



Maxwell

National Wildlife Refuge

Public Recreational Uses and Regulations

Welcome to Maxwell NWR!

Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge provides a unique opportunity to view wildlife in a variety of habitats. Located in northeastern New Mexico at an elevation of 6050', the refuge encompasses 3,700 acres of short grass prairie, playa lakes, wetlands, woodlots and agricultural lands. It is surrounded by high mesas and extinct volcanoes to the east and northeast and to the west by the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The refuge, located along the Central Flyway, provides feeding and resting areas for wintering waterfowl as well as migratory birds that depend on shortgrass prairie habitats.

Season, weather, and water levels will influence what species of wildlife you will encounter on your visit. Over 278 species of birds have been recorded—70 of which nest and raise their young here. Spring and fall are the best times to see unusual migrants. Exposed shorelines attract many shorebirds such as Wilson's phalarope, American avocet, yellowlegs, long-billed dowitcher, and spotted sandpiper. Several thousand ducks, geese, and cranes occupy the refuge in late fall and winter. In the summer, grasshopper, savannah, vesper, lark and Cassin's sparrows are numerous. The colorful plumage and call of western meadowlarks can be enjoyed year round. Raptors soaring overhead are plentiful. Watch for bald and golden eagles, ferruginous hawks, red-tailed hawks, Swainson's hawks, prairie and peregrine falcons. Mule deer and white-tailed deer can often be seen browsing in the fields.

History

The high-plains landscape of the Maxwell refuge has a long history of human use. For thousands of years, these plains were a source of food and an area of trade for Native American tribes such as the Apache, Kiowa, Ute, and Comanche. Later, the Santa Fe Trail, a 900-mile trade route linking the United States with the Mexican colonial town of Santa Fe, crossed near the refuge's western border. The refuge gets its name from its 19th-century owner, Lucien Maxwell. To this day, no other person has ever

surpassed his record for individual land holdings in the United States—almost 2 million acres.

Climate

The climate of the Maxwell NWR and the surrounding region is semi-arid. Much of the precipitation occurs from May to September in the form of brief but intense thunderstorms. Temperatures range from below freezing in the winter to over 90 degrees F in the summer.

Wildlife Habitats

Maxwell's mixture of short-grass prairie, lakes, playa wetlands, and woodlots offer habitat for hundreds of species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

Short Grass Prairie

Grasslands dominated by blue grama, buffalo grass, alkali sacaton, and galleta comprise more than 50% of the refuge. Prairie grasses are able to thrive with no additional water or fertilizer beyond what nature provides. Many species of birds, including songbirds, birds of prey, and mammals, both large and small, rely upon the prairie for their survival. The refuge supports some of the highest densities of Grasshopper sparrows found in the state.

Prairie dogs play an important part in the ecology of the short-grass prairie. They provide a food source for a variety of predators and are also beneficial to other species, particularly burrowing owls, which use vacant burrows to nest and raise their young.

Lakes and Playa Wetlands

Of benefit to waterfowl and other water-dependent birds are over 900 acres of wetlands, lakes, and playas (seasonal, shallow ponds). Blue-winged teal, cinnamon teal, gadwall, pied-billed grebe, eared grebe, western grebe and mallards are some of the birds that nest in or near these wetlands.

Lakes 12, 13 and 14, pre-date establishment of the refuge and serve as impoundments for irrigation water for local farmers and ranchers. As a result, water levels (and shorelines) vary annually with precipitation and irrigation demands.

Woodlots

As remnants of old homesteads, the cottonwood and elm woodlots provide unique habitats for wildlife. These areas support nesting Swainson's hawks, red-tailed hawks, great horned owls, ravens, mourning doves, wild turkey, and migrant songbirds. The woodlots also provide cover for resident mule deer, white-tailed deer and occasional visitors such as elk, mountain lion and black bear.

Lending a Hand For Wildlife

Farming for Wildlife

The crops on Maxwell NWR are grown exclusively for migratory waterfowl. Typically planted in early May and late August, the Refuge plants up to 400 acres of wheat, barley, clover, oats, peas and triticale. These crops provide feed for thousands of birds in their fall and spring migration to and from their breeding grounds. Two challenges of farming are seasonal drought and a short growing season—100 days or less. To conserve water, irrigation ditches are being replaced with underground pipeline. Refuge croplands also helps out our neighbors by enticing the geese to stay away from private land crops.

Prairie Grassland Restoration

Many of the Refuge's wildlife species depend on native short-grass prairie for nesting and feeding. Remaining prairie landscapes on the Refuge are small and isolated. The Refuge is restoring native grasslands by selectively removing non-native invasive weeds, through a combination of mowing, controlled burning, and herbicides. As non-native species are eliminated, native grasses are re-seeded in their place.

Things to do at the Refuge

Whether you drive, walk or just sit and relax, Maxwell NWR will not disappoint you. Several activities are available on the refuge.

Wildlife Observation

Nature observation, photography, and hiking are encouraged. Wildlife observation, particularly birding, is popular around Lakes 13 and 14. Areas open to

public access include the south and west shores of Lake 13 and the east shore of Lake 14. Eleven miles of county roads either bisect or parallel refuge woodlots providing good viewing sites for wildlife at dawn and dusk. Don't overlook the smaller, less obvious species: listen for the distinctive call of a Woodhouse toad after a storm or watch for the secretive movements of a thirteen-lined ground squirrel.

Interpretive Programs

The Refuge provides a unique opportunity for the observation and study of birds and other species in their native habitats. Interpretive and environmental education programs are available by request.

Volunteering

Managing the Refuge is a big job, and we welcome your help. As a volunteer, you can assist with waterbird counts, nest inventories, and maintenance or visitor services activities. Contact the Refuge or check www.volunteer.gov for opportunities.

Fishing

The Refuge is a popular fishing site for rainbow trout and channel catfish. State records for yellow perch and rainbow trout were caught in Lake 13. Anglers are welcome from March 1 through October 31 at Lakes 13. All sport fishing is permitted in accordance with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish regulations. Check their web site www.wildlife.state.nm.us/ for further information.

Boating

Boating—at trolling speed only—is allowed on Lake 13. There is a concrete boat ramp available on the west shore of Lake 13. All U.S. Coast Guard (www.uscg.mil/USCG.shtm), State (NM Statutes Section 66-12), and Refuge regulations apply.

Camping

A primitive camping area is available for use on the west shore of Lake 13 (3 day limit) from March 1st through October 31st. Restrooms are available at the entrance road leading into Lake 13. No electric service or pump-out facilities are available. There are no campfires permitted at anytime.

Visitor Center

Restrooms, exhibits, maps, brochures, and current information including weekly bird counts can be found at the Visitor Center. It is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

When the Visitor Center is closed, a welcome kiosk next to the driveway provides maps, bird checklists, and other helpful information.

Food, Fuel & Lodging

The nearest facilities are in Cimarron, Springer, and Raton, all within a 30-minute drive of the refuge.

Refuge Regulations

Help Us Protect the Refuge

Please remember to “take only photographs and leave only footprints.” All plants, animals and artifacts are protected on the refuge. Please use trash receptacles provided or pack your litter out. Please, no campfires or fires anywhere on the refuge.

The refuge is open year-round. Hours of operation are from sunrise to sunset.

Vehicles

Motor vehicles and horses are permitted only on designated roads. All-terrain vehicles are prohibited. Please use caution; wildlife and people may be on or near roads. The refuge-wide speed limit is 25 mph.

Firearms and Hunting

Firearms or weapons for the purposes of hunting are prohibited on the refuge. Hunting is not permitted on the Refuge. Firearms of any type are prohibited in any Federal Building.

Pets

Dogs are allowed, but must be kept on a leash at all times while on the refuge.

Please inquire at the Visitor Center or consult an information kiosk as to whether specific recreational activities not listed are permitted.

For more information

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