

Kellys Slough
National Wildlife Refuge
Kellys Slough National Wildlife Refuge
Devils Lake Wetland Management District
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Photo credits

Scenic wetlands at Kellys Slough NWR / USFWS

The great blue heron is the largest North American heron and nests in this area. USFWS

Welcome to Kellys Slough National Wildlife Refuge

Kellys Slough National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located in northeastern North Dakota within the ancient glacial Lake Agassiz region. This unique landscape was shaped by the action of glaciers and waves, and later was covered by tallgrass prairie rich with native grasses such as big bluestem, Indian grass, and switchgrass.

Kellys Slough NWR is located in Blooming Township of Grand Forks County. The main parking area is 8 miles west and 3 miles north of the city of Grand Forks, North Dakota. Signs on U.S. Highway 2 direct visitors to the Refuge, where you will find an expanse of wetland and grassland habitats, elevated viewing platforms, and nature trails.

Why a Refuge?

The area was once rich with bison, game, and waterfowl. A little more than 100 years ago, the first settlers and their plows turned over the thick, virgin prairie sod and exposed some of the world's most fertile soils. Over time, intensive agriculture and urban expansion have altered the pre-settlement landscape, leaving only a remnant of the native tallgrass prairie.

Many years ago, members of the Kelly family, the original landowners, cooperated with the Federal government to create this Refuge.

In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Kellys Slough NWR "as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife." Kellys Slough, a tributary of the Turtle River, forms the heart of the Refuge.

Kellys Slough NWR is a unit of the Devils Lake Wetland Management District (WMD). The 1,270-acre Refuge is surrounded by 3,000 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) which were purchased with Federal Duck Stamp funds.

Kellys Slough NWR Today

Many wetland and upland habitats at Kellys Slough NWR and at many other refuges nationwide were developed as a result of the 1990 North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). The Refuge was awarded two NAWMP grants to develop a number of wetlands. Several government agencies and private partners provided additional financial and technical assistance to set the project in motion.

Ducks Unlimited has provided nearly half of the funding needed to construct several of the water control structures and dikes throughout the Refuge. Today, the Refuge staff manages water levels in eight pools covering approximately 936 acres. Current plans are to develop several more managed pools on the Refuge.

Refuge waters are managed to provide a variety of depths within the wetlands. The water is raised and lowered seasonally to provide habitat for many species of waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds. The Refuge staff also manages grasslands through prescribed burning, farming, and haying.

Wildlife Watching

Kellys Slough NWR is an excellent place to view migratory and breeding waterbirds. The Refuge has been designated as a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy.

Twelve species of ducks nest on the Refuge. Mallards and gadwall make up about half of the ducks hatched in a typical nesting season. Blue-winged teal usually come in a close third place during the annual duck production "competition." Green-winged teal, American wigeon, northern shovelers, northern pintails, lesser scaup, redheads, canvasbacks, hooded mergansers, and wood ducks also nest on the Refuge.

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) designated the Refuge as a Regional Shorebird Reserve in 2003. The WHSRN is a voluntary group of 160 private and public organizations working to study and conserve shorebirds and their habitats.

More than 35,000 shorebirds visit the Refuge from April to August. The most abundant species are semi-palmated sandpipers, lesser yellowlegs, Wilson's phalaropes, American avocets, stilt sandpipers, pectoral sandpipers, dowitchers, and dunlins. These species migrate through the area en route to breeding grounds in Canada in April and May. Fall migration usually peaks at the end of July or the first week in August. Up to 22 species of shorebirds have been sighted on the Refuge during the month of July. Shorebird species known to nest on or near the Refuge include American avocets, killdeer, Wilson's phalaropes, willets, marbled godwits, and upland and spotted sandpipers.

Many species of migratory and resident songbirds can be seen at the Refuge, including clay-colored and Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows; eastern and western kingbirds; bobolinks; cliff, barn, bank, and tree swallows; western meadowlarks; sedge and marsh wrens; Baltimore and orchard orioles; and least and willow flycatchers. LeConte's, grasshopper, and Savannah sparrows are highly dependent on open grassland areas and are frequent summer visitors.

Raptors such as red-tailed hawks and northern harriers are commonly seen soaring in the sky. Peregrine and prairie falcons and bald eagles pass through the Refuge during spring and fall migrations. Wading birds include great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, great egrets, and American bitterns. During spring migration, it is common to see flocks of tundra swans, snow geese, and small groups of sandhill cranes. Hungarian partridge, sharp-tailed grouse, and greater prairie chickens may be seen throughout the year.

White-tailed deer, muskrats, raccoons, white-tailed jackrabbits, and mink are among the other Refuge wildlife species. Most of these species are nocturnal, so the best viewing times are at dawn and dusk. The best seasons to view wildlife are spring, summer, and fall. Be prepared for weather extremes and traveling on gravel roads. Insect repellent is advised during the summer months.

Public Use Opportunities

Three short nature trails offer the opportunity to view wildlife and the landscape away from roads and vehicle traffic. Two of the trails start at the main parking area, are less than one-quarter mile in length, and are surfaced with gravel. The parking area features an elevated viewing platform with a 20-power telescope and is available for year-round use. Interpretive signs provide information about the Refuge and its management. A restroom is located at this site.

A third, similarly constructed trail is located 2 miles north and ½ mile west of the main parking area. The trail starts at a small parking area, and is 300 feet in length. The elevated viewing platform at the end of the trail has a 20-power telescope for viewing wildlife.

A 2-mile auto tour route begins 3 miles north of U.S. Highway 2. Interpretive signs are located on the turnouts along the tour route. These turnouts are great locations for viewing wildlife. The signs provide information on area wildlife and wildlife habitat.

To protect wildlife habitat, all foot travel on the Refuge is limited to the established nature trail that begins at the main parking area. The remainder of the Refuge is closed to public access. Off-road motorized vehicle travel is strictly prohibited on the Refuge. Please contact the Refuge Manager for more information regarding Refuge access. The sign shown at left identifies Refuge lands.

Waterfowl Production Areas

Hunting, fishing, and trapping are permitted on WPAs in accordance with North Dakota State seasons. Area WPAs are open to environmental education activities and wildlife viewing, although some WPAs may be closed during the spring and summer to protect nesting birds. All access for permitted activities is limited to foot travel only. Please contact the Refuge Manager for current regulations and information regarding access to WPAs. The sign shown at left identifies WPAs.

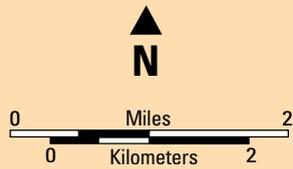
Accessibility Information

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental ability. Dial 7-1-1 for a free connection to the State transfer relay service for TTY and voice calls to and from the speech and hearing impaired. For more information or to address accessibility needs, please contact the Refuge staff at 701 / 662 8611 or the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Opportunity, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Kellys Slough

National Wildlife Refuge and Waterfowl Production Areas

-  Refuge Boundary
-  Waterfowl Production Area
-  Federal Highway
-  County Road
-  Gravel Road
-  Auto Tour Route
-  Restroom
-  Parking
-  Information Kiosk
-  Nature Trail
-  Wildlife Viewing



Grand Forks AFB
Main Gate

