

# Pocosin Lakes

## National Wildlife Refuge - Pungo Unit Regulations and Visitor Information

### Welcome to Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Pungo Unit

The National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the world's premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve America's fish, wildlife and plants. Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida's Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the System has grown to more than 150 million acres, 553 national wildlife refuges and other units of the Refuge System, plus 38 wetland management districts. For more information visit the Service's National Wildlife Refuge System web page at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.

You are on the Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. The Pungo Unit is 12,350 acres in size and includes land in Hyde and Washington Counties in North Carolina. The purpose of the Pungo Unit, originally established as Pungo National Wildlife Refuge in 1963, is to provide habitat for migratory, wintering waterfowl. It is an inviolate waterfowl sanctuary, meaning waterfowl are protected from hunting and disturbance. The 2,800-acre Pungo Lake, in the center of the Pungo Unit, is a historic roost site for waterfowl and one of the main attractions for the birds. The lake is shallow, but because the water is naturally dark in color, sunlight does not penetrate and thus very few plants that waterfowl feed on grow in the lake. The birds primarily use the lake for roosting and loafing (hanging out between foraging excursions). The birds forage in the surrounding wetlands and agricultural fields (both on and off of the refuge).

There are 1,250 acres of agricultural fields on the Pungo Unit. The Service manages this crop ground via a Cooperative Farming Program. We enter into agreements with local farmers to produce crops in the fields (we alternate corn and soybeans as part of an integrated pest management program and double crop winter wheat in some of the fields). Rather than pay us rent for using the land, the farmers leave a portion of corn standing in the fields for waterfowl and other wildlife to eat. It's a win/win for all of us, the farmers, the Service, and the critters.

A third component of our waterfowl habitat management is our moist soil management program. Moist soil units are impounded areas where we can control water levels to grow native wetland plants that waterfowl eat. We have five moist soil impoundments on the Pungo Unit totaling about 450 acres.

Migratory, wintering waterfowl (swans, geese, and ducks) begin arriving at the Pungo Unit in October with large numbers arriving in November (generally during the first full moon of the month). Waterfowl numbers continue to grow until they reach their peak, usually in December or January. The Pungo Unit hosts peak numbers well in excess of 100,000 birds annually.

Tundra swans are large, all white (although juveniles are gray) birds. They tend to travel in small groups. They nest in Alaska and western Canada. While most of the waterfowl at Pungo migrate north and south along the Atlantic Flyway, tundra swans migrate across the continent. Northeast North Carolina hosts more than 80% of the eastern subpopulation of tundra swans and peak numbers at Pungo often exceed 25,000.

Snow geese are larger than ducks, but smaller than tundra swans. They are white with black wing tips, but there is also a dark color phase known as the blue goose. Snow geese are very gregarious, often flocking together in very large groups. In recent years, the peak number of snow geese has been increasing and is approaching the 100,000 mark.

There are several species of ducks on Pungo in the winter including mallard, American black duck, blue-winged and green-winged teal, northern pintail, ring-necked duck, American wigeon, gadwall, and northern shoveler. Wood ducks can be observed year round on the refuge.

Much of the Pungo Unit consists of pocosin wetlands. Pocosins are a unique type of wetland characterized by high-organic-content soils (called peat) and southeastern shrub bog vegetation. The thick understory includes shrub species such as red bay, sweet bay, loblolly bay, gall berry, and wax myrtle. The overstory is usually pond pine that can be anywhere from fully stocked to widely scattered. Pocosins provide great habitat for American black bears and the Pungo Unit supports one of the densest populations reported anywhere in the scientific literature.

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**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
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## Recreational Opportunities

Watching and photographing wildlife is popular on the Pungo Unit. Waterfowl observation (during the winter) and bear watching (nearly year-round) are the most popular, but other birds and wildlife are plentiful on Pungo as well. In addition, there are limited deer and feral hog hunting opportunities and some fishing.

## Access

Generally, the Pungo Unit is open for daylight use only. We define daylight as 30 minutes before official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset. Official sunrise and sunset times change almost daily and are different as you move east and west. Official sunrise/sunset tables are available on the internet and from other sources. In general, however, you cannot be on the Pungo Unit when it's dark.

There are approximately 44 miles of roads on the Pungo Unit. All of them are dirt surface and can get slippery and rough during wet periods and dusty during dry periods. About half of roads are open to licensed vehicles at least part of the year. Some of these roads are closed to vehicles during the wintering waterfowl season (November through February) and some may be closed to all public entry during that time. Closed roads are shown on the map in this brochure and/or posted with signs. Sometimes, roads have to be temporarily closed because they become impassable. State traffic laws apply on refuge roads when they are open to vehicles. The speed limit on all refuge roads is 25 m.p.h. unless otherwise posted. Unless closed to all public entry, the roads on the Pungo Unit are open for foot travel and bicycling.

See the map in this brochure for the location of the following state, county, and refuge roads that can be used to access refuge areas by licensed vehicle:

- NC Highway 45, a paved state road.
- Pat's Road, a paved county road.
- South Pungo Road, a dirt refuge road.
- Hyde Park Road, a dirt refuge road that is gated at the southern refuge boundary and closed to vehicles south of South Pungo Road during the wintering waterfowl season.
- D-Canal Road, a dirt refuge road.

- Molt Road, a dirt refuge road that is closed to all public entry during the wintering waterfowl season.
- West Lake Road, a dirt refuge road that may be closed to vehicles during the wintering waterfowl season.
- South Lake Road, a dirt refuge road part of which may be closed to vehicles or all public entry during the wintering waterfowl season.
- Refuge Road, a paved county road.
- Van Staalduin Road, a dirt refuge road open to vehicles from Refuge Road to South Pungo Road.
- Allen Road, a dirt refuge road (which can become impassable and is closed when wet); it is gated at the southern refuge boundary. Most of Allen Road is within the boundaries of the Pungo Unit and subject to Pungo Unit regulations. There are three locations (two roads and one foot-bridge) along the Pungo Unit section of Allen Road where visitors can walk or bicycle across the Allen Road Canal to refuge lands east of Allen Road and off of the Pungo Unit. However, visitors should note the private lands interspersed in this area and avoid trespassing on these private properties.

## Other Access Restrictions

All of the agricultural fields and moist soil units on the Pungo Unit are closed to all public entry during the wintering waterfowl season (November – February).

Pungo Lake is closed to all public entry year round; boats are not allowed on Pungo Lake at any time.

The entire Pungo Unit is closed to all public entry during the special six-day, deer and feral hog gun hunts except for those persons with a valid permit to participate in the hunts. There are four of these six-day (Monday through Saturday) hunts during late September and October. Please see our *Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Hunting and Fishing Regulations* brochure, which is updated annually, for more information on hunting opportunities on the Pungo Unit.

## Waterfowl Observation

Although waterfowl can be seen almost anywhere on Pungo during the waterfowl season (November – February), we have designated five observation areas/points that usually provide good waterfowl observation opportunities. Refer to the map in this brochure for locations.

*1. Hyde Park Observation Point*  
This area features one of our moist soil management units. Often, millet is planted in part of this impoundment and it sometimes attracts large concentrations of ducks.

From November through February, most of the section of Hyde Park Road south of the South Pungo Road intersection is closed to all public entry to prevent waterfowl disturbance in this moist soil unit. However, you can park at the Hyde Park/South Pungo Road intersection (please do not block the gate or roads) and walk a short distance south on Hyde Park Road (to the “Closed Area” signs) to look at the birds.

*2. Pungo Lake Observation Platform and Charles Kuralt Trail Site*  
This elevated platform on the southern tip of Pungo Lake provides unobstructed views of Pungo Lake and the surrounding pocosin. Large concentrations of waterfowl can sometimes be seen from the platform, usually when the wind is from southerly directions.

A Charles Kuralt Trail kiosk is located in the parking lot. The Kuralt Trail connects a number of refuges in eastern North Carolina that native North Carolinian Charles Kuralt visited in his time “on the road”. For more information on the Charles Kuralt Trail visit [www.northeast-nc.com/kuralt/](http://www.northeast-nc.com/kuralt/).

*3. Pungo Lake Observation Point*  
Take a stroll on the Duck Pen Wildlife Trail out to the Pungo Lake Observation Point on the south-central side of Pungo Lake.

Park along the shoulder of South Lake Road near the trailhead; do not block the road or trail, but be careful to not get off of the road bed as you could easily get your vehicle stuck.

The trail is approximately ½ mile long leading to an observation/photo blind on the shore of Pungo Lake. Large concentrations of waterfowl can usually be seen on this part of the lake from November through February.

Be very quiet as you walk the trail and while in the blind to avoid disturbing and scaring the birds away. Stay on the trail and within the fenced areas; all of the surrounding areas are closed to all public entry to protect wildlife. The trail and observation point are open for foot travel only during the waterfowl season; bicycles and pets are not allowed on the trail.

#### 4. *West Lake Road Observation Point*

Located at the south end of West Lake Road (near the intersection with South Lake Rd), this point is a great location for watching waterfowl flying back and forth between Pungo Lake and the foraging areas to the west and southwest during the winter. Early morning and late afternoon are often the best times to see these flights.

#### 5. *North Lake Woods Observation Area*

The wooded area between North Lake Road and Pungo Lake provides a naturally concealed area for visitors to see large concentrations of waterfowl on the lake. To prevent disturbance to the birds, you are not allowed to go out of the woods and into the open lakeshore area.

Park at the gate on North Lake Road near the D-Canal Road intersection (please do not block the road or gate) and walk east on North Lake Road. About one mile down the road (see a farm road going off to the left) there's a trail going into the woods on the right leading to Pungo Lake. Less than ½ mile further east on North Lake Road is a small road on the right that also leads to Pungo Lake.

### **General Prohibitions**

Generally, everything other than those activities specifically authorized are prohibited on national wildlife refuges. Prohibited activities include:

- taking wildlife or wildlife parts (eggs, antler sheds, etc.) other than as authorized under our hunting and fishing regulations
- cutting or removing vegetation
- spotlighting (shinning lights, including vehicle headlights, on wildlife)
- open fires
- All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) except as provided for in our hunting regulations
- all commercial activities except as allowed under a Special Use Permit
- baiting (placing any food, lure, or attractant on the refuge for any purpose)
- littering

### **Our Mission**

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service.

# Pocosin Lakes Refuge: Pungo Unit

## Legend

-  Information
-  Maintenance compound
-  Observation areas
-  Roads closed to vehicles from Nov-Feb
-  Refuge roads closed to vehicles
-  Roads open to vehicles
-  Pungo Unit boundary
-  Duck Pen Wildlife Trail to Observation Point
-  Areas closed from Nov-Feb
-  Farm fields - closed Nov-Feb
-  Moist soil units - closed Nov-Feb
-  Pungo Lake - closed year round

## Observation points:

- 1** 1. Hyde Park Obs Point
- 2** 2. Pungo Lake Platform and Charles Kuralt Trail site
- 3** 3. Pungo Lake Obs Point
- 4** 4. West Lake Road Obs Point
- 5** 5. North Lake Woods Obs Area

Observation areas and routes may be subject to closure at management's discretion. Park along road edge.

