunting and incidental take of beaver, muskrat, nutria, coyote, striped skunk, fox, bobcat, river otter, mink, and feral hogs.

Turkey (Youth Quota Gun): Apr. 10-11.

Quota permit is required. Only youth 6 to 15 years old may hunt during this special youth turkey hunt. Youth turkey hunt permits are free. Limit is one legal turkey. Turkey harvested on the refuge are NOT bonus turkey and are part of the hunter's statewide turkey bag limit. Only Quota Youth Turkey Hunt permit holders are allowed to enter or use Wildlife Auto Drive during this hunt and only for the purpose of turkey hunting. Anglers using boats must access the lake from Bright's Landing.

NOTE: The Wildlife Auto Drive Road is CLOSED to all other entry and public use during Youth Quota Gun Turkey Hunt

To Apply for a Quota Hunt Permit

All quota hunt permits for Big Lake NWR can be obtained at at <https://wapanocca.recaccess.com/>

Quota Gun Deer permits are \$12.50 and Quota Youth Deer Hunt permits are free.

Deer quota permits are issued beginning Aug. 1 on a first come, first served basis until the quota is reached, or until Oct. 31.

Youth Quota Gun Turkey permits are free and will be issued beginning Mar. 1 until the quota is reached, or until Mar. 31.

Permit requests will NOT be accepted in person.

NOTE: Permits are non-transferable and nonrefundable, even in the event of refuge deer hunt closures due to flooding.

Signs Protect Visitors and Resources

Millions of people visit national wildlife refuges each year. The impact of human activity, if not regulated, can degrade these wildlands. Signs control recreational activities while protecting natural resources on the refuge. Please respect and obey all signs on the refuge:



Boundary of the refuge.



Area closed and area seasonally closed signs. These signs mean the area behind the sign is closed to all entry either year-round or seasonally. Do not enter the area behind this sign for any reason.

Take pride in your refuge.

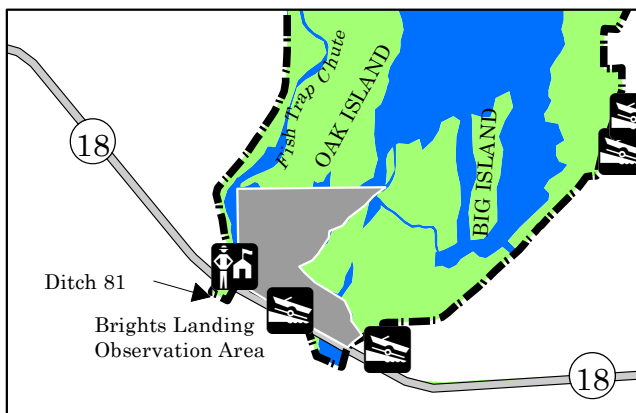
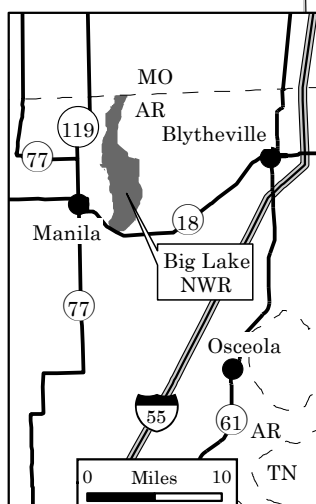
Don't litter.

Report violations.

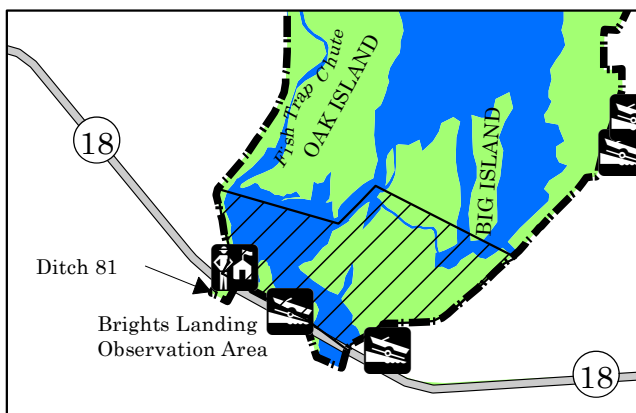
Stop Poaching Hotline 1800/482 9262

Legend

- Refuge Headquarters
- Boat Access
- Gravel Roads
- Wildlife Drive 3.1 Miles
- Refuge Boundary
- Wilderness Area Public Law 94/557



Open to fishing November 1 - February 28
Trolling motors only



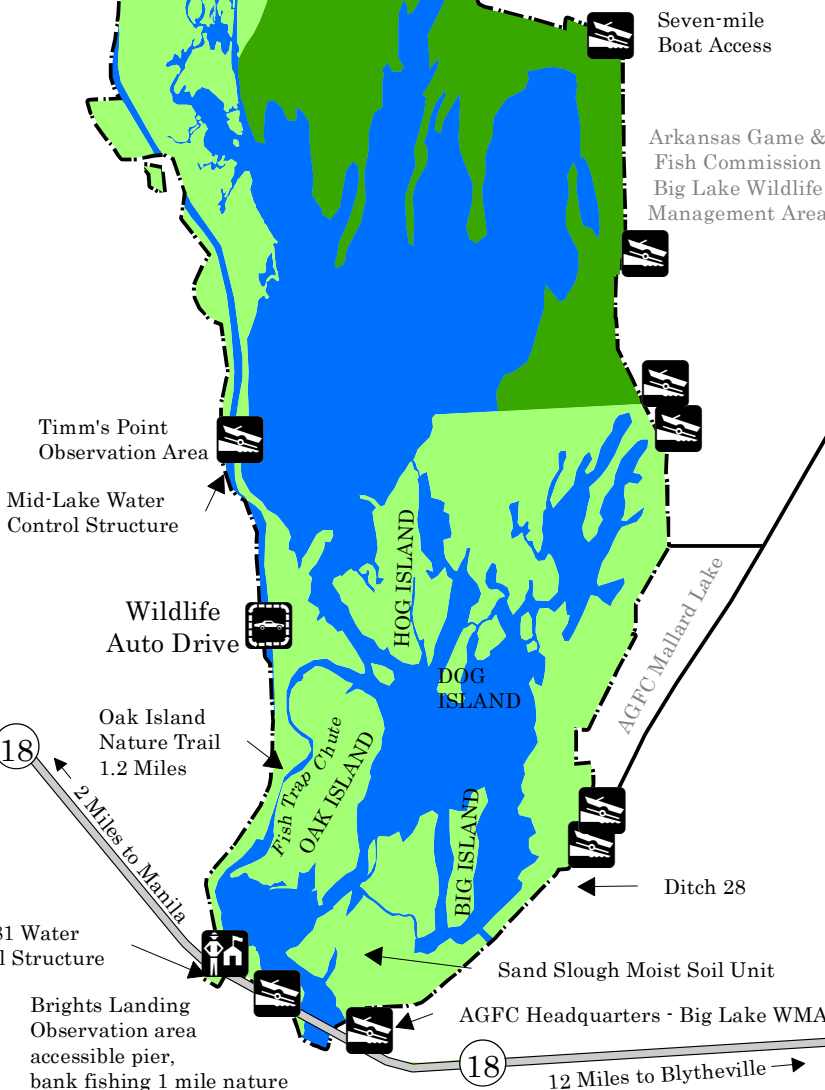
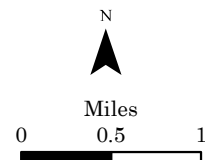
Closed to hunting

DUNKLIN CO.
MISSISSIPPI CO.

MISSOURI
ARKANSAS

North End Water
Control Structure
Earth Plug
North Dam

Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge



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