



Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Introduction

Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1915 through an executive order as a reserve for native birds by President Woodrow Wilson. Approximately 5,000 acres of the refuge have been set aside as a National Natural Landmark, and over 2,100 acres have been included in the Wilderness Preservation System. The refuge was recognized as a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy in 2001. Refuge management efforts focus on conserving this remnant of the upper Mississippi Delta and providing quality habitat for the migratory bird species found here.

History

The northern tier of the Mississippi Delta region in northeast Arkansas and southeast Missouri is extremely rich in archaeological history. Prior to the Ice Age, this area was covered in spruce forest. The habitat eventually changed to an oak-hickory forest that was inhabited by Paleoamericans and many now-extinct animals such as the mastodon.

The earliest documented human occupation of the Big Lake area was in the 700's. During the 9th and 10th centuries, a more advanced society occupied the area. Archaeological findings revealed that this society built fenced villages and rectangular log houses. They also developed new farming techniques and a sophisticated political system. The area was occupied by the Mississippian Tribe until the 14th century, and then remained unoccupied until the early 19th century.

The New Madrid earthquake of 1811-12 changed the Big Lake area from a free-flowing river system to its current swamp environment. In the late 1800's, loggers rapidly cleared the timber from the area. The area was then converted to farmland.

Habitat Management

The Little River Drainage District in southern Missouri is the primary water source for the over 11,000-acre refuge. The watershed consists of approximately 2,000 square miles of agricultural land that is funneled into the refuge by several large drainage ditches. Since the Flood Control Act of 1935,

Big Lake had been used as a sump for flood waters. Silt and trash associated with the floods led to the deterioration of the Big Lake system. To alleviate this problem, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed a bypass ditch to divert some of the floodwaters around the refuge. Since the completion of the project, there has been a noticeable improvement in water quality and an increase in aquatic vegetation.

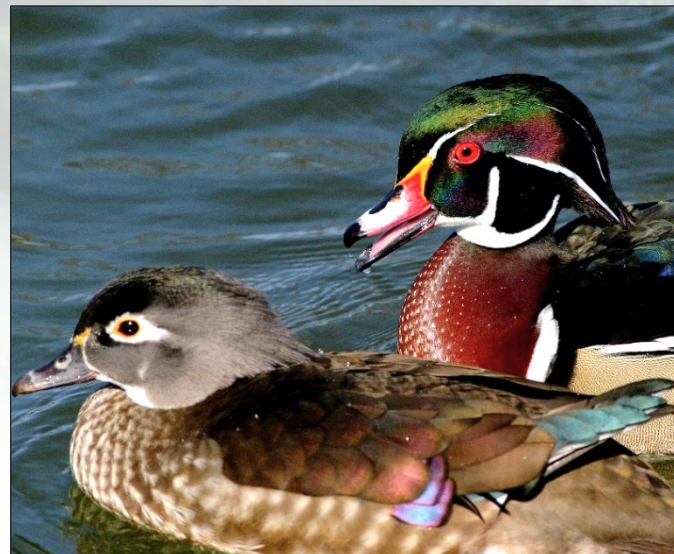
Big Lake NWR consists primarily of wooded swamps and open water. The lake is shallow, with an average depth of three feet. The swampy areas are characterized by stands of black willow, buttonbush, and towering bald cypress trees. Trees on higher ground include a variety of oaks, green ash, river birch, and sycamore.

Refuge Residents

Big Lake NWR is home to a variety of wildlife species including songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Over 225 different species of birds have been recorded on the refuge since 1915.

Many species of migratory waterfowl use the refuge as a feeding, resting, and pair-bond area during the winter. Wood ducks are year-round residents that nest on the refuge. Bald eagles and osprey also nest on the refuge. Other wildlife species to look for include beavers, otters, raccoons, squirrels, wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, and bobcats.

Refuge waters abound with fish, aquatic reptiles, insects, and crustaceans. Largemouth bass, crappie, bream, catfish, buffalo, and carp are the most common fish species. Turtles basking in the sun on logs are also a common sight.



Female and male wood ducks. Photo © Roy Herron.

Visit the Refuge

The public is encouraged to visit the refuge during daylight hours year-round. The refuge offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife observation, and photography. Stop by the visitor center to learn about the refuge's history, management, and local flora and fauna. The observation platforms at Mud Island and Timm's Point are excellent places to view eagles and waterfowl. Visitors can also walk along two trails -- Oak Island Trail and Champion Overcup Oak Trail.

Summers are hot and humid at Big Lake NWR. Biting insects, venomous snakes, and poison ivy are common, so it is recommended that visitors bring drinking water, snacks, sunscreen, insect repellent, and wear long pants and site-appropriate footwear.

Hunters are required to carry a signed public-use regulations brochure with them on the refuge at all times. You may pick one up at the refuge headquarters, from brochure boxes at various locations on the refuge, or download one from our website.

For more information about the refuge or to find our public use regulations, you can call the refuge headquarters or visit our website.

Refuge Headquarters

2274 Highway 18
Manila, AR 72442

Phone: 870-564-2429

Office Hours: 7:00 am – 3:30 pm, Monday – Friday
Closed on federal holidays.

Website

www.fws.gov/refuge/Big_Lake/
...or scan the QR code below with your phone.

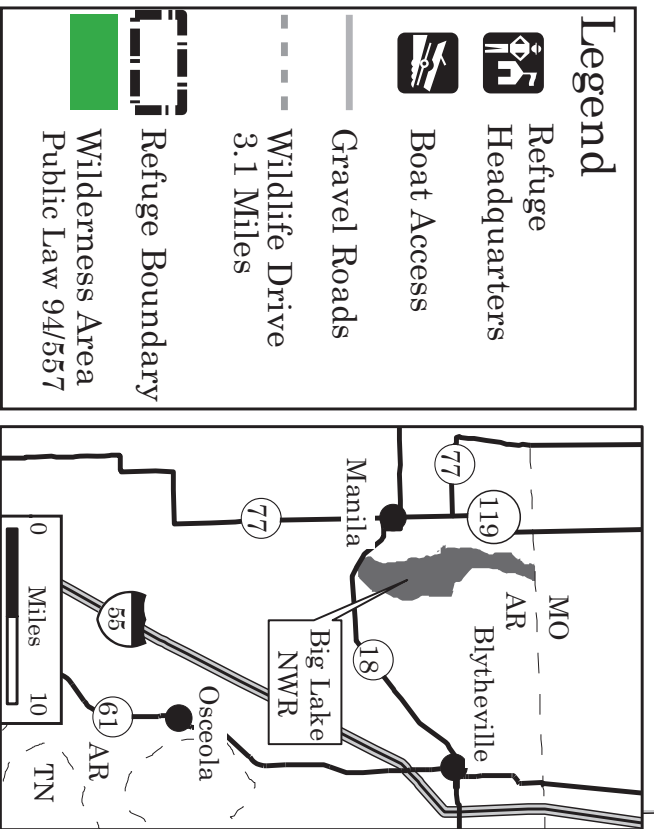
Refuge Website



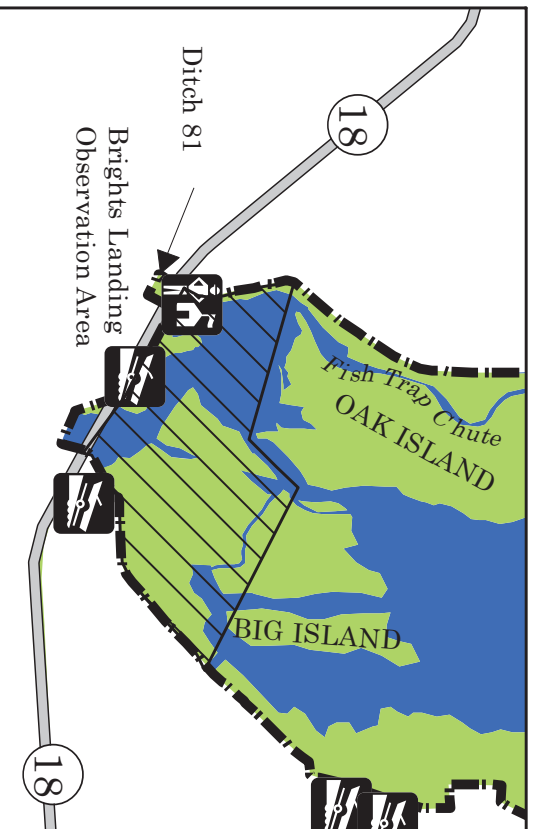
Scan Me!



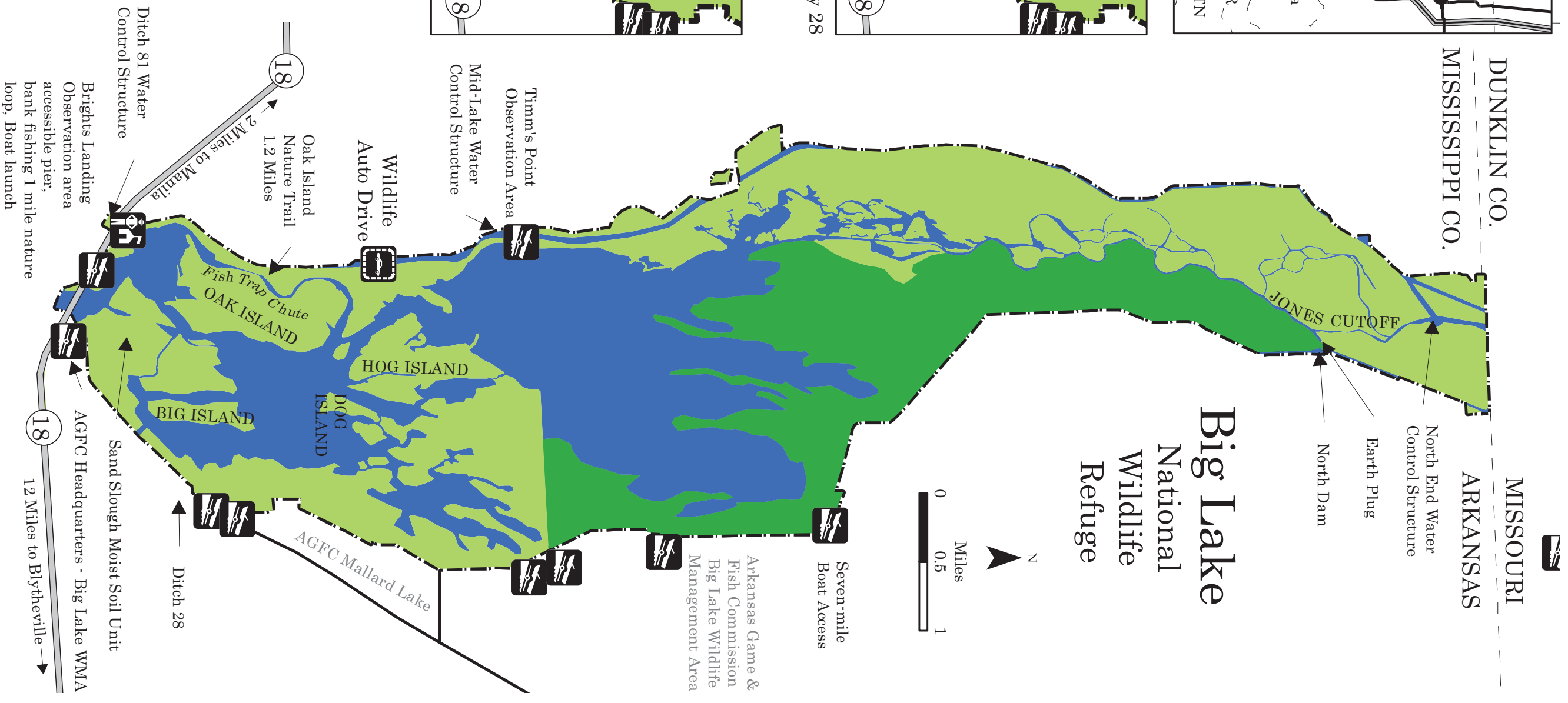
Baldcypress trees in Big Lake. Photo © Steven Rimer, USFWS.



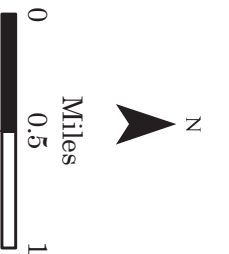
Open to fishing November 1 - February 28
Trolling motors only



Closed to hunting



Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge



Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Big Lake Wildlife Management Area

2 Miles to Manila
1.2 Miles
Oak Island Nature Trail
Wildlife Auto Drive
Timm's Point Observation Area
Mid-Lake Water Control Structure
Seven-mile Boat Access
AGFC Headquarters - Big Lake WMA
12 Miles to Blytheville
Ditch 81 Water Control Structure
Brights Landing Observation area
accessible pier, bank fishing 1 mile nature loop, Boat launch
Ditch 28
Sand Slough Moist Soil Unit