

Big Branch Marsh

National Wildlife Refuge



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photo: USFWS



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Refuge Facts

- Established 1994.
- Acres: 18,000.
- Located in St. Tammany Parish, LA.
- Refuge manages state owned St. Tammany Refuge as part of Big Branch Marsh NWR.
- Location: The Refuge is located on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain between the Pearl River (east of Slidell) to Mandeville, Louisiana. Refuge lands are south of Highway 190.

Natural History

- Encompasses the habitats and transition zones between the pine savannahs to the north and the shorelines, marshes, and offshore grassbeds of the lake to the south.
- Concentrations of waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and neotropical migrants.
- Several Red-cockaded Woodpecker nesting colonies, Bald Eagle and Osprey nests are present.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- More than 200,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide habitat for a natural diversity of wildlife associated with marsh and pine flatwoods.
- Provide habitat for endangered and threatened species.
- Provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl.
- Provide nesting habitat for Wood Ducks
- Provide habitat for non-game migratory birds.
- Provide opportunities for public outdoor recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, birdwatching, environmental education and interpretation, whenever they are compatible with the purposes of the refuge.

Management Tools

- Forest habitat management.
- Prescribed fire.
- Artificial nest boxes/structures.
- Control of invasive, exotic plants and animals.
- Public hunting.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking/biking trails.
- Canoeing, kayaking.
- Interpretive boardwalk.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- Fishing.
- Hunting (big game, waterfowl, small game).
- Visitor Center open Thursday-Saturday from 9 am - 4 pm.

Calendar of Events

- February:** Bayou Garden Open House.
- April:** Refuge Ranger Spring Break Camp
- May:** International Migratory Bird Day.
- September:** Beach Sweep shoreline clean up.
- October:** Wild Things Special Event.
- October – January:** Archery deer hunting.

December – January: Waterfowl and woodcock hunting.

Fall and Spring: Seasonal canoe tours of the Refuge and volunteer Work/Play Days.

For more details on events and tours visit our website or call our office.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Questions and Answers

Where is the Refuge and how do you access it?

The Refuge is located on the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain from Slidell to Mandeville, Louisiana. Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge can be accessed by vehicle off of State Highway 190, off State Highway 434, and along Bayou Paquet Road, Barringer Road, and Lake Road. Boat access is from Salt Bayou, Liberty Bayou, Bayou Bonfouca, Bayou Lacombe, Cane Bayou, and Lake Pontchartrain.

What is available at the Refuge, what can I do?

The Refuge has hiking and biking trails, an interpretive nature trail boardwalk, and has a canoe launch into Cane Bayou. Public hunting and fishing are available in-season. Opportunities for wildlife observation and nature photography can be found around the Refuge.

A Visitor Center is located at the headquarters facility in Lacombe, Louisiana at 61389 Highway 434. The Visitor Center's exhibits feature the wildlife and habitats of Southeast Louisiana. It is open Thursday- Saturday 9 am - 4 pm.

What types of fishing are available?

Both freshwater and saltwater fishing are available on or near the Refuge. The most commonly caught species include largemouth bass, bream, crappie, redfish, and speckled trout. Crabbing is popular along Lake Road.

What types of hunting are available?

Public hunting is allowed for white-tailed deer (archery only), waterfowl, quail, squirrel, rabbit, woodcock, snipe, and hog.

What is in store for the future?

We are working in collaborative efforts to restore marsh habitat along Lake Pontchartrain's shoreline. Restoration projects will help protect the community of Slidell from storm surge, while enhancing valuable wildlife habitat.

Photos, top to bottom: Big Branch Marsh at sunset (©Tom Carlisle), the historic Bayou Gardens at the Refuge Visitor Center (USFWS), Boy Scout Road interpretive boardwalk trail (USFWS), artificial nesting cavities are provided for the threatened red-cockaded woodpecker in pine savannah habitat (USFWS), marsh restoration projects pump sediment into containment areas (Patrick Quigley) — these areas are later replanted with marsh plants by volunteers.

