

# Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Welcome to Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is located in northeastern North Carolina, and stretches through Hyde, Tyrrell, and Washington Counties. Today Pocosin Lakes Refuge encompasses 110,106 acres which are used to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, other migratory birds, and threatened and endangered species, to protect and enhance the pocosin habitat, and to provide opportunities for wildlife interpretation, outdoor recreation and environmental education. The designated wildlife observation areas and trails offer the best wildlife viewing opportunities for many species of wildlife. Pocosin Lakes Refuge is one of more than 540 National Wildlife Refuges that protect over 100 million acres throughout the United States. Come and enjoy the natural beauty on your National Wildlife Refuge!

## Habitat & History

The term pocosin is an Algonquian Indian word meaning “swamp on a hill.” These pocosin wetlands, also called southeastern shrub bogs, are at a slightly higher elevation than the surrounding landscape and have deep organic soils called peat. The organic soil is made up of leaves, sticks, and other organic matter that accumulates and decomposes slowly over time. The peat soil acts as a sponge, holding water at these higher elevations and releasing it very slowly—thus creating a swamp on a hill. Once lost, it can take over 100 years to create approximately one inch of peat soil. The pocosin is a fire adapted ecosystem. Many of the plant species that occur in pocosins require fire to release new seeds and provide conditions to allow new growth.

Pocosin Lakes Refuge was established in 1990 when The Conservation Fund in conjunction with the Richard King Mellon Foundation donated over 93,000 acres to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The adjacent 12,000 acre Pungo Refuge, established in 1963 to serve as an inviolate waterfowl sanctuary, was combined with these new refuge lands and became the Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes Refuge. Prior to becoming a wildlife refuge, thousands of acres of pocosin wetlands were severely degraded by an extensive canal and ditch system that was used to drain these wetlands for timber harvest, agriculture, pasture and peat mining. Draining the lands also dried out the peat soils making the lands much more susceptible to catastrophic wildfires and ground fire. Since 1990, the refuge has been restoring the natural hydrology to make the pocosins wet again. This will provide a healthy, functioning wetland; improving wildlife habitat, water quality, and sequestering (i.e., storing) tons of carbon and nitrogen that would have been released into the atmosphere and waterways.

## Refuge Management

The refuge staff works to provide high quality habitat conditions for a variety of wildlife. Habitat management actions include cooperative farming, moist soil management, invasive species management, hydrology restoration, prescribed burning, water management and wildfire protection and suppression.

## Wildlife

More than 300 different wildlife species, including the endangered red wolf and red-cockaded woodpecker, inhabit the refuge. During the winter months on the Pungo Unit, visitors can observe tens of thousands of tundra swans, snow geese, Canada geese and a variety of duck species. Numerous wading birds, shore birds, Neotropical migratory song birds and birds of prey (including the bald eagle) utilize the refuge. Abundant black bears and deer are easily observed roaming and foraging on the refuge. Other species including river otters, bobcats, foxes, five-lined skinks, green tree frogs, yellow-bellied sliders, canebrake rattlesnakes and other reptiles and amphibians can also be found on Pocosin Lakes Refuge. Please see the refuge’s wildlife list for more information.

## Things to Do

Wildlife observation and wildlife photography

Hunting and fishing (please see our annual hunting and fishing brochure for more information)

Environmental education and interpretation (you can find more information on these opportunities at our Visitor Center in Columbia, NC)

## Regulations

- The refuge is open for “Daylight Use Only” (30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset).

- Refuge Roads open to vehicles are for licensed vehicles only; state and federal traffic regulations apply.

- Please abide by all refuge regulatory signs.

- Prohibited activities include: littering, fires, cutting and/or removing vegetation, taking or collecting plants, animals, flowers, nuts, berries, or any other items, baiting or feeding wildlife, riding all terrain vehicles (ATV’s) except as provided for in our hunting regulations, and all commercial activities

- Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit on all refuge roads is 25 mph.

- Please use good judgment and caution when driving on any refuge road. Road surface conditions vary greatly due to weather conditions and some unimproved (dirt) roads may become impassible at times.

## Safety

- Biting insects and ticks are numerous along trails during summer months. Use of insect repellent is advised.

- Many black bears roam throughout the refuge. If you encounter a bear, never run. Instead of running, let the bear know you are there by backing up slowly while waving your arms above your head and speaking loudly.

- Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when to expect your return.

**For the most up-to-date Refuge Map, please see  
[fws.gov/pocosin-lakes/map](https://fws.gov/pocosin-lakes/map)**



photo: Mike Dunn



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**For more information please contact:**

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