Refuge Manager
DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge
1434 316th Lane
Missouri Valley, IA 51555
Phone 712/388-4800

People with hearing disabilities may contact the refuge via the Federal Information Relay System at 1 800/877 8339.

Website: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/desoto

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

DeSoto

National Wildlife Ref-

Snowgeese!
Dave Menke, USFWS

Boating at Bullhead
Bruce Weber, USFWS

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge lies on the wide plain formed by prehistoric flooding and shifting of the Missouri River. Each spring and fall since the end of the last ice age, spectacular flights of ducks and geese have marked the changing seasons along this traditional waterfowl flyway.

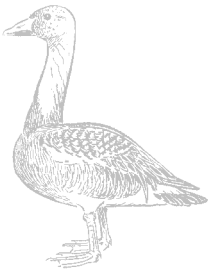
Vast changes have taken place in the Missouri River Valley since settlement in the early 1800s. Land clearing, drainage projects, river channelization and flood control measures during the past 150 years have transformed the Missouri River floodplain from diverse wildlife habitat to farmland.

DeSoto is part of a network of refuges devoted to preserving and restoring increasingly scarce habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife. The "**Blue Goose**" symbol (shown below) represents this *National Wildlife Refuge System*, a collection of over 500 refuges protected and managed for wildlife, habitat and people.

Waterfowl at Sunset
Dave Menke, USFWS

DeSoto: A Stopover for Waterfowl

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge's primary purpose is to serve as a stopover for migrating ducks and geese. During typical years, 550,000 snow geese utilize the refuge as a resting and feeding area during their fall migration between the Arctic nesting grounds and the Gulf Coast wintering areas. Peak populations of 50,000 or more ducks, mostly mallards, are common on the refuge during the fall migration. October and November are the months of peak waterfowl use, with smaller concentrations of ducks and geese returning in March and early April.



Bald Eagle
Mike Lockhart, USFWS

Bald eagles follow the geese into the area, with many wintering here until March. Peak numbers of bald eagles usually occur in late November and December, and again in early March. As many as 145 have been seen here at one time. Bald eagles are often seen perched in cottonwoods along DeSoto Lake when waterfowl are present, and good viewing opportunities are available from the DeSoto Visitor Center.

Photos Above:
Eastern Bluebird
Dave Menke, USFWS

Two Fawns
USFWS

Cottontail
E. Smith, USFWS

Pheasant in Snow
J.Jave, USFWS

Wood Duck
Dave Menke, USFWS

An interesting assortment of warblers, gulls, shorebirds and other bird life also can be observed on the refuge during the fall and spring migration.

In the summer, white-tailed deer and their fawns can be seen browsing in early morning and evening hours alongside refuge roads. Cottontails, raccoons, coyotes, opossums, and fox squirrels are also frequently observed along refuge roads and in fields. Backwater areas of DeSoto Lake and several wetlands on the refuge provide habitat for beaver, muskrat, and an occasional mink.

Woods, fields of native prairie grasses, and hedges along refuge roads attract a variety of songbirds and other wildlife, such as turkeys, pheasants and bobwhite quail. Red-headed woodpeckers abound along the woodland edge. In summer, wood ducks, perhaps the most beautiful of American waterfowl, are present in ponds throughout the refuge. Steep banks at several locations along DeSoto Lake provide burrowing sites for colonies of bank swallows.

Red-bellied Woodpecker
Dave Menke, USFWS

Prescribed Burning
J. Olmsted, USFWS

Since 1965, more than 2,000 acres of refuge fields have been reverted to grasslands that provide important nesting habitat and winter shelter for wildlife. They also provide for a more diverse natural area. Wildlife managers use fire as a management tool to maintain healthy stands of native grasses.

Hen Woodie in Box
B. Angus, USFWS

Additional management activities on the refuge include the maintenance of wood duck nesting habitat. Wood duck boxes have been installed to provide nesting sites for DeSoto's principal resident duck species.

DeSoto also manages sandbar habitat to attract nesting piping plovers and interior least terns; the least tern is considered endangered throughout the United States.

Fish Cleaning Demonstration,
Steve Van Riper, USFWS

Visitor Opportunities

Visitor Center

Visitor Center

The DeSoto Visitor Center is open daily from 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., except most federal holidays and weather-related emergencies. Please call ahead to confirm holiday and severe weather hours.

Weekend wildlife films Saturday and Sunday at noon and 1:30 and 2:45 pm.

Enviromental Education

Auditorium for films and special programs.

The refuge is closed New Year's Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Wildlife Drive

Open one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.

Twelve miles of paved & gravel roads traverse the refuge along DeSoto Lake, woods, grasslands, freshwater ponds, and the Missouri River.

During the fall, the auto tour drive follows numbered stops corresponding to a special interpretive brochure which explains the annual waterfowl migration. Please remain in your vehicle to lessen the disturbance to wildlife.

Bertrand Excavation Site

Visit the pond where the hull of the 178-foot *Bertrand* steamboat lies buried. Displays describe its excavation and the historic significance of the Missouri River steamboat era.

Bertrand Trail

This 2/5-mile trail explores the old river channel and takes the visitor through grassland and marsh habitats.

Cottonwood and Grassland Trail

A 3/4-mile interpreted trail through the woods and 3/4-mile in grassland allows for close examination of the plant and animal life along the Missouri River.

Missouri Meander Trail (Accessible)

Adjacent to the DeSoto Visitor Center,

One loop provides a 900-foot paved trail accessible to those in wheelchairs or with walking difficulties.

Fishing and Boating

Both are permitted on DeSoto Lake during public use season, April 15-October 14. Please refer to regulatory section.

Boating is limited to no-wake speeds, not to exceed 5 mph.

Fish for largemouth bass, bluegill, flathead and channel catfish, crappie, and walleye, from shore or boat.

Accessible fishing piers.

Archery and spearfishing are allowed for nongame species.

Ice fishing, January - February, when conditions permit.

Hunting

Limited hunting opportunities are allowed in the refuge by special hunting permit only. Contact the refuge manager for current regulations.

Mushroom Gathering

Certain areas of the refuge are open to the public for mushroom picking from April 15 through May 31.

Mushrooming,
K.L. Drews, USFWS

Fishing

Recreational Fishing,
G. Gage, USFWS

Anglers are Welcome on DeSoto Lake April 15 - October 14!

State and federal regulations apply. An Iowa or Nebraska license is required. Some special regulations may be posted, in addition to the following regulations:

- Digging or seining for bait is prohibited.
- Trot lines, bank lines and float lines are prohibited.
- No more than two lines and two hooks per line may be used, including ice fishing.
- Catch and Release - Bass under 15" and northern pike under 24" must be immediately returned to the lake.
- Archery and spearfishing are permitted for roughfish only.

Boating

- Boating operation is permitted in accordance with state regulations, and the following special regulations:
- Boating is limited to no-wake speeds, *not to exceed 5 miles per hour.*
- Airboats, houseboats and boats containing toilets that flush directly into the water are prohibited.

Picnicking

- There are a number of picnic sites with grills on the refuge. Trash disposal, except in appropriate receptacles, is prohibited.

Prohibited Activities

- Fires must be confined to grills, which are provided at picnic sites. Open fires are prohibited.
- The use of artificial lights to take or locate wildlife is prohibited.
- Camping is not permitted on the refuge. Campsites are available at Wilson Island State Recreation Area, adjacent to the refuge.
- Use or possession of alcohol by minors is prohibited.
- Firearms, fireworks, airguns and all other weapons are prohibited, except when used in authorized refuge hunting programs.
- Pets are not permitted on the refuge.
- Swimming is not allowed on the refuge.
- Trespassing into closed areas is prohibited.
- Collecting or destruction of plant and animal life is prohibited.
- Disorderly conduct or disturbance of the peace is prohibited. No intoxicated person shall enter or remain upon the refuge.

1999-2000 Federal Duck Stamp,
Jim Hautmann

The funding for the **National Wildlife Refuge System** was established in 1934 through the passage of the *Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act*, which requires waterfowl hunters to purchase an annual migratory bird "duck stamp." Funds collected from the sale of these duck stamps are used to purchase valuable lands for the continuing benefit of wildlife,

Public Use Calendar

Spring-Summer

Missouri Meander Trail
K.L. Drews, USFWS

Visitor Center: Monday-Saturday, 9:00 am-4:30 pm, Sunday, noon-4:30 pm

Refuge Hours: One-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.

April 15 - October 14

- Fishing
- Wildlife Observation
- Photography
- Boating
- Environmental Education
- Nature Trails
- Visitor Center
- Weekend Films
- Mushroom collecting is allowed in designated areas, April 15 - May 31

Fall

Snow Geese
Dave Menke, USFWS

October 15 -November

The refuge is closed Thanksgiving Day.

- Great opportunity for viewing migrating waterfowl spectacle!
- Nature Trails and Auto Touring
- Special hunting programs, access as designated.
- Environmental Education

Morel Mushrooms
Dave Menke, USFWS

Fox Squirrel
Dave Menke, USFWS

Winter

Snow Geese and Visitor Center
J. Olmsted, USFWS

December-February

The refuge is closed Christmas and New Year's Day.

- Ice Fishing-January-February, When conditions permit.
- Special hunting seasons, access as designated.
- Visitor access to the Visitor Center, Bertrand Excavation Site and adjacent trails.

  Half of the refuge is closed during the winter to minimize the disturbance to wintering eagles, waterfowl, and resident game populations.

Early Spring

Cardinal
Dave Menke, USFWS

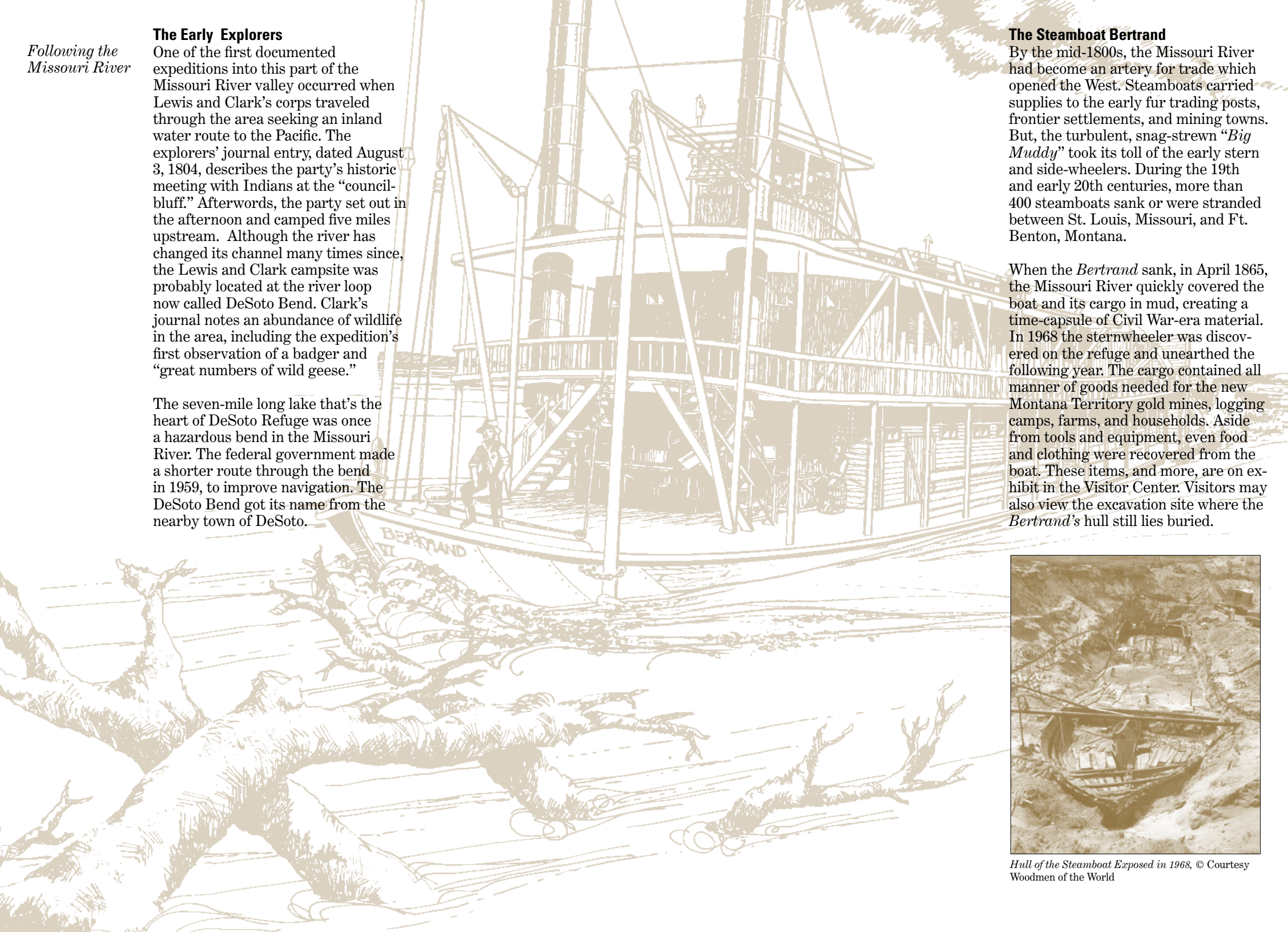
March 1-April 14

- Waterfowl Migration Observation
- Visitor Center
- Nature Trails
- Environmental Education

The Early Explorers

One of the first documented expeditions into this part of the Missouri River valley occurred when Lewis and Clark's corps traveled through the area seeking an inland water route to the Pacific. The explorers' journal entry, dated August 3, 1804, describes the party's historic meeting with Indians at the "council-bluff." Afterwords, the party set out in the afternoon and camped five miles upstream. Although the river has changed its channel many times since, the Lewis and Clark campsite was probably located at the river loop now called DeSoto Bend. Clark's journal notes an abundance of wildlife in the area, including the expedition's first observation of a badger and "great numbers of wild geese."

The seven-mile long lake that's the heart of DeSoto Refuge was once a hazardous bend in the Missouri River. The federal government made a shorter route through the bend in 1959, to improve navigation. The DeSoto Bend got its name from the nearby town of DeSoto.



The Steamboat Bertrand

By the mid-1800s, the Missouri River had become an artery for trade which opened the West. Steamboats carried supplies to the early fur trading posts, frontier settlements, and mining towns. But, the turbulent, snag-strewn "*Big Muddy*" took its toll of the early stern and side-wheelers. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, more than 400 steamboats sank or were stranded between St. Louis, Missouri, and Ft. Benton, Montana.

When the *Bertrand* sank, in April 1865, the Missouri River quickly covered the boat and its cargo in mud, creating a time-capsule of Civil War-era material. In 1968 the sternwheeler was discovered on the refuge and unearthed the following year. The cargo contained all manner of goods needed for the new Montana Territory gold mines, logging camps, farms, and households. Aside from tools and equipment, even food and clothing were recovered from the boat. These items, and more, are on exhibit in the Visitor Center. Visitors may also view the excavation site where the *Bertrand's* hull still lies buried.

Hull of the Steamboat Exposed in 1968, © Courtesy Woodmen of the World

Special Refuge Regulations

Federal Fee Area

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge is a federal fee area. Visitors may enter the refuge only if they have a valid entrance permit. Annual and lifetime passes are available at the DeSoto Visitor Center. People at least 62 years of age are eligible for a $10 lifetime permit. Permanently disabled visitors are eligible for a free lifetime permit.

Daily entrance permits are $3 per vehicle. They may be obtained at self-registration stations near each refuge entrance, or at the visitor center. The charge for commercial vans and buses is $20, or $30 if 21 or more people are aboard.

This federal fee area should not be confused with state parks or recreation areas, which administer similar entrance fee programs in Iowa and Nebraska.

The refuge is open one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.

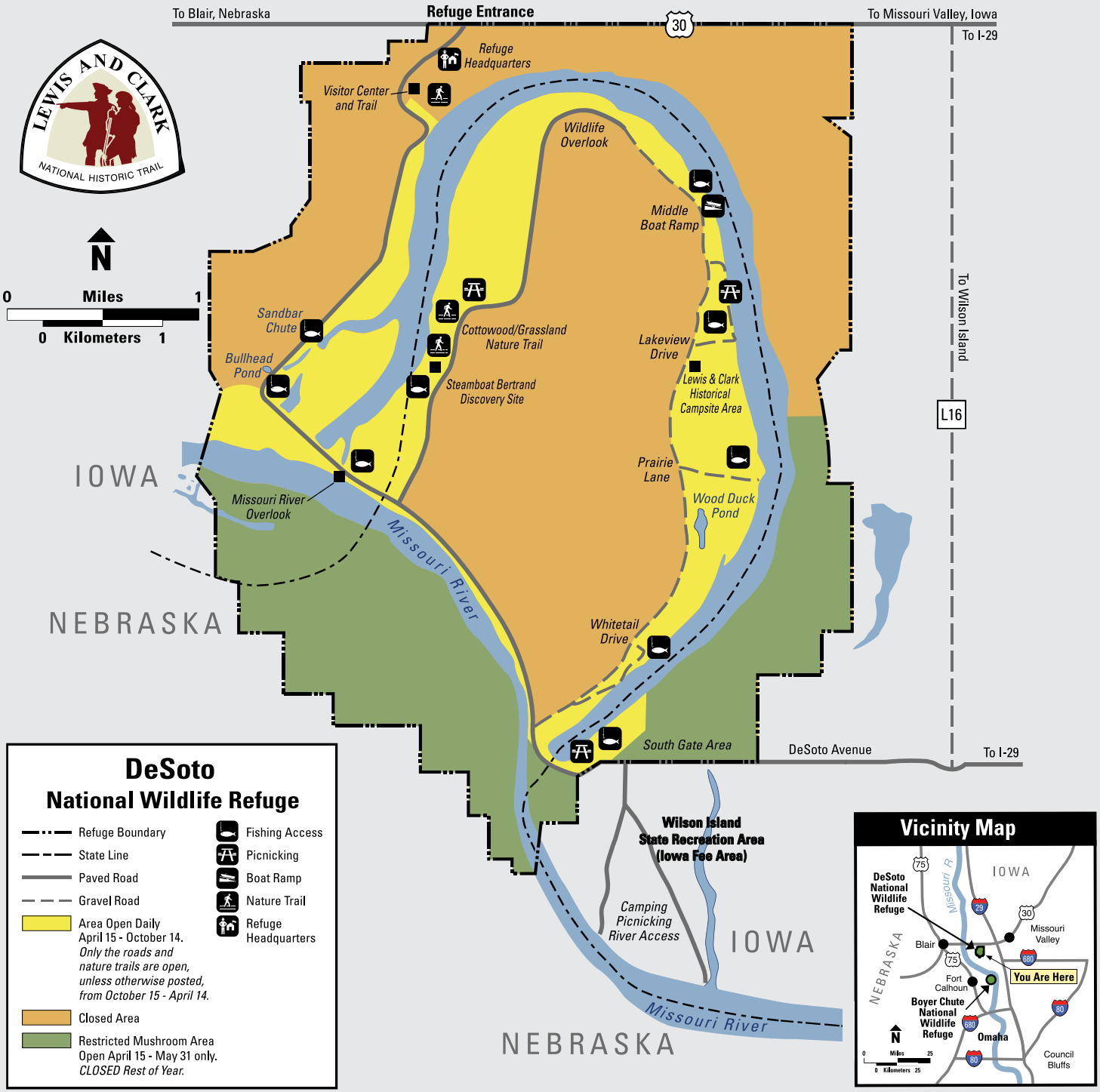
Knowing and obeying these special regulations is your responsibility!

For more information, contact the DeSoto Visitor Center between 9:00 am and 4:30 pm daily, or at http://midwest.fws.gov/desoto.

Vehicles

Auto touring, biking and wildlife observation are encouraged.

Vehicles, including bicycles, are allowed on public roads and designated parking areas only.


To Blair, Nebraska
Refuge Entrance
30
To Missouri Valley, Iowa
To I-29
LEWIS AND CLARK
NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL
N
0 Miles 1
0 Kilometers 1
Refuge Headquarters
Visitor Center and Trail
Wildlife Overlook
Middle Boat Ramp
Sandbar Chute
Bullhead Pond
Cottowood/Grassland Nature Trail
Steamboat Bertrand Discovery Site
Lakeview Drive
Lewis & Clark Historical Campsite Area
To Wilson Island
L16
IOWA
Missouri River Overlook
Prairie Lane
Wood Duck Pond
Missouri River
NEBRASKA
Whitetail Drive
South Gate Area
DeSoto Avenue
To I-29
Wilson Island State Recreation Area (Iowa Fee Area)
Camping Picnicking River Access
IOWA
Missouri River
NEBRASKA
DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge
Refuge Boundary
State Line
Paved Road
Gravel Road
Area Open Daily April 15 - October 14. Only the roads and nature trails are open, unless otherwise posted, from October 15 - April 14.
Closed Area
Restricted Mushroom Area Open April 15 - May 31 only. CLOSED Rest of Year.
Fishing Access
Picnicking
Boat Ramp
Nature Trail
Refuge Headquarters
Boundaries posted in the field supercede all boundaries shown on map.
Vicinity Map
75
Missouri R
IOWA
DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge
29
30
Missouri Valley
Blair
75
680
You Are Here
NEBRASKA
Fort Calhoun
Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge
680
80
Omaha
N
Council Bluffs
80
0 Miles 25
0 Kilometers 25