



Dale Bumpers White River National Wildlife Refuge

Introduction

White River Migratory Waterfowl Refuge was established in 1935 for the conservation of habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. The name was changed to White River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in 1940. Encompassing over 160,000 acres of land, the refuge protects one of the largest remaining bottomland hardwood forests in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. The refuge was designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1989, and as a globally-Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy in 2001.

History

The first Europeans arrived at the White River with Hernando de Soto's expeditions in 1542, near present-day St. Charles. In 1673, the French arrived in the area and created a settlement at the Quapaw village of "Arkansa", which the French called Arkansas. This name was later given to the surrounding region and one of the area's three rivers. The original site of Arkansa was rediscovered in 2003 and is now known to be located on the refuge.

In 2014, the refuge was renamed to Dale Bumpers White River NWR in honor of Dale Bumpers. As a U.S. Senator, Mr. Bumpers facilitated a land exchange that swapped Idaho timberland for bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands in Arkansas, adding 41,000 acres to the White River and Cache River National Wildlife Refuges. As state governor, he helped prevent the channelization of 232 miles of the Cache River and its tributary, Bayou DeView.



American black bear cub. Photo © Tina Shaw, USFWS.

Habitat Management

Forest management is the key to maintaining high quality habitat on the refuge. Practices such as the selective harvest of trees opens the canopy and allows gaps of sunlight to reach the forest floor. This encourages the growth of younger trees, shrubs, and other small plants that are beneficial as sources of food and shelter for wildlife.

The White River itself naturally floods every winter, inundating approximately 75% of the refuge's bottomland hardwood forests. Carefully timed flooding of these areas stimulates the growth of native wetland plants and invertebrates. It also provides quality feeding and resting areas for migratory wintering waterfowl. During the spring, these flooded areas become a nursery for millions of fish and other aquatic wildlife species.

Refuge Residents

White River NWR supports a tremendous variety of wildlife throughout the year. Mammals such as beavers, mink, and river otters frequent the waterways of the refuge. White-tailed deer and wild turkey move between the uplands and bottomland hardwoods. The refuge also supports one of the largest populations of black bears in the state. American black bears use the large tree cavities in the refuge's mature forests as shelter for their cubs.

During the late fall and winter, large concentrations of migratory waterfowl such as mallards, gadwall, and ring-necked ducks feed and rest in the flooded bottomland hardwoods. In the spring, neotropical migratory songbirds such as prothonotary warblers, yellow-billed cuckoos, and Acadian flycatchers arrive from Central and South America to use the bottomland hardwoods as breeding habitat. During the summer and fall, migratory shorebirds such as least terns, pectoral sandpipers, and killdeer feed on invertebrates along the river's sandbars, lake mudflats, and within flooded fields.

These wetlands are also excellent nesting habitat for wood ducks, rookeries of wading birds such as great blue herons and great egrets, and bald eagles. American alligators are known to nest here and can be seen throughout the refuge's wetlands and oxbow lakes. Smaller, more elusive species such as toads, bullfrogs, and treefrogs can be heard calling during warm nights. Turtles basking in the sun on logs are a common sight along the waterways.

Enjoy the Refuge

The public is encouraged to visit the refuge year-round. Hunting, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing opportunities attract many outdoor enthusiasts. Visitors have access to several primitive campgrounds, boat ramps, interpretive hiking trails, and an observation tower when available. The 1.2-mile Champion Big Cypress trail leads visitors to the largest baldcypress tree in Arkansas. Stop by the visitor center to learn more about the refuge's history, management, and local wildlife.

Arkansas has long, hot summers. River levels greatly affect activities on the refuge, and certain parts of the refuge may be closed due to flooding. Accommodations are limited. Biting insects, venomous snakes, and briars are common, so it is recommended that visitors bring drinking water, snacks, sunscreen, insect repellent, wear long pants and site-appropriate footwear.

Visitors are encouraged to read the public use regulations brochure before entering the refuge. You may pick one up at the visitor center, from brochure boxes located throughout the refuge, or download one from our website.

An annual public use permit is required to hunt, fish, launch boats, and utilize campgrounds on the refuge. Permits are valid for one year from date of purchase. ATV use is permitted for hunting and fishing only. Visit our website or call the refuge for more information.

Refuge Headquarters

57 South CC Camp Rd
St. Charles, AR 72140

Phone: 870-282-8200

Office Hours: 8:00 am – 3:30 pm, Monday – Friday
Closed on federal holidays.

Website

www.fws.gov/refuge/dale-bumpers-white-river
...or scan the QR code below with your phone.

Refuge Website



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Flooded bottomland hardwood forest. Photo © USFWS.