

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Chickasaw and Lower Hatchie

National Wildlife Refuges





Mission:

To protect, restore, enhance, and manage for public benefit a representative portion of bottomland hardwood forest, wetland, and associated habitats for wintering waterfowl, other migratory birds, and endangered and threatened species.



This blue goose, designed by “Ding Darling,” has become a symbol of the Refuge System.

Introduction

The National Refuge System is an extensive network of lands and waters protected and managed especially for wildlife and its habitat. Refuges stretch across the United States from above the Arctic Circle in Alaska to the subtropical waters of the Florida Keys and beyond to the Caribbean and South Pacific. The National Wildlife Refuge System is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which protects and manages over 500 refuges for wildlife and people to enjoy.

Chickasaw and Lower Hatchie NWR’s lie adjacent to the Mississippi River, along with the nearby Sunk Lake Public Use Natural Area, and occupy over 37,000 acres in west Tennessee.



photo: USFWS

Open Lake

These refuges include many of the major ecological communities found in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley (LMAV) Ecosystem. When visiting these refuges you can explore extensive bottomland hardwood forests; riverine habitats of streams, oxbow lakes, and sloughs; open lands managed for migratory birds; sandy grassland savannahs along the Mississippi River; and a remarkable upland bluff ecotone.

*cover photo:
Eugene Hester
ducks in flooded timber*

What was once a vast expanse of mature bottomland hardwood forests along the Mississippi River and its tributaries is now only small fragmented pockets of forestland. Since 1960 the loss of bottomland hardwood forests have been the most dramatic in the southeastern United States, particularly in the LMAV. Conversion to agriculture and other uses have accounted for most of the losses.

These bottomland hardwood forests are highly productive communities of plants and animals characterized and maintained by alternating annual wet and dry periods. The management strategies on Chickasaw and Lower Hatchie NWR's are geared toward re-establishment and protection of the natural water cycles associated with the Hatchie, Forked Deer, and Mississippi Rivers.

The forest management program focuses on protection, enhancement, and regeneration of bottomland hardwood tree species, with emphasis on "red oaks" and other important mast producing species. Common bottomland hardwood tree species include a variety of oaks such as cherrybark, Nuttall, willow, and overcup oak. Other species include eastern cottonwood, persimmon, sweetgum, sweet pecan, hackberry, hickory and others. Although not truly a "hardwood," bald cypress frequently occurs throughout the bottomlands.

Moist soil management and agriculture are also tools the refuges use to manage for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Moist soil management uses water manipulation at certain times of the year to promote natural vegetation and invertebrate habitat for migratory birds. This natural vegetation combined with



photo: USFWS

Afforestation



photo: USFWS

Yellowlegs



Stilt

agricultural foods such as corn, millet, and rice provide the needed nutrients for wintering and migrating waterfowl and shorebirds.

By managing the “entire system” (water cycles, plant and wildlife communities...and man’s influences), these refuges can restore many of the original resource values that have been lost from the LMAV Ecosystem.

Access to these areas is varied and is subject to seasonal weather conditions, river flooding, and refuge management activities. Check with the refuge manager before venturing out.



Much of the refuge is open for motorized and non-motorized **boating**. There are a number of accessible boat ramps. Canoeists can enjoy paddling in sloughs and oxbow lakes, as well as along small rivers and streams. Annual flood conditions usually eliminate all refuge access except for boating. However, river flooding creates hazardous conditions for all boaters and extreme caution must be exercised.



Legalized licensed motorized land vehicles may use the refuge road system. For resource protection and safety, all-terrain vehicles (ATV’s/ ATC’s) are prohibited.



Hikers and other visitors are encouraged to use established **foot trails** and **logging trails** throughout the refuges.



Several areas have been developed for **Handicapped Accessibility**. A handicapped accessible fishing pier is located at Champion Lake and Sunk Lake on Lower Hatchie NWR. Handicapped access is available at the Observation Tower on Chickasaw and Lower Hatchie National Wildlife Refuges.

For additional information on accessibility for the disabled, contact the refuge manager.



Off-road/mountain **biking** is encouraged on the refuge road and trail system.



Horseback riders may enjoy riding along roads open to motorized traffic only. **Riding** off-road into woods or foot trails is prohibited unless specifically permitted.



Primitive camping is allowed only during refuge hunts at the Barr Road camping area located on Chickasaw NWR (See Map). Otherwise, camping and fires are prohibited on the refuges.



Sportfishing with pole and line/rod and reel only is permitted year round on most areas of the refuges. Spring months are best for crappie, sunfishes, bluegill, largemouth, and striped bass. Catfish can be caught throughout the summer.



Hunting is seasonally open at Chickasaw and Lower Hatchie NWR's in designated areas marked on the refuge hunting permit and by signs. The refuges are open for deer, small game, and waterfowl hunting. Contact the refuge manager for current hunting regulations.



photo: USFWS

pintails in flight

Who Lives Here

These refuges support a variety of wildlife. Wintertime visitors can see large concentrations of migratory waterfowl such as mallards, pintails, shovelers, blue-winged teal, Canada geese, ring-necked ducks, wood ducks, and many others.

Neotropical migratory songbirds such as vireos, warblers, tanagers, flycatchers, indigo buntings, bluebirds, and many others are common summertime residents in the forested areas. Shorebirds such as yellowlegs, sandpipers and plovers, can be seen using the wetland mud flats and river sandbars of the refuges during their spring and fall migrations. Great blue herons, little blue herons, snowy egrets, and other wading birds are plentiful.

Birds of prey such as the bald eagle, great horned owl, red-tailed hawk, Mississippi kite, and other raptors are frequently observed by refuge visitors, as well as game birds including wild turkey, bobwhite quail, woodcock and mourning dove.

As with most wildlife, mammals are elusive and sometimes hard to observe. White-tailed deer, beavers, woodchucks, muskrats and raccoons are more easily spotted while foxes, bobcats, mink, coyotes, and river otters are much more secretive. Mammals often leave indications of their presence by way of tracks, droppings, and hair.

Reptiles and amphibians such as turtles, tree frogs, salamanders, toads, lizards, and numerous snakes are common inhabitants of these refuges and can be seen in wetlands as well as upland areas. Visitors may encounter dangerous snakes such as cottonmouths, copperheads, and timber rattlesnakes. As with all refuge wildlife, these creatures are protected. Please do not disturb them or their habitat.



photo: USFWS

Eagles



photo: USFWS

Deer Fawn



photo: USFWS

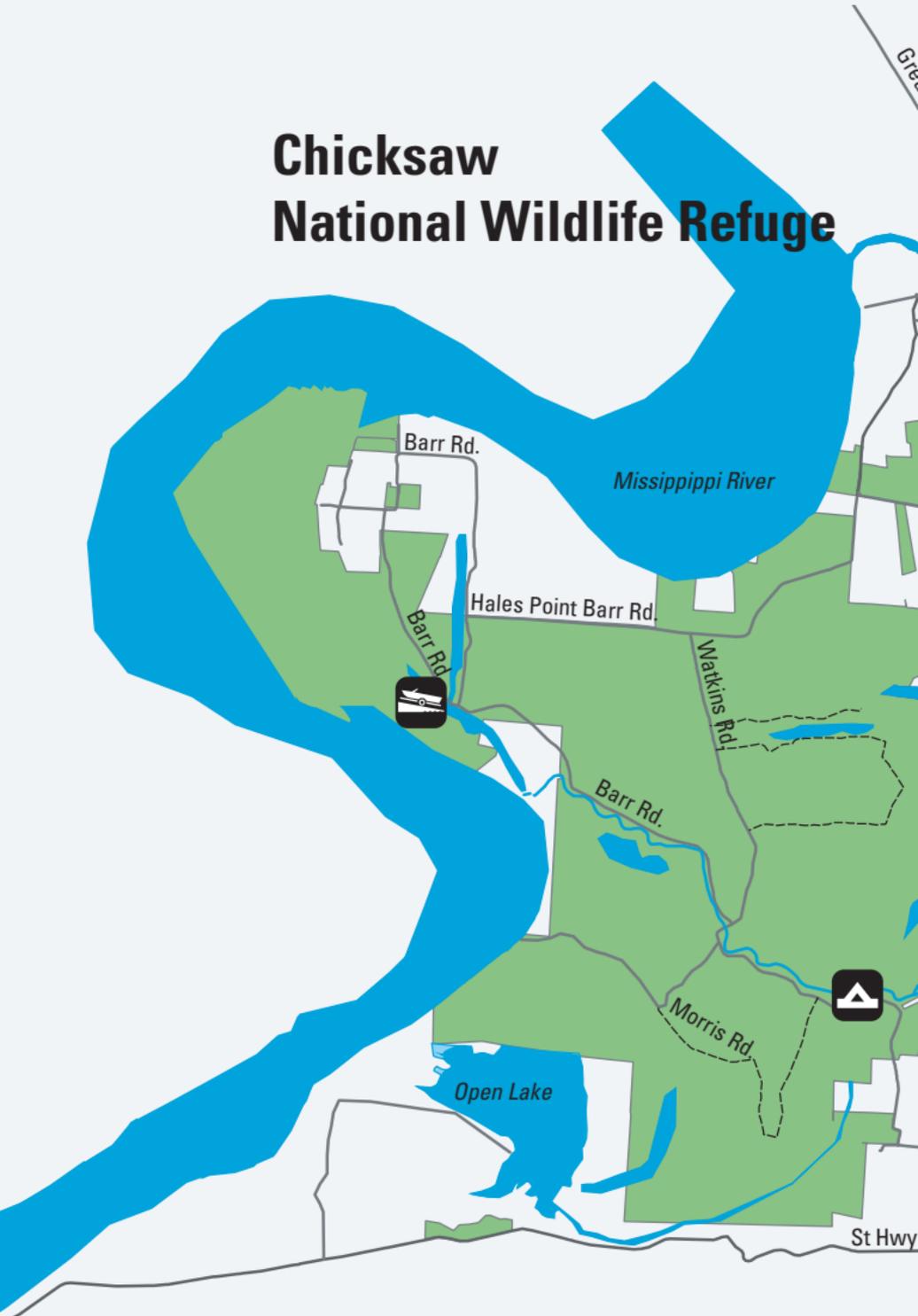
Springpeeper

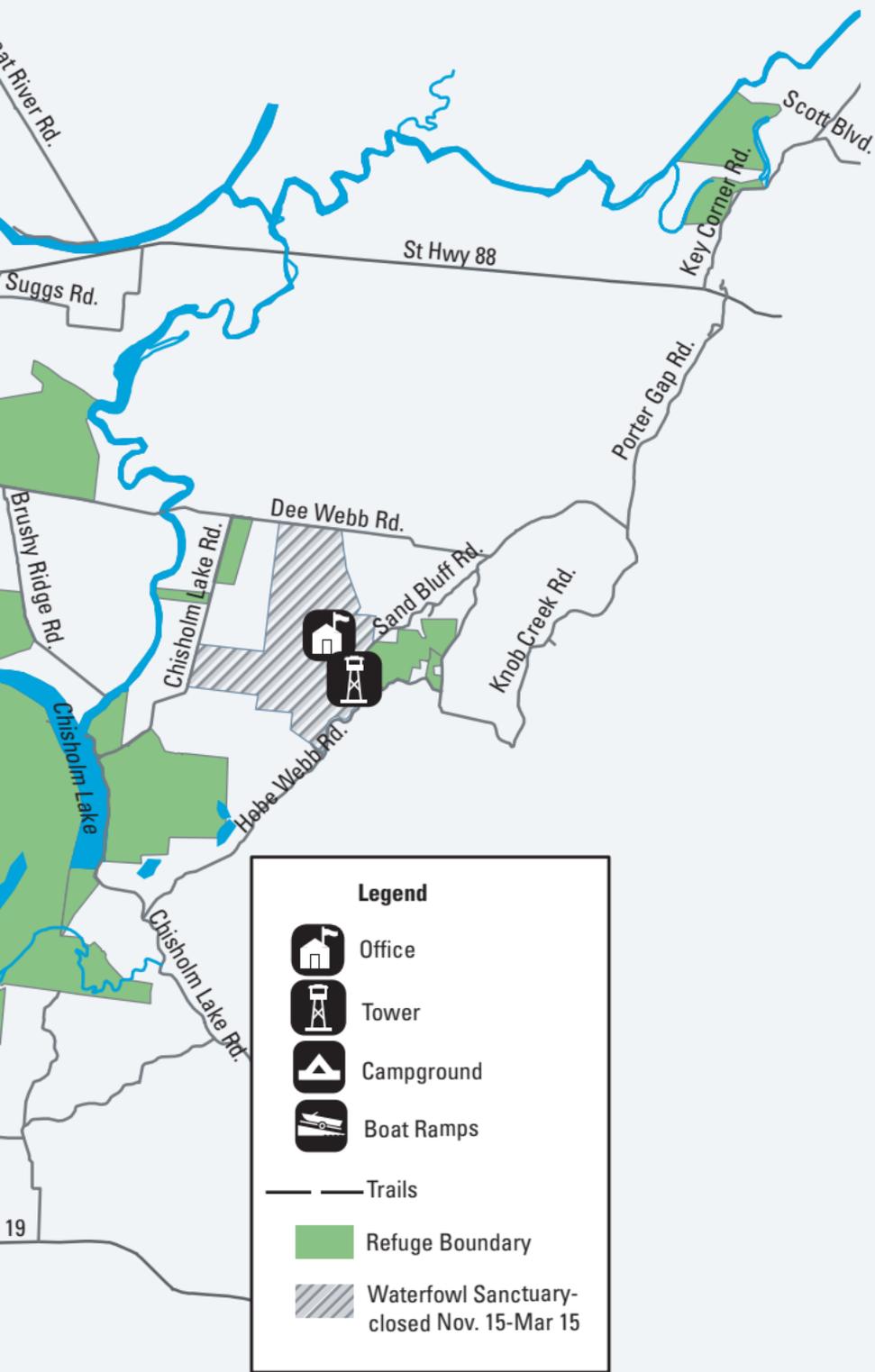


photo: USFWS

Copperhead

Chicksaw National Wildlife Refuge





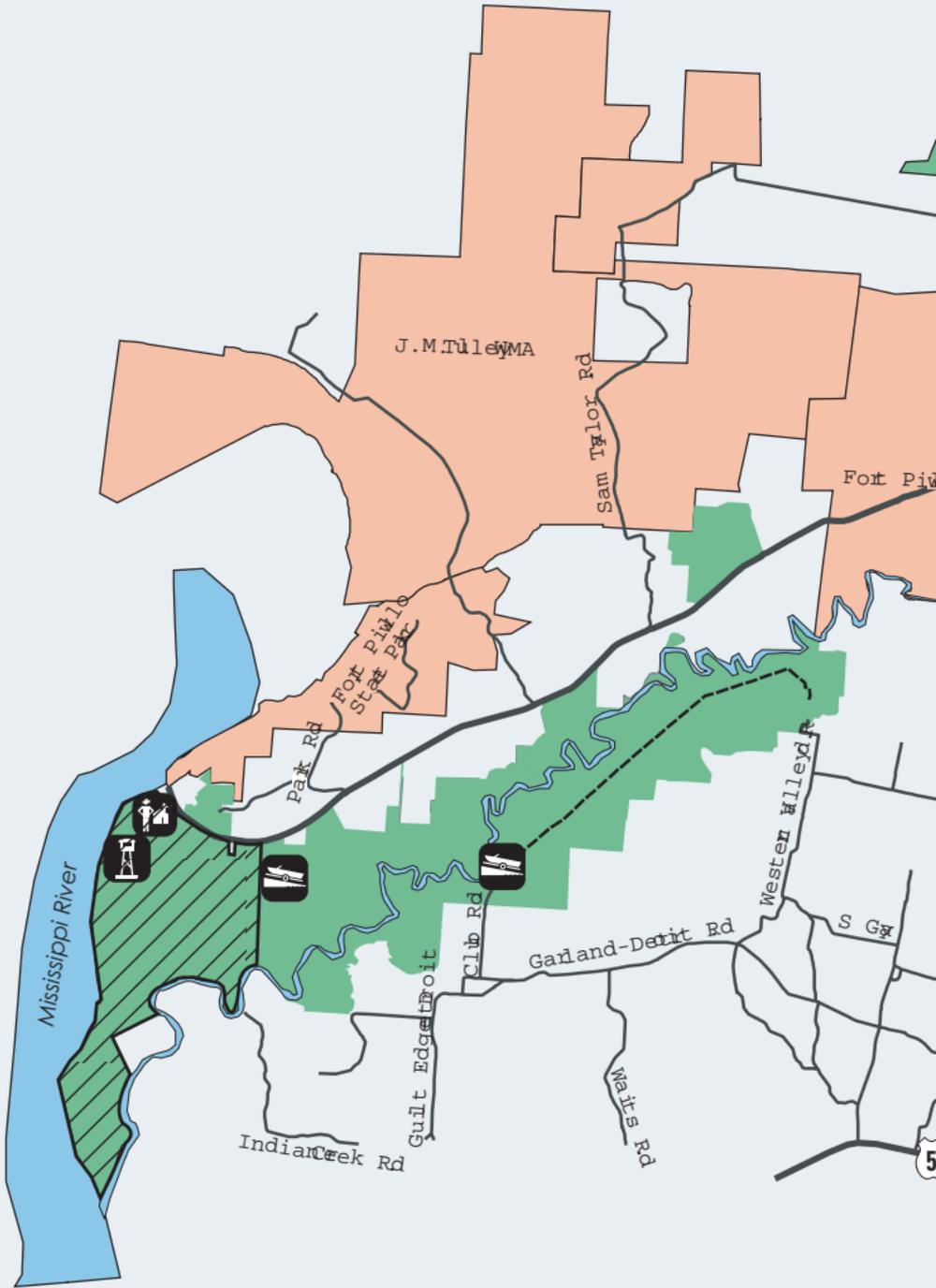
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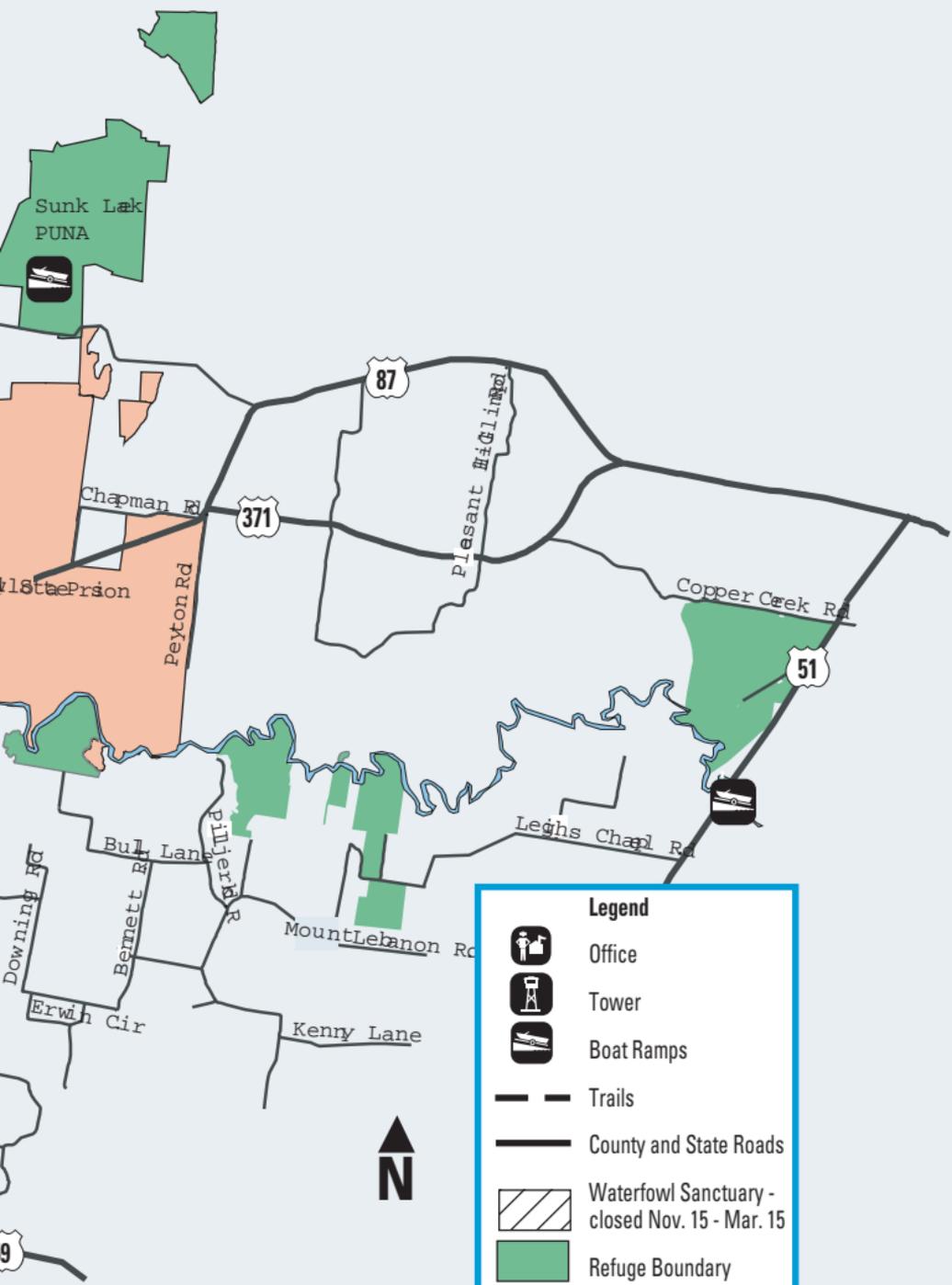
-  Office
-  Tower
-  Campground
-  Boat Ramps

-  Trails
-  Refuge Boundary
-  Waterfowl Sanctuary-closed Nov. 15-Mar 15

Lower Hatchie

National Wildlife Refuge





Legend

-  Office
-  Tower
-  Boat Ramps
-  Trails
-  County and State Roads
-  Waterfowl Sanctuary - closed Nov. 15 - Mar. 15
-  Refuge Boundary
-  State Lands

photo: USFWS



least tern

photo: USFWS



Whitetail Deer buck

Calendar of Wildlife Events

Most of the bottomlands become dry after winter/spring flooding. Mississippi kites are seen soaring over open lands. Wild turkeys can be seen along roadsides and forest edges. Flycatchers and purple martins (daytime) and bats and nighthawks (evening) actively hunt summer insects. Endangered least terns nest and feed along the Mississippi River sandbars.

Squirrels and other small mammals become more active with the advent of cooler weather. Early waterfowl migrations can be seen. White-tailed deer antlers have hardened. Snakes can be found moving to winter den sites. Bottomland hardwood forests are ablaze with red and gold fall colors. Natural and planted waterfowl foods have ripened and will provide food for the wintering birds. White pelicans utilize the lakes and rivers during their migrations.

Early rains have brought water back to the bottomlands. By mid winter large concentrations of waterfowl have migrated to the refuges. Resident and migratory bald eagles can be seen watching for injured waterfowl and fish to feed upon. Coyotes roam the refuges in search of anything to eat. Cold weather has frozen much of the refuge wetlands by late winter.

Late winter rains and spring thaw elevates river levels, and flooding begins at the refuges. Bottomland hardwoods come out of dormancy in time for the arrival of many Neotropical songbirds. Most waterfowl have migrated back north to the breeding grounds. Crappie and bass fishing are at their peak.

photo: David Brown



Dickcissel



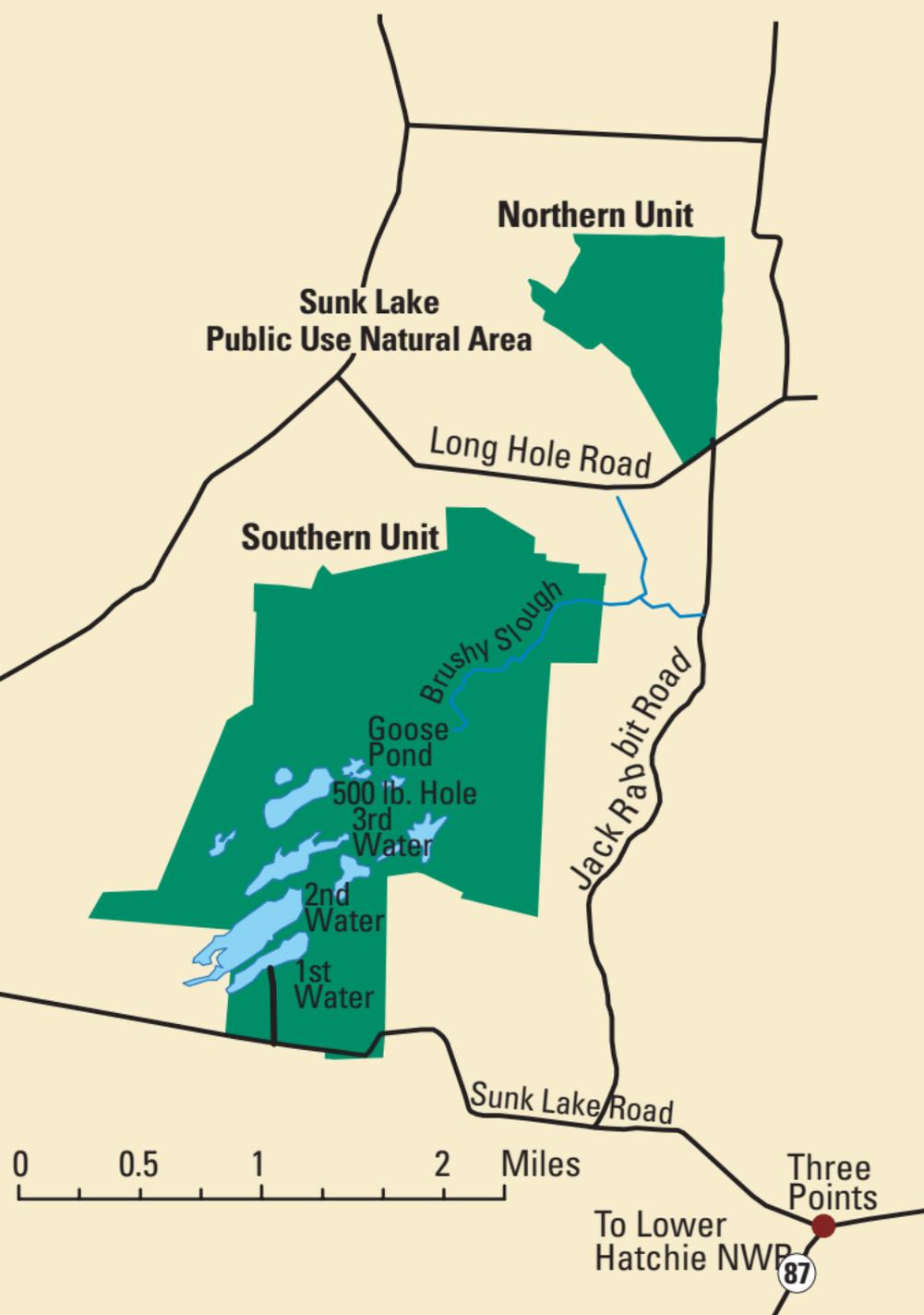


photo: USFWS
mallard duck



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