

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Rocky Mountain Arsenal

*National
Wildlife Refuge*

*Interpretive
Wildlife Drive*



Welcome



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

Welcome to Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, where more than 330 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish thrive. This 15,000-acre expanse of short-grass and mixed-grass prairie is one of the largest urban refuges in the country and is a place where wildlife comes first.

The refuge has a rich and varied history, which includes the transition from farmland to a U.S. Army wartime and chemical munitions manufacturing site to a wildlife sanctuary. This special place offers many ways to reconnect with nature: a self-guided Wildlife Drive, nature programs, environmental education for students, wildlife viewing tours, and seasonal catch-and-release fishing (the first Saturday in April through November 30), and more than 10 miles of easy hiking trails.

The Refuge was a former U.S. Army chemical munitions manufacturing site that underwent a safe and comprehensive environmental cleanup. The Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and Tri-County Health Department oversaw and approved the cleanup. Portions of the Wildlife Drive go through or near sites that were part of the environmental cleanup. Extensive cleanup was conducted to transition this site to a national wildlife refuge and the cleanup is protective of people and wildlife. Some areas remain under the management of the U.S. Army for the protection of remedy facilities and are closed to visitors. Please observe all posted signs.

About the Wildlife Drive

We invite you to learn about the Refuge and its wildlife by touring the 11-mile Wildlife Drive, which takes between 45 minutes to one hour to complete. The interpretive information in this brochure corresponds with the mile markers along the Wildlife Drive. One-way travel begins after Mile Marker 2, and ends just before Mile Marker 10.

The Wildlife Drive is open year-round from sunrise to sunset, with the exception of Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The speed limit is 30 miles per hour on all Refuge roads. Follow the car and directional arrow symbols, stay on paved roads, and observe all posted signs such as "Stay in Vehicle" or "Area Closed" signs. Be sure to watch for pedestrians at hiking trail crossings.

Along the Drive you may see all kinds of wildlife including bison, deer, coyotes, songbirds, waterfowl, and hawks. Pull off to the shoulder when stopping to view wildlife. To see more wildlife, we recommend you use your vehicle as a viewing blind. Practice good wildlife viewing ethics by remembering that if your behavior is affecting wildlife, then you are too close, and consider those who follow you want to see wildlife too. For your safety, remain in your vehicle when driving through the bison pastures, which are marked with signs and cattle guard crossings. Bison are unpredictable animals and need lots of space, especially during calving season, which is May through September.

Along the Drive

To start the Drive, leave the Visitor Center and turn east on 64th Avenue. Watch for mule deer, songbirds, and black-tailed prairie dogs as you drive through the short-grass prairie. At the stop sign, continue east to start the Wildlife Drive.

Ahead on your left, is Lake Ladora, which has a 1.8-mile loop trail around it. Watch for red-winged blackbirds, geese, gulls, double-crested cormorants, and migrating waterfowl such as northern shovelers, gadwalls, mallards, and ringed-neck ducks.

Showy milkweed, with its bright pink flowers, dot the lakes' edge throughout the summer. Milkweed is the only plant Monarch butterflies will lay eggs on and is the primary food source for the caterpillars. Milkweed also provides important nectar for butterflies and bees.

Catch-and-release fishing is permitted at Lakes Ladora and Mary from the first Saturday in April through November 30 on Tuesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. For more information, please see the Refuge's fishing rules and regulations on the website.

1

Just past the fence line, Lower Derby Lake is to your left and a parking lot is on your right.

This is the Refuge's largest lake at 72 acres. The viewing platform is a great spot to see migrating and seasonal waterfowl such as American white pelicans, shorebirds, blue herons, and cormorants



in the spring and summer. In the winter, bald eagles use the cottonwood trees for nighttime roosting. During the daytime they hunt for fish on the icy lake.

Notice the trees in a row to your right as you drive along the road. More than 180 families grew crops and raised their families on this land. They planted a variety of trees to serve as windbreaks for their homes. Look closely and you may spot mule or white-tailed deer lying in the shade, a coyote in the distance, or songbirds in the tree tops.

2

Follow the car and directional arrow symbol, turn left on Potomac Street to continue on the Wildlife Drive. This is where one way travel begins. The grasslands to your right provide habitat for North America's largest mammal, the American bison, which were reintroduced to the Refuge in March 2007.



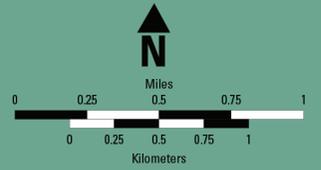
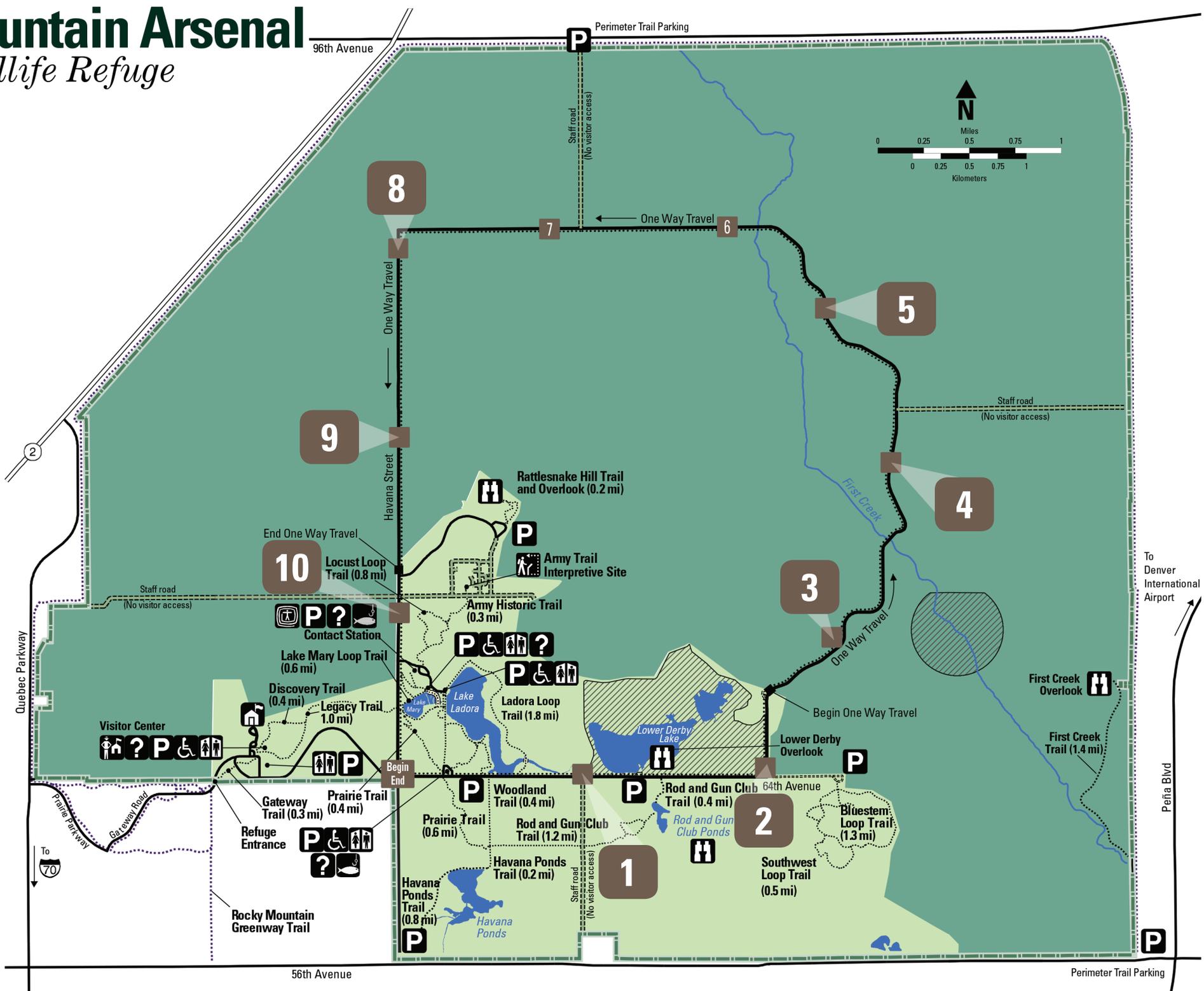
Mature males (bulls) weigh up to 2,000 pounds and females (cows) weigh up to 1,200 pounds. Bison walk up to 18 miles a day eating 24 pounds of native grasses. This is one of their many pastures throughout this expansive Refuge.

Bison are natural lawnmowers of the prairie and are rotated to different pastures to stimulate the grasslands. Please stay in your vehicle as bison are wild and unpredictable animals. Bison pastures are marked with signs and cattle guard crossings.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal

National Wildlife Refuge

- Refuge boundary
- Wildlife drive and mile markers
- Other visitor road
- Gravel road
- Staff road (No visitor access)
- Hiking trail
- Perimeter Trail
- Lake / wetland
- Stream
- Floating boardwalk
- Sensitive wildlife habitat area (Closed to all entry)
- Bison and prairie restoration area
- Visitor and environmental education area
- Accessible facilities
- Visitor center
- Contact station
- Refuge headquarters
- Historic interpretive site
- Information kiosk
- Wildlife viewing site
- Restroom
- Fishing fee station
- Parking



To Denver International Airport

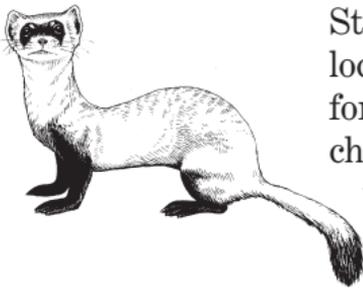
Peña Blvd

3



Slow down and stop at the 30 mph speed limit sign. Looking straight east is the bald eagle nest. It sits in the tallest tree and can be seen without binoculars after the leaves have fallen. Bald eagles mate for life and this pair has been using this nest since 2002. When an eagle is five years old, its head and tail feathers turn white, and its beak and eye color turn yellow. Bald eagles, once an endangered species, were discovered wintering on the site in the 1980s, which prompted the transformation to a national wildlife refuge.

Also to the east is the original reintroduction site of the endangered black-footed ferret in 2015. Ferrets are nocturnal and fossorial meaning they are active at night and spend most of their life underground. They are skilled at pursuing and capturing prairie dogs. They rely on prairie dogs for food and shelter, and therefore have an unbreakable link to the health of prairie dogs. Loss of prairie dog habitat is one of the main reasons the black-footed ferret almost became extinct and remains an endangered species.



Stop by the live ferret exhibit located behind the Visitor Center for a rare opportunity to see these charismatic mammals Wednesdays through Sundays from 9 am – 4 pm.

Ahead, you will cross over the First Creek Bridge. In the spring, listen for frogs and toads in the wetlands; watch for swallows darting through the cattails catching insects during the summer months, and look year-round for white-tailed deer laying down beneath the trees. Please continue to stay in your vehicle, as you are still in the bison pasture.

4

Look west to enjoy a magnificent view of the Rocky Mountains and Front Range. Near the top of the hill you will cross over a cattle guard and are now exiting the bison pasture.



As you look around, notice the expansive short grass prairie.

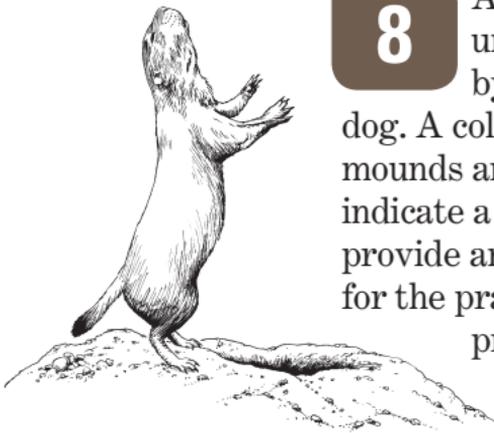
This habitat was altered by more than 100 years of human activity, such as farming and wartime munitions manufacturing, allowing weeds to crowd out the native grasses. Through extensive cleanup efforts, followed by seeding a variety of native grasses and wildflowers, and prescribed burns to remove the weeds, this area is now supporting healthy native grasses. Small native birds like grasshopper sparrows, horned larks, and lark buntings nest in this area.

Ahead on your left is a former U.S. Army Bunker, which serves as a reminder of the site's past to support wartime production. During the Army manufacturing years this bunker was used to watch the launching distance of test munitions made at the site. The building has a heavy steel door, the glass is about 1 inch thick, and the protruding pipes were used for ventilation in an otherwise sealed building.

Although this area underwent environmental cleanup, it is important that visitors observe all posted signs such as "Stay in Vehicle" and "Area Closed". Visitors in this area are required to stay in their vehicle. Due to the site's munitions history, use the following basic rules: *"If you didn't drop it, don't pick it up"* and report any unknown object to Refuge staff.

5

Ahead on your left are two U.S. Army landfills that hold old building debris and soil from the cleanup of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. The buildings were used intermittently from World War II through the Cold War to support wartime efforts, as well as to destroy munitions made at the Arsenal. By 2003, all manufacturing buildings were demolished and the landfills were closed by 2008. This area is not part of the Refuge; it is monitored and maintained by the U.S. Army and stands as a reminder of the conservation success story and transition from a former military site into a national wildlife refuge. Please continue along the road and observe all posted signs.

8

Around you are active underground “towns” built by the black-tailed prairie dog. A collection of cone-shaped mounds among the low grasses indicate a colony. The mounds provide an elevated lookout post for the prairie dogs to watch for predators, such as coyotes, hawks, and eagles. They also keep rain, water, and snow melt from entering the burrows. The low grasses provide not only food and water, but also cover from predators.

As you continue driving ahead, watch for perched raptors like the red-tailed hawk, Swainson’s hawk in the summer, and ferruginous hawk in the winter. They are daytime hunters of the prairie dog.

The burrowing owl, one of the smallest owls in North America, can be seen in the vicinity of the

prairie dog town. In late spring, these owls migrate from Mexico to the Refuge. They spend the summer raising their young in abandoned prairie dog burrows. The owls are about 9-inches tall with long-spindly legs, brown spotted feathers, and yellow eyes. Active during the day, burrowing owls eat moles and mice during late spring and early summer. Later, they switch to insects, especially grasshoppers and beetles.

Ahead, you will be entering another bison pasture area. Please stay in your vehicle.

9

On your left is the bison corral, which is used to conduct the annual health check-up on the bison. All animals are micro-chipped and, as they pass through the corral, biologists collect specific genetic and health information for each animal. This information determines which bison will stay on the Refuge or be transferred to other national wildlife refuges or conservation herds to keep the gene pool diverse.



Behind the corral is Rattlesnake Hill. This hill provides a scenic overlook of the entire Refuge and can be accessed by turning left onto Rattlesnake Hill Road.

One-way travel ends as you exit the bison pasture. When you reach the stop sign, continue straight on Havana Street.



As you continue south on Havana Street, be sure to watch for mule deer moving through the short grass prairie and locust thickets. Look for the directional sign leading you to a variety of trails, Lakes Mary and Ladora, and the Contact Station. To exit the Refuge, turn right at the intersection of Havana Street and 64th Avenue.

Come Visit Again

We hope you have enjoyed the Wildlife Drive. Come visit us again as each season brings new and exciting wildlife viewing opportunities. Stop by the Visitor Center to learn more about the Refuge's history, habitats, and wildlife. You can pick up information there about Refuge programs and activities and visit the gift store. Visit us anytime online at www.fws.gov/refuge/rocky_mountain_arsenal.

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 711 for a free connection to the State relay service for TTY and voice calls to and from people with hearing and speech disabilities. For more information or to address accessibility needs, please contact the Refuge staff at 303 / 289 0232, or the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Opportunity, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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303 / 289 0579 fax
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TTY / Voice: 711

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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For Refuge Information
1 800 / 344 WILD

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