

Lake Drummond

Lake Drummond, at 3,100 acres, is the largest natural lake in Virginia. The lake was formed about 4,000 years ago after a fire burned away several feet of peat.

The peat is the reason the lake's water is a dark brown color. As ground water perks through the peat, it is stained just as tea in a teacup. Despite its murky appearance, the water is very pure. The lake is home to several species of fish, including mud sunfish, yellow perch, brown and yellow bullhead catfish, bowfin, and crappie. Contrary to popular myth, there are no alligators in the lake.

In the winter, the lake provides a resting place for thousands of migratory birds including Tundra Swans and Snow Geese. In the summer, keep an eye out for Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets, as well as Northern Parula and Prothonotary Warblers nesting in the cypress trees. Bald Eagles often have nests around the lake's shoreline.



Lake Drummond is the main source of water for the Dismal Swamp Canal. The canal serves as the eastern boundary of the refuge. The canal was initially proposed by George Washington and was dug by slaves by hand. It was an important strategic position during the American Civil War. The canal is still in use today, making it the oldest continually operating canal in America.



The Railroad Ditch Wildlife Drive gate is open every day. Access hours are April 1 to September 30, 7a-7p and October 1 to March 31, 7:30a-5:00p. The entry gate closes one hour earlier to allow all vehicles to exit on time.

Boat launching is allowed every day, year round, by use of and by terms of the Wildlife Drive permit.

Hiking and biking are allowed every day on refuge trails, including the Railroad Ditch Trail, sunrise to sunset.

The Railroad Ditch Trail and Wildlife Drive are occasionally closed for hunts, maintenance, prescribed burns, and other management events.

The refuge office is open Monday-Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. The office is closed on weekends and federal holidays.

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

Headquarters, 3100 Desert Road, Suffolk, VA
23434

(757) 986-3705

www.fws.gov/refuge/Great_Dismal_Swamp



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive

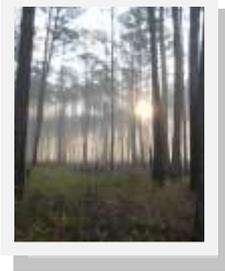
3120 Desert Rd, Suffolk, VA

*Sights and stops along the
way to Lake Drummond*

Welcome to the Great Dismal

The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is a place of both ecological importance and historical significance. The refuge is the largest intact remnant of a vast habitat that once covered more than one million acres of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. Over 200 species of birds and nearly 100 species of butterflies and skippers have been identified on the refuge. It is also home of one of the largest black bear populations on the eastern coastal plain.

The Wildlife Drive route is a popular way to see Lake Drummond. Even so, there are plenty of other sights along the way. But first: As you travel the route, please watch out for snakes and turtles sunning themselves in the road. Be sure to bring your binoculars and cameras, you never know what you might see!



Pines Trail

Begin your tour by walking the Pines Trail, a quarter mile loop around the refuge headquarters that winds through a stand of pines, including recently planted long leaf pines. Long leaf pines once dominated the Southeast, but logging and development have reduced them to only a fraction of their original range.

The Refuge conducts prescribed burns in this area every few years. Carefully burning the forest under controlled conditions prevents the buildup of plant matter that could fuel a larger, more destructive fire. Long leaf pines depend on periodic fire to clear out undergrowth and allow seeds to germinate. Burns also create a more diverse habitat for a variety of animals. It is common to see a re-growth of wildflowers appear a few weeks after each burn. Look for the Pink Lady Slippers and a variety of tiny orchids.

Some animals you might spot along the Pines Trail include: Redheaded Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Summer Tanagers, black rat snakes, and deer.

Permit Station and Boardwalk

Soon after you begin your travel up the Railroad Ditch, you will come to the Permit Station and the Underground Railroad Pavilion. A self-serve permit will be necessary to complete the route to the Lake. Simply complete the form and keep the permit on your driver's side dash until you depart.

The pavilion was built to showcase the Great Dismal Swamp's role as a stop on the Underground Railroad and as a hiding place for permanent, multi-generational communities of escaped slaves known as maroons. In 2004, the Great Dismal Swamp became the first National Wildlife Refuge designated as a site on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. The Swamp's story is a featured exhibit in the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, DC. Stop by our pavilion to learn more about this important piece of American history.



Cypress Marsh and Boardwalk

At the intersection of Railroad and West Ditches lies an area where the dense forest is replaced by tall marsh grasses and cypress trees. This 10-acre marsh was created through a series of prescribed burns, allowing a different habitat type to take hold.

The Cypress Marsh is home to several beaver lodges, including one that is visible from the road. You might also see otters, turtles, wood ducks, herons, and mallards.

Take a stroll on the boardwalk! Listen for the chatter of birds, the activity of beavers, or the glide of a snake through the water. Sounds so apparent here, but lost in the openness of a ditch road. Limited parking is by the trail entrance. More parking is available at the corner of Railroad Ditch and West Ditch Roads.

West Ditch Boardwalk Trail

Midway down West Ditch, you will see another boardwalk trail on the right. The trail leads to a Bald Cypress tree approximately 800 years old. Although the entire Dismal Swamp has been logged, a few old-growth trees like this one remain. This tree was topped by lightning, probably numerous times, and is only about one-half to two-thirds of its original height. Centuries ago, much of the swamp was dominated by giant cypress like this.



If you would like to walk out to the tree, please park your car along the opposite side of the road so as to allow others to pass.

Lateral West Fire Scar

In recent years, several severe wildfires have affected the swamp. The 2008 South One Fire lasted 121 days and burned 4,800 acres. It was followed in 2011 by the Lateral West Fire, which burned 6,300 acres, much of which was in the South One fire scar. It smoldered for nearly four months. The elevation in the fire scar is two to five feet lower than it was before the fire. It will take centuries for this peat to regenerate.



Fire has always been a part of the Dismal Swamp history, especially during times of drought. Wildfires in the swamp are difficult to put out. The

swamp's peat soils actually burn. In the early part of the 20th century, a fire raged for three years. As the area surrounding the swamp has become more populated, fire suppression and prevention have become a priority.