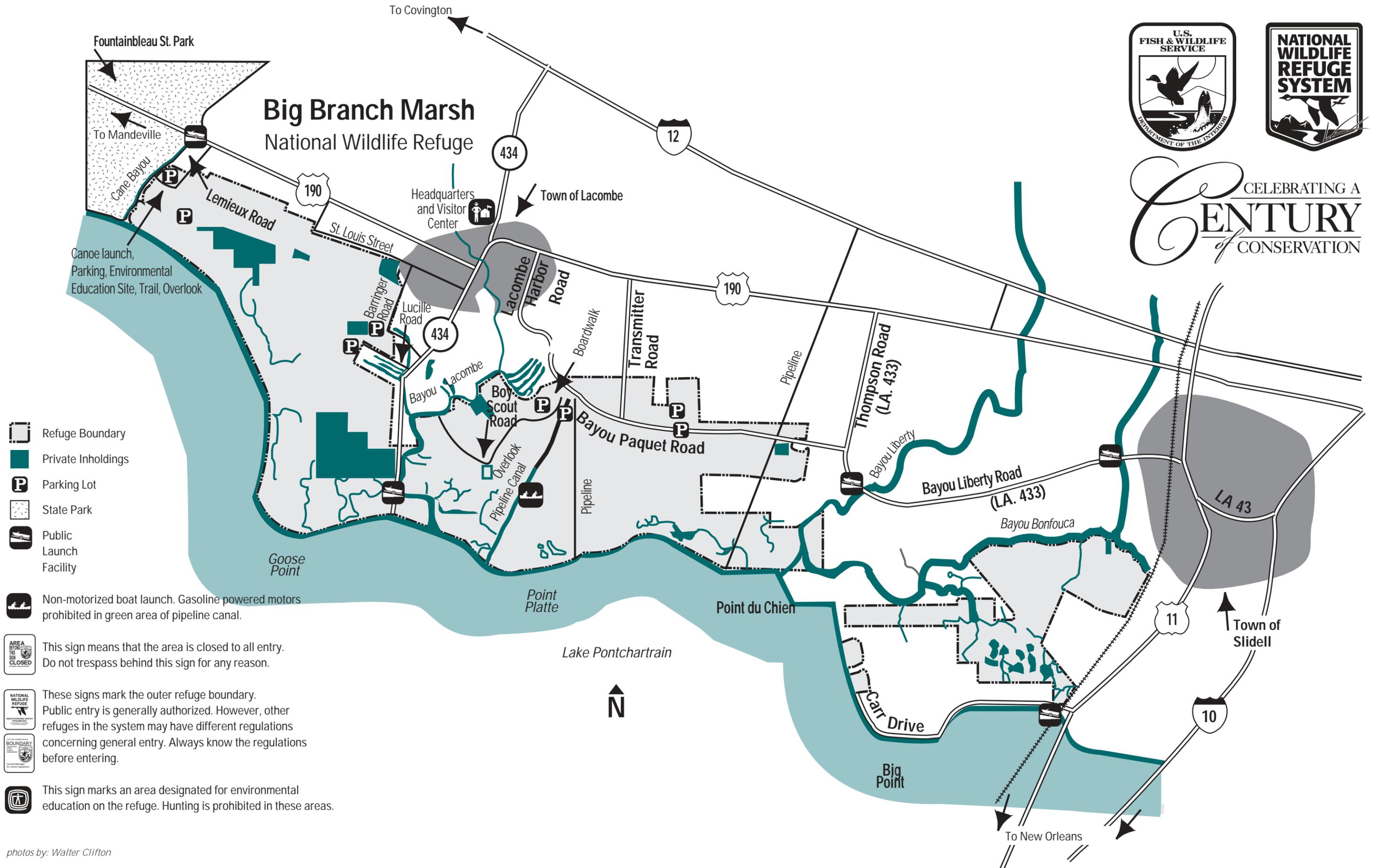




CELEBRATING A
CENTURY
of CONSERVATION



-  Refuge Boundary
-  Private Inholdings
-  Parking Lot
-  State Park
-  Public Launch Facility
-  Non-motorized boat launch. Gasoline powered motors prohibited in green area of pipeline canal.
-  This sign means that the area is closed to all entry. Do not trespass behind this sign for any reason.
-  These signs mark the outer refuge boundary. Public entry is generally authorized. However, other refuges in the system may have different regulations concerning general entry. Always know the regulations before entering.
-  This sign marks an area designated for environmental education on the refuge. Hunting is prohibited in these areas.

photos by: Walter Clifton

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



Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

General

Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1994. It is the last large undeveloped natural area on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Within it are interfaces of sandy beaches, offshore grass beds, marshes, hardwood hammocks, and pine ridges.

This diversity of habitats supports a wide variety of wildlife species. The refuge attracts shorebirds, wading birds, neotropical migratory birds, and wintering and resident waterfowl. A variety of mammal species, including game species such as white-tailed deer and swamp rabbits, furbearers such as mink, otter, raccoon, muskrat, nutria and many other non-game species are found here in abundance.

The marshes provide critical spawning and nursery habitat for a number of fresh and saltwater species. Shrimp, crabs, redfish, speckled trout, largemouth bass, catfish, bream, and other species can all be found within the refuge at least part of the year.

The management objectives of the refuge are to (1) provide habitat for a natural diversity of wildlife associated with Big Branch Marsh NWR, especially those listed as threatened or endangered, (2) provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl, (3) provide nesting habitat for wood ducks, (4) provide habitat for non-game migrating birds, and (5) provide opportunities for public outdoor recreation.

Environmental Education Programs

Formal environmental education programs, targeted for various ages, are offered on the refuge. These highlight the wildlife and habitats of the refuge, and encourage students to



Giant blue iris

become advocates for our country's natural heritage wherever they live. Classroom visits by refuge staff are also available. Schools or other organized groups should contact the refuge well in advance to make reservations for EE programs.

Interpretive Tours of the Refuge

Interpretive tours are presented every weekend by refuge staff and volunteers. These include canoeing, biking, hiking, bird-watching tours and photography classes. A quarterly calendar of tours and other events is published, and can be obtained at the visitor center or by mail.



Mink

special guests spotlight this as well as other refuges in the Southeast Louisiana complex and around the country.

Hunting and Fishing

The primary objective of National Wildlife Refuges is to provide habitat for the conservation and protection of all species of fish and wildlife. Harvesting surplus animals is one tool used to maintain wildlife populations at a level compatible with the environment, provide wholesome recreational opportunities, and permit the use of a valuable renewable resource.

Both hunting and fishing are permitted on Big Branch Marsh NWR, subject to regulations contained in the refuge's annual hunting and fishing brochure. This brochure is available at the visitor center or by mail, and contains the required hunting permit. Other recreational users should be aware of hunting seasons on the refuge. Visitors are encouraged to wear hunter orange for safety during hunting seasons. State fishing and hunting licenses are required to fish or hunt on the refuge.

Recreational Opportunities

Hiking

The best hiking opportunities are on Boy Scout Road, where a 4.5-mile round trip walk takes you through several refuge habitats to the edge of Bayou Lacombe. A 1/4 mile boardwalk trail also begins here, and travels to the edge of a nearby cypress slough. A detailed interpretive guide to Boy Scout Road is available from the visitor center.

Biking

Boy Scout Road is also great for a 4.5-mile bike trip, with a smooth graveled surface. Mountain bikes are recommended. The interpretive guide to Boy Scout Road will help you enjoy your trip. The Tammany Trace paved bike path, while not on the refuge, runs very near it and provides access to several refuge locations.

National Wildlife Refuge Week

National Wildlife Refuge Week is celebrated each year at Big Branch Marsh NWR in mid-October. Displays, tours, demonstrations, and presentations by



Red-cockaded woodpecker

Canoeing

Canoeing opportunities are best on Cane Bayou, at the western end of the refuge. A canoe launch is located at the Cane Bayou Access area, off of Lemieux Road. From there, a round trip of about three miles takes you downstream to Lake Pontchartrain. The mix of pine and hardwoods gives way to cypress and willow as you near the lake. Osprey are often seen in this area.

Endangered Species

Nesting clusters of Red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) are found on Big Branch Marsh NWR. This cavity-nesting bird utilizes live mature pine trees in which to build its nests. As logging has occurred throughout its range, RCW's have found it difficult to find proper nest sites. Management programs such as prescribed burning seek to enhance habitats for this endangered species.

For Your Safety

Be prepared and observe regulations concerning: fishing and hunting license requirements; refuge hunt permits; closed areas; boat registration; life jackets and other required safety equipment.

Big Branch Marsh NWR is closed at night.

Do not leave valuables in your vehicle.

Tell a relative or friend where you are going and when you should return.

During hunting season, non-hunters are encouraged to wear hunter orange vests.

Prohibited

Feeding, enticing, or disturbing alligators or any other wildlife.

Air-thrust boats, motorized pirogues, mud boats, and go-devils.

Taking, collecting, or injuring any plant.

Taking, collecting, or injuring any wildlife not in season on the refuge.

Use of trotlines, jug lines, gill nets, hoop nets, slat boxes, and commercial fishing of any kind.

Motorized vehicles off public roads, designated trails, and parking areas.

Firearms are permitted ONLY during the refuge hunting season for which a permit is required.

Visitor Center

The refuge Visitor Center is located in Lacombe, Louisiana at 61389 Highway 434, 1/4 mile north of U.S. 190, and 2 miles south of I-12. There you will find exhibits, information, a sales area, and a backyard wildlife demonstration garden. Visitor Center hours are 9:00 am - 4:00 pm Monday thru Saturday. The Center is closed New Year's Day, Mardi Gras, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day, and Federal Holidays. The phone number is (504) 882 3881.

Surrounding the Visitor Center is a 110-acre tract of the refuge along Bayou Lacombe. This beautiful property contains a variety of formal garden areas and ornamental species, and was once operated as a commercial garden attraction. The site has also been the home of a Louisiana governor and, most recently, a boarding school operated by the Redemptorist Fathers. The grounds are currently used for special events and environmental education programs. The site will become the headquarters for the Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex. From here the Complex will manage Big Branch Marsh NWR as well as six other National Wildlife Refuges in the region.

When Visiting Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

Lodging is available in nearby communities of Lacombe, Slidell, and Mandeville/Covington. Various restaurants, gas stations, and a grocery store are located in the town of

Lacombe. General tourist information is available from the St. Tammany Parish Tourist and Convention Commission, located at Exit 65 from Interstate 12. Their address is 68099 Highway 59, Mandeville, La. 70471; phone (985) 892 1441.



White-eyed Vireo