

Wallkill River
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U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

WALLKILL RIVER

*National
Wildlife Refuge*

Paddling the River

Welcome



This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Welcome to Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge! This self-guiding brochure will help make your trip along the Wallkill River safe and fun. Whether you are canoeing or kayaking, your river trip will provide ample opportunities to observe and photograph wildlife while enjoying the sights and sounds that can only be found within the heart of the refuge. Because all natural and historical objects are protected within national wildlife refuges, please take only pictures and leave only footprints during your trip.

During the summer months, a trip along the Wallkill River will be a lazy paddle along a placid stream. During the spring, or after a heavy rainstorm, the river will have more current, so plan your trip with this in mind.

This brochure will guide you from the Route 565 Canoe Access, northward to the Oil City Road Fishing and Canoe Access. Since the Wallkill River is one of a select group of rivers that flows north, the river's current will make your trip a little faster and easier. The entire distance is approximately nine miles and may take up to seven hours. Visitors with limited time who wish to take a shorter trip can launch or take out at the Bassett's Bridge Fishing and Canoe Access which is located between Route 565 and Oil City Road.



Early Spring flooding

During your paddle along the Wallkill River you will travel through floodplain forests, wet meadows, and past rock outcroppings. If you take your trip in the spring, the wet meadows may be flooded, making the river channel difficult to follow. During the summer months, water levels will likely be low. You may have to portage around beaver dams or fallen trees, so be prepared to traverse steep, slippery banks and unstable slopes.

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When you paddle away from the shore, you will be traveling on waters that began their journey in springfed Lake Mohawk, located in Sparta, New Jersey. After leaving the refuge, the Wallkill River joins Rondout Creek in Rosendale, New York, and empties into the Hudson River in Kingston, New York.

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For the first half-mile, the river will wind through grasslands studded with large silver maple and black willow trees, as part of the 1,500 acres of forested wetlands protected within the refuge. You may also notice many young sapling trees along both banks. These have been planted by volunteers as part of the process of restoring the wooded corridor along the river. Purple flowered pickerel weed and other aquatic plants will be abundant. The Wallkill River watershed includes red maple swamps, 1,400 acres of marsh, and 600 acres of wet meadow. By July, the buzzing of cicadas will begin as the heat of the day arrives.

Pickerel weed





Papakating Creek where it joins the Wallkill River

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The first part of your trip will take you past many trees that have fallen in the water. These trees are left in place by refuge staff due to their importance in creating fish nursery habitat supporting largemouth bass, pickerel, perch, bullheads and other species. Take advantage of the slow pace of travel to observe the wildlife feeding along the river. Slides created by river otters and dens of muskrats are common along the banks. You may see a wood duck hen with her family of ducklings or spot a great blue heron on the lookout for a meal.



*River otter den
in river bank*

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*Endangered
bog turtle*

As you continue downstream, notice how the river seems to split in two. On the left is Papakating Creek, one of the main tributaries feeding into the Wallkill River. Papakating Creek and the Wallkill River are part of the Hudson River, New York Bight Watershed. Both the creek and the river run through major towns, including Sussex Borough, the largest concentrated population center close to the refuge. As urban runoff is a possible source of river pollutants, periodic studies are performed to ensure that the river's water quality is maintained for the diversity of wildlife dependent on the river, including species such as the bog turtle. Since the bog turtle is a federally-listed endangered species known to live in the refuge, the enhancement, restoration, and management of calcareous fen habitat used by the turtle is one of the refuge's top conservation priorities. Common plants in these fens are tufted hairgrass, swamp birch, shrubby cinquefoil, willows, and poison sumac.

Great Blue Heron



Herb Houghton © 2009

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About a half mile further, is the site of what used to be a low foot bridge across the river. This was an old tractor bridge from the days when the refuge was a dairy farm. It was removed in the summer of 2010 for safety reasons as the bridge was damaged by floods. If you look along the banks past the bridge, you may see sedge caught on the branches of nearby trees as well as scars on their trunks from collisions with uprooted debris. As two-thirds of the refuge's soil is hydric, or poorly drained, much of the area along the river becomes flooded when snow melts or after a heavy rain storm.

Early European settlers from the 1600s dubbed the Wallkill River bottomland "The Drowned Lands." It is probable that the river is named after the Waal River in The Netherlands. These settlers originally used the land for cattle and even eel fisheries, but as early as 1760 they made efforts to straighten, dredge and drain the river for farming. A small feud ensued between mill owners, nicknamed "beavers," and local farmers, nicknamed "muskrats," who wanted to drain and farm the river. In 1826, a large canal was put in place which lowered the water table of the river, and in 1871 the "Muskrat and Beaver Wars" ended in the farmers' favor. However, the seasonal floods still affect today's "muskrats."

Low bridge along Dagmar Dale Nature Trail



Whitewater

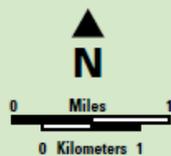
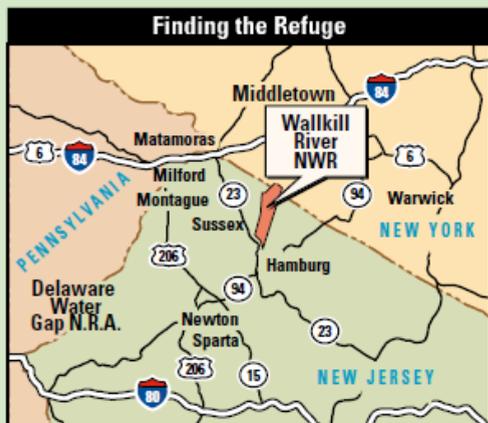
6

Soon you reach the concrete remains of an old railroad bridge, once part of the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railroad. The old rail bed runs throughout the refuge and provides access to numerous seasonal, vernal pools which are essential to the survival of many amphibian species, including Spotted Salamander and Wood Frog. Just past the bridge appear rocky boulders along the banks. The Wallkill River Valley is underlain by limestone. At high water, these outcroppings can create a small whitewater adventure, but at low levels, be prepared for quick maneuvering and difficult passage!

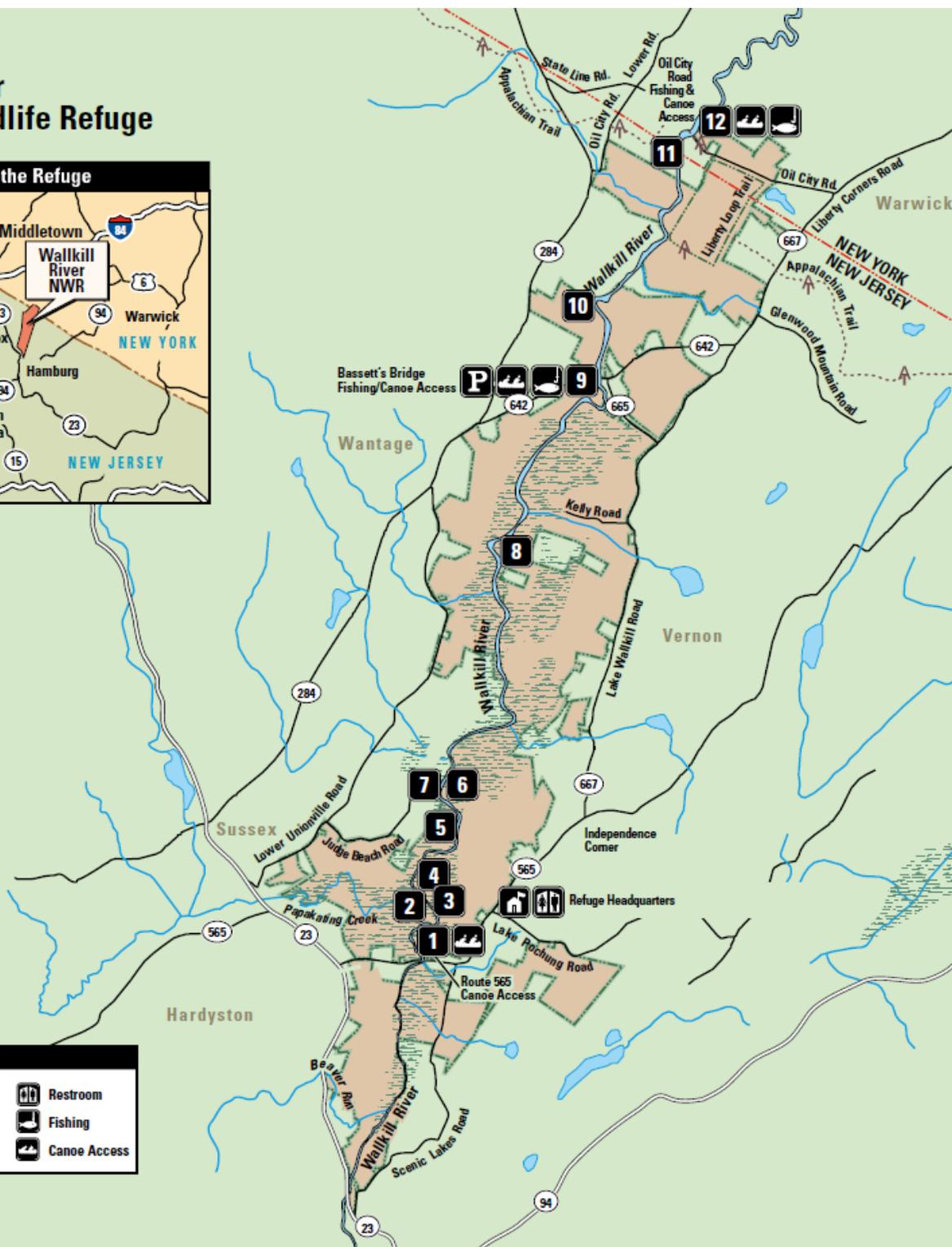
Concrete abutment from an old railroad bridge



Walkill River National Wildlife Refuge



Legend	
	Refuge Boundary
	Refuge Parking Facilities
	Refuge Headquarters
	Restroom
	Fishing
	Canoe Access



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As you continue downstream, notice that the right bank is forested while the left bank is not. This contrast exists because the left bank is private farm land that has not yet become part of the refuge. The refuge can be expanded when private land is purchased from willing sellers.



Invasive water chestnut

Because farm fields in the Wallkill River watershed have been tilled for hundreds of years by foreign settlers, many non-native and invasive plant species have been introduced and are now common. Many exotic plant species such as purple loosestrife, reed canary grass, and Canada thistle become problematic by growing in dense stands that may replace native species such as cattails and grasses. When non-native plant species change the local plant life, native wildlife species can no longer find their preferred habitats, making them less common. The introduction of invasive species is one reason why 73 wildlife species at Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge are listed by the Federal or state government as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Invasive species, including the common carp and mute swan, are threats to lands in the National Wildlife Refuge System and require increasing amounts of attention by refuge managers. Three invasive aquatic plants found in Wallkill River Refuge are Eurasian watermilfoil, curly leaf pondweed and water chestnut. Whenever you finish a boating trip, be sure to rinse off your boat and remove any plants. An extra five minutes of attention can prevent the spreading of an invasive species into another area.



Sago pondweed



Canada geese watching kayakers

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Once the farm fields recede behind you, shaded banks of red maple, green ash, river birch and pin oak return. This is a quiet, lazy stretch of the river where the summer traveler can relax and observe river and ebony jewelwing damselflys, red-tailed hawks, and small flocks of Canada geese. Along the banks you can appreciate nature's many colors; the sunny flowers of water stargrass and spatterdock, and white blossoms of the fragrant pond lily and lizardtail. Nearby leopard frogs and green frogs make their presence known with a small splash as they take a swim, while on logs nearby you may see a painted turtle basking in the sun. Take a break yourself as the river widens with wide muddy banks that make it easy to get out of your boat to stretch or for lunch.



Ebony Jewelwing Damselfly

After about two miles, the river will make a sharp turn to the right, then curve to the left, forming an oxbow. Oxbows are formed when a lack of elevation causes rivers to meander across the landscape. Over time, many oxbows are cut off when the river finds a new channel during periods of high water. Old oxbows often become lakes or wetland areas after the river has left them behind.



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As you complete your trip through the oxbow, the sounds of traffic will be heard and you will see the Bassett's Bridge Fishing and Canoe Access. This is also a spot where fishermen gather to try their luck. If you have left a vehicle here, this will be the end of your trip. If not, take a quick break and then resume your paddle to Oil City Road.

During your break, you can observe the field next to the bridge and river. Many refuge grasslands are mowed for hay by local farmers during the summer months to prevent shrubs and trees from invading brush in a gradual process called succession. Haying preserves habitat for nesting grassland birds, such as bobolinks and meadowlarks. This field, however, is less than 50 acres and thus is too small to be suitable grassland habitat. Instead of mowing next to the river, young trees such as swamp white oak, silver maple and American sycamore have been planted to encourage succession. Once grown, the new trees will help shade out invasive reed canary grass and provide habitat for numerous songbird species of the northeast.



Morning glories and reed canary grass

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Shortly below Bassett's Bridge at low water, you traverse a short, rocky stretch which may cause your boat to take on a small amount of water. These rapids only offer minor excitement and they may not be seen for much of the year. Private farmlands are visible as the river bends to the right below the white water. Grazing cows may greet you with their presence by going for a short wade in the river!

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Refuge land on this stretch of river mostly includes flat forest banks with a thin grassland border between the river and the forest. A small tributary joins the Wallkill River on your right just before you reach the Liberty Loop Trail area, also on your right. Although only glimpses of the Liberty Loop marshes are visible through the trees, the sounds of geese and ducks may be audible on a calm day.



Birdwatcher

The trail traverses artificial dikes which were once part of a commercial sod farm. Years ago in the Pleistocene Epoch, the Wallkill River Valley was covered by glaciers. As the glaciers retreated, they created a large glacial lake. Some of the lake dried to expose dark, fertile, organic soil, causing the area to be called "The Black Dirt Region." The lake also created nearby wetlands. The Liberty Loop Marsh Restoration Project was completed to maintain this habitat for migrating waterfowl such as the green heron and hooded merganser, which can be spotted by taking a hike along the Liberty Loop Trail.

A short stretch of the Liberty Loop Trail is part of the 2100 mile Appalachian Trail which begins in northern Georgia and ends at the top of Mount Katahdin in Maine. Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge is the only refuge that the Appalachian Trail passes through, making the refuge a showcase for the entire National Wildlife Refuge System.



Wallkill tributary entering from the east

Your trip along the Wallkill River will conclude at the Oil City Road Fishing and Canoe Access. Here, you may relax on a wooden bench near the bridge before hauling your boats up the bank to your vehicle or exploring the nearby trails. Don't forget to wash any clinging plants off your boat!



Cardinal flower

Wallkill River is one of more than 550 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and it represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands in the Caribbean and the South Pacific. The habitat of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1990 "to preserve and enhance refuge lands and waters in a manner that will conserve the natural diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for present and future generations and to provide opportunities for compatible scientific research, environmental education, and fish and wildlife-oriented recreation." Congress also required the protection of aquatic habitats within the refuge, including the Wallkill River and Papakating Creek.



Hooded Merganser

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also manages national fish hatcheries and provides federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance, and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals, and threatened and endangered species.

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Kayaks at Route 565 canoe access

