

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge
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Madison, Indiana 47250
Phone: 812-273-0783
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bigoaks@fws.gov
<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/big-oaks>

V/TTY Users may reach Big Oaks NWR
through Indiana’s State Relay System
at 1-800-743-3333 or the Federal Relay
System at 1-800-877-8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1-800-344-WILD
www.fws.gov

August 2025



ENTRANCE FEES	
Annual Permit	\$15.00
Daily Permit	\$3.00
Hunt Permit	\$20.00

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge

Map & Regulations

Be aware that unexploded ordnance (UXO) could be encountered at any location on the refuge. **DO NOT TOUCH ANY METAL OBJECT.**

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge consists of approximately 50,000 acres on the former Jefferson Proving Ground located in Jefferson, Ripley, and Jennings Counties in southeastern Indiana. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has managed the wildlife resources of Jefferson Proving Ground since 1996 and Big Oaks was established as a refuge in June 2000. Big Oaks is an “overlay” refuge with a 99-year real estate permit from the U. S. Army. As an overlay refuge, the Army retains ownership and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the property as a refuge. The Indiana Air National Guard operates the Jefferson Range, which is located near the center of the former proving ground, not designated as part of the refuge. Large safety buffer areas separate the range from public use areas of the refuge.

Big Oaks contains a variety of different habitat types, which provide for a diversity of wildlife species. The refuge contains one of the largest contiguous forest blocks and grassland complexes in southeast Indiana. This landscape mosaic of grasslands, shrublands, forests, and wetlands provides opportunities for viewing a variety of wildlife species while visiting the refuge. The refuge offers many recreational activities, including fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, wildlife photography, refuge tours, environmental education, and hiking.

Wildlife Calendar

Spring

Spring is a popular season on the refuge. Wildflowers are in full bloom and neotropical migrants fill the sky with song, with over 120 species of birds ending their journey here to breed. Bird field trips and spring bird counts are available along with fishing at Old Timbers Lake and the annual turkey hunting season. Also included is the annual Youth Turkey Hunt.

Summer

Fishing on the refuge continues throughout the summer and fall. Outdoor Women at Big Oaks offers women a chance to improve outdoor skills. Take a Kid Fishing Day is a popular day to bond with your kids while fishing on the refuge. Summer also includes the annual North American Butterfly Survey.

Fall

Fall marks the beginning of deer season at Big Oaks with an archery and gun season. Also included is the annual Youth Deer Hunt and squirrel hunting season. Migrating birds may also be observed on their migration south.

Winter

The refuge is closed to public use from December through mid-April. Guided tours can be scheduled by contacting the refuge office. Please contact the refuge office for a complete schedule of events and times.

RULES & REGULATIONS

Public Use

Public use on the refuge is limited from mid-April through November. Check for public use days on calendars at refuge office or on the refuge website. Public use hours are from 7:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.; days and hours may vary during hunting seasons.

1. All visitors are required to attend a safety briefing, sign an acknowledgment of danger agreement, and obtain a public access permit before entering the refuge. Visitors must possess a valid daily pass at all times. All visitors must check into and out of the refuge in accordance with the provisions of their refuge permit.

2. A lottery system is used as needed during public use. Any activity by a refuge visitor that will result in an unfair advantage or improve one’s chance in the lottery is prohibited.

3. We prohibit trespass into unassigned areas. In areas posted “Area Closed,” we prohibit entry. It is the responsibility of each person to know where they are at all times.

4. Pets must be kept on a leash, except hunting dogs used during refuge squirrel hunting season. All pets are required to wear a collar displaying the owner’s name, address, and telephone number.

5. Searching for, removing, or possessing objects of antiquity or historical significance or unexploded ordnance, munitions or any item(s) associated with the Army’s historical mission is prohibited.

6. Camping, fires, swimming, dumping, trapping, ATV’s and littering are prohibited.

7. Vehicles and other modes of transportation

are allowed only on designated roads. Vehicles are prohibited off road.

8. Disturbing or collecting plants or animals and/ or parts is prohibited. Wild edible food products (i.e., mushrooms, nuts, wild asparagus and berries) and shed deer antlers may be gathered for personal use during refuge public use days subject to the following condition: permit required. Mushrooms must be collected in a mesh bag.

9. Spotlighting wildlife, even without weapons, is prohibited.

Legal Game

Refuge hours listed are for hunting seasons; legal shooting hours are according to state regulations.

White-tailed Deer/ Wild Turkey Archery Season:
Eastern Daylight5:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.

White-tailed Deer Gun Season:
Eastern Daylight5:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.
Eastern Standard4:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.

Wild Turkey Spring Season:
April -May5:30 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

Squirrel Season:
August -November.....7:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

1. Hunting of white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and squirrel are permitted in designated areas on the refuge subject to the following condition: hunt permit and state licenses required.

2. Only designated game species may be taken; all other wildlife may not be molested, harassed, or taken in any manner.

3. Weaponry is regulated by the state.

4. You may possess only approved non-toxic shot while in the field.

5. We allow the use of portable hunting stands and blinds. We prohibit tree steps or screw-in steps. Stands, blinds and personal belongings must be removed at the end of each day.

6. We require that all hunters check all harvested game taken on the refuge at the refuge check station.

7. We require all refuge hunters to hunt with a partner. We require hunting partners to know the location of their partner while hunting. An adult, age 18 or older, must directly supervise

youth hunters age 17 or under.

8. Without the harvest and check-in of an antlerless deer, there is a limit of 1 buck during each specific refuge hunt season (1 buck during refuge archery hunt; 1 buck during refuge primitive muzzleloader hunt; and 1 buck during refuge firearm hunt). This is by refuge season and not by equipment. Only allowed state deer license is the military/refuge tag.

9. Hunters may not exceed the daily bag limit of 1 deer per day.

10. We allow the use of hunting dogs only during the squirrel hunting season. You must ensure that all hunting dogs wear a collar displaying the owner’s name, address, and telephone number.

11. We allow the use of squirrel dogs only in the day-use areas.

12. We prohibit flagging tape and reflective tacks.

13. We prohibit the cutting of trees or trimming branches for shooting lanes.

14. We prohibit the use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting on the refuge.

15. Hunters must possess and carry a compass and/or GPS while hunting on the refuge.

16. All hunting is subject to state regulations.

17. We prohibit the use of trail cameras.

Sport Fishing

1. We allow fishing on Old Timbers Lake in accordance with state fishing regulations subject to

the following conditions: refuge access permit required.

2. We only allow fishing with rod and reel or pole and line.

3. We prohibit the use of trotlines.

4. We allow boats only if rowed, paddled, or powered by an electric trolling motor on Old Timbers Lake.

5. We prohibit retaining largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, and spotted bass between 12 and 15 inches.

