

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Mountain Longleaf

*National
Wildlife Refuge*







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

Introduction

The 9,016 acre, Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge is located midway between Atlanta and Birmingham near the city of Anniston, Alabama. The refuge was established within mountainous sections of the former Fort McClellan Army Base. The Appalachian Mountains reach their southern terminus in this region, providing a terrain and landscape more typical of lands to the north. At the same time, Coastal Plain forests of longleaf pine extend northward deep into this highland region.



History

Longleaf pine forests once extended from Virginia to Texas, first supporting Native Americans, and later providing resources for American settlers. Native Americans burned the forests, to increase fruit and berry production, to improve habitat for game species, and to facilitate transportation and movement through the land. Early settlers were quick to recognize the value of longleaf pine forests. Cattle were grazed on the grassy forest floor, turpentine was extracted from live trees, charcoal was manufacture from the wood, and timber was cut to build towns and cities. The city of Anniston was established in 1872 and eventually operated the second largest charcoal fired iron furnaces in the United States. The proximity of abundant iron ore deposits along with extensive longleaf pine forests for charcoal production was responsible for the city's success and growth.

Cover photo: Eastern Fox Squirrel (USFWS - Bill Garland); photo on left: Moorman Mountain (USFWS - Bill Garland); photo above: Northern Cardinal (unknown)

Excessive logging, fire suppression and other human actions have reduced the once vast longleaf pine forests to only three percent of their former range. While a variety of human activities are considered the cause, the greatest and most damaging impact has been from the



curtailment of fire. Without fire, longleaf pine seedlings fail to regenerate, hardwoods encroach on the forest, and the land is eventually transformed into an upland deciduous forest.

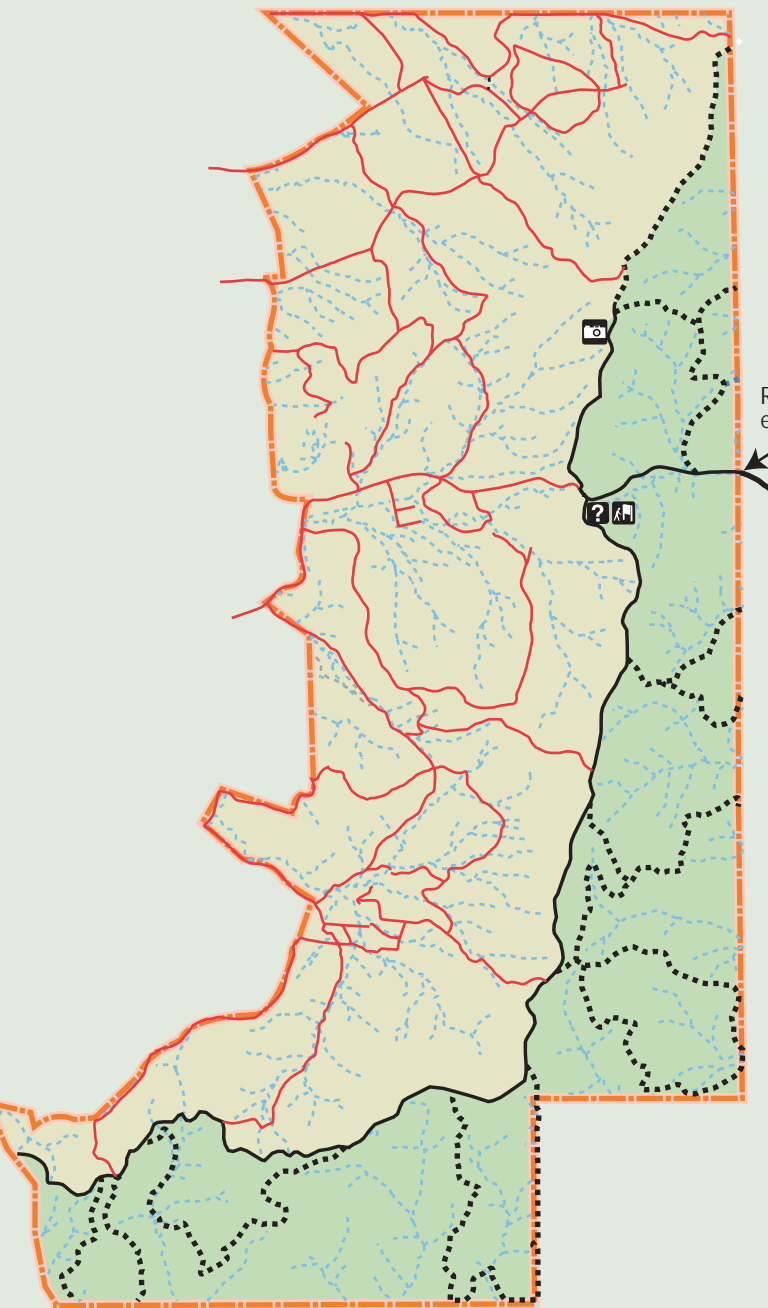
Mountain Longleaf Pine

While longleaf pine once extended over a vast area in the Southeast, only in Northeast Alabama and Northwest Georgia did forests extend beyond the Coastal Plain, through the Piedmont and deep into the Blue Ridge Mountains. While Coastal Plain longleaf pine commonly occurs on deep sands, mountain forests grow on steep rocky slopes and along upland ridges. They are considered the most endangered of the remaining longleaf pine communities. Refuge forests contain the finest remaining fire maintained mountain longleaf pine stands, and the only old-growth forests outside the Coastal Plain.

*Photo above:
Mountain Longleaf
Pine Forest (USFWS
- Bill Garland);
photo below:
Longleaf Pine
Seedling (USFWS -
Bill Garland);
photo at right: Red-
headed Woodpecker
(unknown)*


















Legend

-  Refuge boundary
-  Stream
-  Service road / Pedestrian trail
Authorized vehicles
-  Closed area
-  Public use area
-  Service road / no public access
-  Public use road
-  Refuge information
-  Kiosk
-  Scenic view



The Army

While logging and fire suppression were altering forests throughout the Southeast, refuge lands were selected for military training and eventually became the Fort McClellan Army Base in 1917. The presence of wildfire as a by-product of military training, and less interest in commercial logging continued to sustain remnants of this fire adapted forest type. However, with closure of the fort in 1998, these fires disappeared and the forests were again endangered of disappearing and evolving into a hardwood forest.

Refuge Management

Following creation of the refuge in 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service instituted a prescribed burning program to ensure this remnant of a once vast forest type remained for future generations to enjoy. Forest stands are periodically burned to maintain the rich herbaceous layer and provide a substrate for new seedlings. Forests, some approaching 250 years in age, provide a window into the past and an example of a natural fire maintained longleaf pine forest.

Photo above: White-Fringeless Orchid (USFWS - Bill Garland); photo below: Spring Seepage (USFWS - Bill Garland); photos at right, top to bottom: Kentucky Warbler (USFWS); Eastern Wild Turkey (NCTC, USFWS)





Longleaf pine forms one cover type within a much larger mosaic of refuge forest communities. Within this mosaic, other forests include; hardwoods along streams, ravines and north facing slopes; shortleaf and Virginia pine on uplands and ridge tops; and shrub bogs within spring seepages along the mountain front. This forest mosaic creates a rich diversity of both Appalachian and Coastal Plain biota. Rare



plants, such as white fringeless orchid, can be found in bogs, while species, such as turkey oak and ground juniper, reach their northern and southern range extensions.





Wildlife

The refuge provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. Deer and turkey are particularly abundant, and provide recreational hunting opportunities on the refuge. Other game species include bobwhite, mourning dove, opossum, rabbit, raccoon, squirrels, fox, bobcat, and coyote. The refuge's forested connection to the Appalachian Mountains, has allowed species such as black bear to occasionally be sited.



Large tracts of relatively unfragmented forest provide habitat for neotropical migratory birds. Many of these species have recently experienced population declines from loss of habitat. Refuge forests in particular are important to species that require large forested tracts for nesting. Some of the more sensitive forest birds that nest on the refuge include yellow-billed cuckoo, red-eyed vireo, black-and-white warbler, worm-eating warbler, ovenbird, Kentucky warbler, and scarlet tanager.



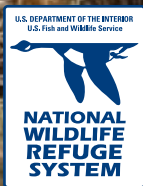


Photos on left, top to bottom: Ovenbird (S. Maslowski); Scarlet Tanager (S. Maslowski); Sphagnum Bog (USFWS - Bill Garland); above: Forest Wetland (USFWS - Bill Garland)

Visitor Information

The refuge is undergoing cleanup from past army activities with only the eastern portion of the refuge open to the public. Visitors from the east can access the refuge from I-20 at Heflin, by traveling north along Route 9. Visitors from the west can exit I-20 at Golden Springs in Anniston, travel north on Golden Springs Road and turn right on Choccolocco Road (see map). All access into the refuge is through the eastern gate via Bain's Gap Road.

Visitor information is available at the kiosk on Bain's Gap. Vehicle traffic is allowed along Ridge Road North to Moorman Mountain Overlook and along portions of Ridge Road South. The overlook provides scenic views across the Choccolocco Valley into the adjoining Talladega Mountains. North of the overlook, Ridge Road North is closed to vehicles, but open to hiking and wildlife observation. Enjoy day hikes along the scenic Ridge Roads, with panoramic views both to the east and west of the refuge.



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