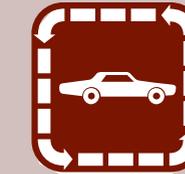


# Rice Lake

## National Wildlife Refuge Auto Tour



Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge  
36289 State Highway 65  
McGregor, MN 55760  
218/768 2402

People with hearing impairments may reach Rice Lake NWR through the Federal Information Relay System at 1 800/877 8339.

RiceLake@fws.gov  
www.fws.gov/refuge/Rice\_Lake

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344-WILD  
www.fws.gov

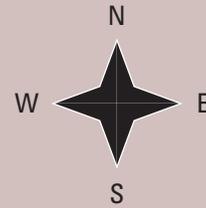
August 2018



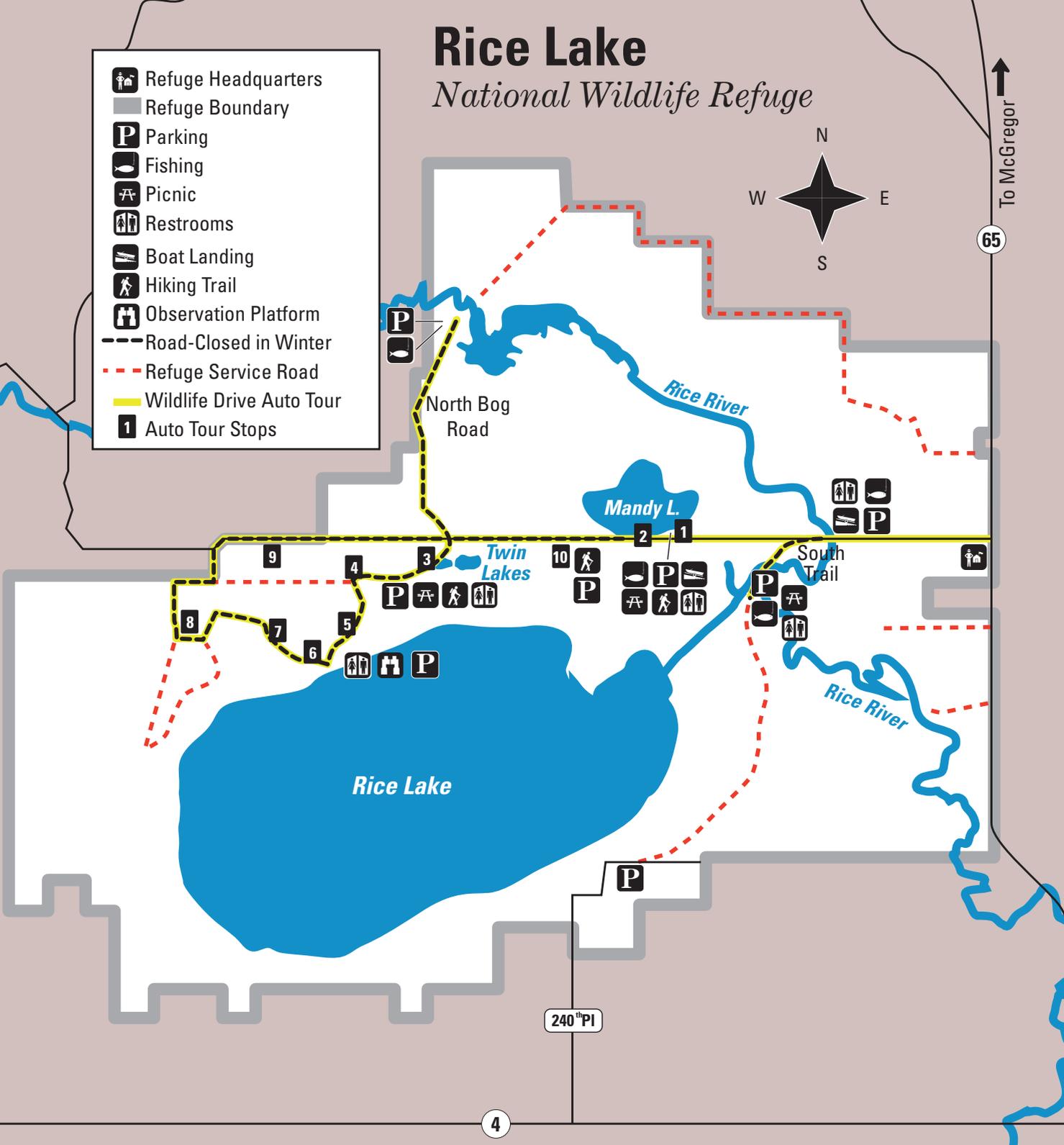
# Rice Lake

## National Wildlife Refuge

- Refuge Headquarters
- Refuge Boundary
- Parking
- Fishing
- Picnic
- Restrooms
- Boat Landing
- Hiking Trail
- Observation Platform
- Road-Closed in Winter
- Refuge Service Road
- Wildlife Drive Auto Tour
- Auto Tour Stops



To McGregor  
65



240<sup>th</sup> PI

4

### Changing Times—Changing Uses

For an eon, native people have come here to gather what the land provided. We do not know how they named themselves, those first people to follow retreating glaciers to this place. But, they kept coming, and lived here, for generations unnumbered.

More recently the Dakota and the Ojibwe Indians came and lived here. They collected wild rice from the lake, maple syrup from the forest, and other foods and materials they needed to survive. Later, Europeans and their descendants settled here and cut timber and dug drainage ditches to convert this place to farmland.

Today, this 18,200-acre refuge is managed for wildlife and for people who come to enjoy these wildlands.

The land retains traces of how people have used it. This 13-mile self-guided tour draws your attention to many of the changing uses humans have placed on the land. The tour takes about one hour—longer if you stop to hike or watch for wildlife. Follow the arrows and stop at the numbered posts.

As you travel the auto tour and learn how humans have used the area, you may see waterfowl, deer, grouse, bear and other wildlife that continue to be a part of this refuge's attraction.



1

As the last glaciers melted 10,000 years ago, they left behind poorly drained soils and basins created by chunks of melting ice. The resulting watery landscape contains a mixture of cedar swamp, tamarack bog and lakes. The ridge you are now on, between Mandy Lake before you, and Rice Lake to the south, was one of the few high grounds close to the abundant wild rice crops of the lakes. A 1.5-mile long hiking trail skirts the edge of Mandy Lake to the North Bog Road, rewarding the hiker with excellent wildlife viewing.

2

Ancient people lived and buried their dead on this ridge. Among these trees are mounds that archaeologists think were built by prehistoric people about 1,300 years ago as a cemetery. Such sites are found from northwestern Wisconsin across central Minnesota to the Red River Valley. This is the largest known concentration of linear mounds in Minnesota and Wisconsin. All remains of peoples' use of the land on the refuge are fragile and irreplaceable. They are strictly protected by state and federal laws.

3

Evidence suggests the Eastern Dakota Indians occupied the Rice Lake area 200–400 years ago. Attracted by wild rice and plentiful game, the Dakota probably lived here in temporary hunting and ricing camps. Archaeologists believe their main villages were at Mille Lacs Lake, southwest of here. At Twin Lakes, located down the road to your left, an ancient dugout canoe was discovered in 1969. Perhaps, the canoe was used by Indians to gather wild rice and hunt game. A short, scenic hiking trail begins at the east end of the picnic area and makes a short loop on the north side of Twin Lakes.

4

The Dakota and Ojibwe people took resources from the land which were renewed each year; maple syrup, wild rice and game. But in the late 1800s the use of the land changed dramatically.

5

As the railroads extended westward, more European settlers moved into the area. The resources, which for centuries were used for subsistence, became commodities.

In 1900, a livestock ranch began operating in and around Rice Lake. Wanting to harvest Rice Lake's marsh hay with machinery, the ranchers made two unsuccessful attempts to drain the lake. The ditch they dug was too small to be effective.

6

For a few weeks in the fall, Indians centered their activities around the harvest of wild rice. They poled their canoes through dense stands of wild rice, bending the stalks over their boats, tapping the stalks with sticks, dislodging the grain into the bottom of the boats. On shore, they parched the rice over a fire, placed the grain in shallow holes in the ground, tramped out the kernels from the husk, and winnowed out the grain. They took the wild rice back to their villages where they stored it in pits for use during winter. A local band of Ojibwe still gather wild rice here each September.

7

Climb the observation platform for a view of the 3,600 acre lake. In the fall, Rice Lake often holds concentrations of 250,000 ducks and other waterfowl. In October 1994, a Minnesota state record was set when more than 1,000,000 ducks were counted in a single day!

Loggers harvested the towering white pine and maple from the forests that surround Rice Lake. During the winter, logs were hauled to the lake and unloaded on the ice. A boom was made around the logs and, when the ice melted, the log raft was towed to the lake's outlet. Lumbermen drove the logs down the Rice River and on to the Mississippi River, 20 miles to the northwest.

8

While many of the area's fields were cleared by early European settlers, these fields were cleared by refuge staff many years ago to provide habitat for Canada geese and sharp-tailed grouse. However, current management efforts are to restore the native forest and reduce forest fragmentation. More than 35,000 tree seedlings were planted here in 2012 to benefit species like scarlet tanager and pileated woodpeckers in years to come.

9

A branch of the Soo Line Railroad, known as the Cuyuna and Iron Range, was constructed in 1910. This line carried ore from the iron mines of the nearby Cuyuna Range, and timber from the surrounding area to Lake Superior ports. This line was abandoned in the 1920s and a portion of the rail bed is now used as the main refuge road. You are now on it.

10

President Franklin Roosevelt established Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge in 1935. To help restore wildlife and to provide employment during the depression, the federal government operated a Civilian Conservation Corps camp here from 1939 to 1941. In the clearing to your right there were 24 camp buildings. While no camp buildings remain, the product of the corpsmen's work still does. Through their labor, water control structures were built on the Rice River, providing the refuge with a lasting tool for improving wildlife habitat.

Today, the refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, providing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife species.

*The refuge staff hopes that you have enjoyed your tour!*