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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Lacreek

National Wildlife Refuge



Trumpeter swan
Tom Koerner / USFWS

Welcome to Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge



This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1935 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt through Executive Order No. 7160 "as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife."

The Refuge is one of over 565 refuges and 38 wetland management districts in the National Wildlife Refuge System - a network of lands set aside specifically for wildlife. Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Refuge System is a living heritage, conserving wildlife and habitat for people today and for generations to come.

The Refuge is located on the northern edge of a vast grassland area known as the Nebraska sandhills. The sandhills capture much of the rainfall as groundwater, and release some of this groundwater it back up through springs. Lacreek NWR has seven springs which help fill its wetlands. One of these is Lake Creek, for which the Refuge is named. These springs emerging from the sandhills, along with Lake Creek, Cedar Creek, and Elm Creek, are the lifeblood of the Refuge. The springs continue to flow even when precipitation has not fallen for months. These reliable sources of water are magnets for wildlife in this otherwise arid landscape.

Lake Creek channel flowing through Pool 6.



Pool 6

© Laura Crawford Williams

Refuge Habitats

Lacreek NWR is at the intersection of multiple habitat types. Mixed grass prairie dominates the area, with tallgrass prairie found in valleys where more water is available. Shortgrass prairie is located north and west of the Refuge in the badlands, and the sandhills are found on the southwest portion of the Refuge. The grass-covered sandhills extend south for hundreds of miles into Nebraska and are one of the last remaining intact native grasslands in North America.

Over 5,000 acres of wetlands are managed by the Refuge staff to provide habitat needed to support migratory birds.

Wildlife of the Refuge

The unique combination of grasslands and wetlands supports a large diversity of migratory birds. Trumpeter swans use the wetlands from September through March, feeding on arrowhead tubers and other food sources. Large concentrations of ducks and geese, numbering up to 80,000, use the wetlands during the spring and fall migrations.

The springs keep some open water available during the winter for trumpeter swans, mallards, Canada geese, and other waterfowl. However, most of the trumpeter swans fly south in March and April to nest on large wetlands on private ranches in the sandhills.

American white pelicans return to the Refuge in March and April to nest.



One of the largest nesting colonies of American white pelicans in South Dakota is found at Lacreek NWR. Thousands of pelicans can be observed in courtship, incubating eggs, feeding young, or flying to and from feeding sites from April through August. Other colonial nesters include great blue herons, snowy egrets, double-crested cormorants, and black-crowned night-herons.

A variety of other bird species, such as American bitterns, marbled godwits, black terns, long-billed curlews, American avocets, and willets are found in the wetlands. Many of these birds use the wetlands to feed and rest before migrating to northern nesting grounds. Some stay through the summer to nest and raise young.

Grassland birds, including eastern and western meadowlarks, bobolinks, upland sandpipers, and grasshopper sparrows, return each year to nest in the grasslands. A number of species of management concern, including burrowing owls, long-billed curlews



© Laura Crawford Williams

Burrowing owls use prairie dog burrows to nest. These young owls have just emerged from the burrow to sit in the sun.

and ferruginous hawks, are commonly observed using Refuge habitats.

In addition to the many species of migratory birds, the Refuge also provides habitat for a resident wildlife such as white-tailed deer, ring-necked pheasants, and sharp-tailed grouse. These species can be seen on the Refuge year-round and provide excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. A variety of small mammals, such as muskrats, Ord's kangaroo rats, and long-tailed weasels, are found in appropriate habitats. Reptiles and amphibians, such as leopard and chorus frogs, snapping turtles, bull snakes, and prairie rattlesnakes, might be seen on the Refuge.

Habitat Management for Wildlife

A variety of management tools are used to provide quality wildlife habitat, including prescribed grazing, prescribed burning, raising or lowering water levels in management pools, controlling noxious weeds, and seeding native plants.

Cattle are often used to manage Refuge habitats.

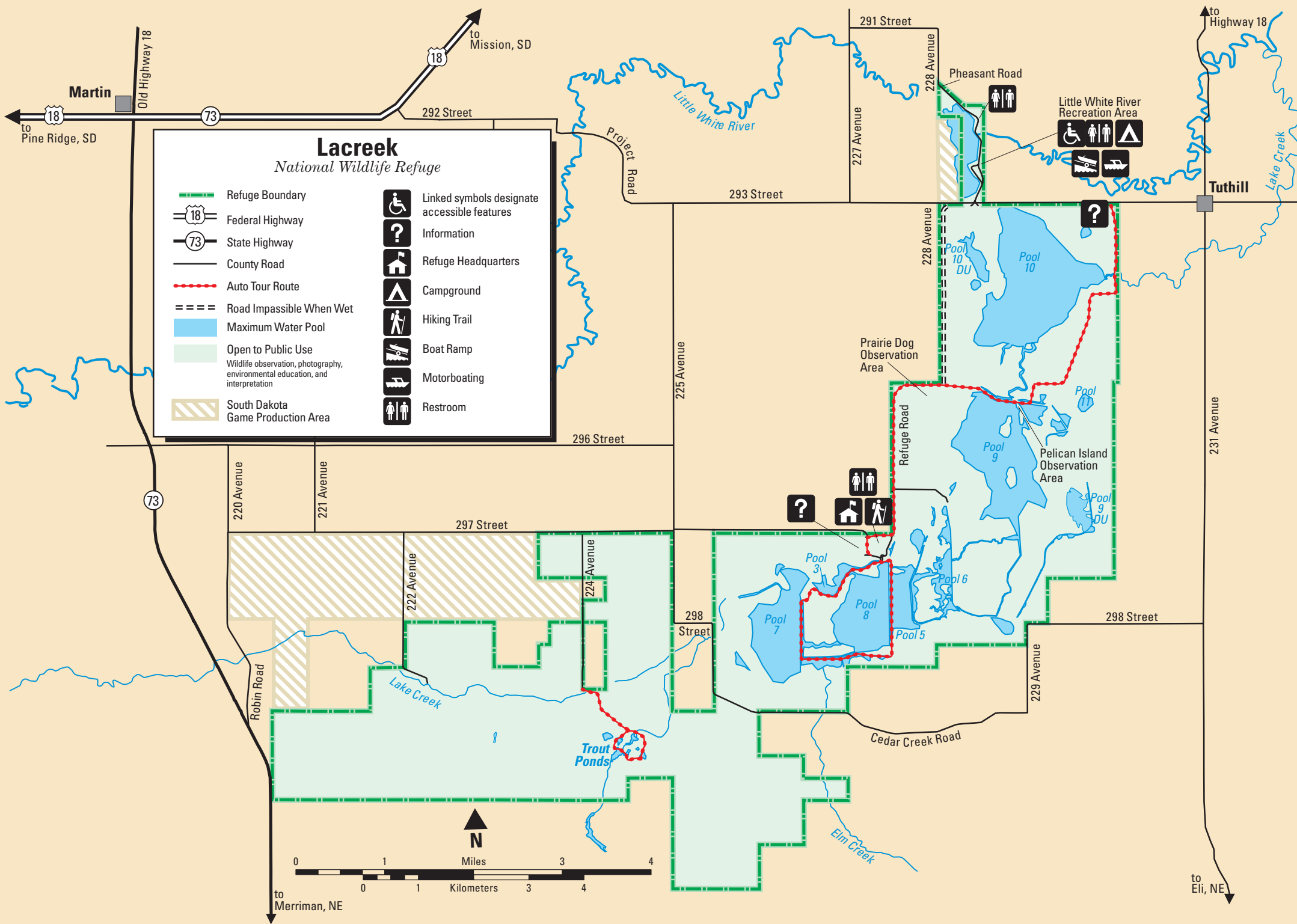


The native plant communities of the Great Plains were shaped over time by the ecological forces of wildfire and grazing. Managers use cattle grazing and prescribed fire to mimic these natural forces. Refuge staff work with neighboring ranchers to graze grasslands at a specific time, location, and with a specified number of cattle. Grazing helps to remove old plant growth, opens up dense stands of wetland vegetation, and stimulates new plant growth and establishment of seedlings.



A prescribed burn in progress.

Prescribed burning is conducted under a “prescription” that describes the conditions that must exist before a fire can be ignited. The current and forecasted weather conditions, including wind speed and direction, relative humidity, and temperatures, are considered. Prescribed burning helps remove heavy accumulations of organic matter, recycle nutrients, reduce exotic species, and control the spread of trees.





A Refuge employee lowering water levels.

An extensive network of earthen dikes and water control structures allow Refuge staff to manipulate water levels. Water levels may be slowly lowered to promote the growth of food for waterfowl. Water levels may be raised to flood food sources and make the food available to ducks, geese, and swans during the spring and fall migrations. Portions of some units may hold

water year-round to provide brood water for ducklings, food resources for over-wintering trumpeter swans, or to help muskrats survive through the winter.

What to See and Do

We invite you to observe wildlife while participating in outdoor recreational opportunities. Many wildlife species are active and visible during the first hour or two after sunrise and again for an hour before dark.

There are several trails on the Refuge (see map). You may also walk on Refuge dikes or to other locations to sit quietly and observe wildlife.

Drive the auto tour route to view waterfowl, bald eagles, great blue herons, sharp-tailed grouse, ring-necked pheasants, white-tailed deer, and painted turtles. The main Refuge road north of headquarters passes a large black-tailed prairie dog town, where you may see golden eagles, badgers,

ferruginous hawks, and burrowing owls. Traveling east on this road leads you to the Pelican Islands, where during the months of April through August, you may see thousands of American white pelicans.

General Regulations

Hours

The Refuge headquarters is open from 7:00 am to 3:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays. Visitors are welcome on the Refuge during daylight hours, with the exception of Little White River Recreation Area, which is open to overnight use.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

We welcome you to observe and photograph wildlife by driving on designated roads, hiking, or by manual-powered boating.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing are allowed for certain species in designated areas of the Refuge. Refer to the hunting and fishing brochure for specific information on these activities.

Travel

Motor vehicles, bicycles, and horses are allowed only on designated roads. All other management trails are closed to these modes of travel unless permission has been granted by the Refuge staff.

Parking

Several parking areas are available and are marked with signs. In addition, parking for the purposes of wildlife observation or photography is allowed throughout the Refuge. Please park where you do not block the road or gates or create a safety concern for other drivers.

Camping

Camping is allowed only at the Little White River Recreation Area.

Campfires

When there is not a burn ban for Bennett County, campfires are allowed only at the Little White River Recreation Area. You must use one of the fire rings or a self-contained portable fire unit.

Boating

Recreational boating is allowed only at the Little White River Recreation Area.

Other Uses

Unless specifically allowed, all other uses are prohibited on Lacreek NWR. Please contact the Refuge Manager for questions regarding other uses.

*Below left:
Muskrat
feeding on
wetland plants.*

*Below right:
White-tailed
deer fawn.*



Alcohol

The possession of alcoholic beverages is prohibited on the entire Refuge, including the Little White River Recreation Area.

Accessibility Information

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental ability. For more information, please contact the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Opportunity, <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eo/public-civil-rights>.

*Below left:
Annual
smartweed
is a preferred
duck food.*

*Below right:
Arrowhead,
especially its
underground
tubers, is
a preferred
trumpeter
swan food
source.*



*Unless otherwise noted, all photos
by Tom Koerner / USFWS.*