

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Reelfoot and Lake Isom

National Wildlife Refuges



Unmatched anywhere in the world, the National Wildlife Refuge System is an extensive network of lands and waters protected and managed especially for wildlife and its habitat. Refuges stretch across the U.S. from above the Arctic Circle in Alaska to the subtropical waters of the Florida Keys and beyond to the Caribbean and South Pacific. The National Wildlife Refuge System is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which protects and manages over 560 refuges for wildlife and for people to enjoy.



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

Introduction and History

The lure and beauty of Reelfoot Lake make it a captivating place, known not only for its rich fish and wildlife resources, but also for its unique origin and natural history.

During the winter of 1811, time momentarily stopped in the central Mississippi River valley as the earth suddenly began to shake and violently move about. The once peaceful woodlands rolled like ocean waves and landslides covered many rivers and streams. A great depression was formed in northwest Tennessee and the waters of the Mississippi River filled the sunken area.



Dave Menke

Thus, Reelfoot Lake, as presently known, was formed as a result of one of the most violent earthquakes recorded in North America. Numerous shocks were recorded from December, 1811 to February, 1812 and aftershocks were recorded

for several decades. The formation of Reelfoot Lake created a valuable wetland area which became a haven for many wildlife species, attracting hunters and outdoorsmen such as Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie.

Reelfoot and Lake Isom National Wildlife Refuges

Reelfoot National Wildlife Refuge is located on the northern portion of Reelfoot Lake, which lies within the northwest corner of Tennessee and southwest corner of Kentucky. The Refuge was established in 1941 under the terms of a lease and cooperative agreement with the State of

*cover photo:
Norm Nelson*

Tennessee. Additional land purchases extended the Refuge into Kentucky to its present 10,428 acres.

Lake Isom National Wildlife Refuge was established by Executive Order in 1938 and lies three miles south of Reelfoot Lake. The Refuge's 1,846 acres of open water, forested wetlands, and croplands resemble the larger Reelfoot Refuge. Its wildlife resources and management are also similar:

Due to the proximity to the Mississippi River and being located in its former floodplain, these Refuges serve as a major stopover point and wintering area for waterfowl of the Mississippi Flyway. Reelfoot and Lake Isom National Wildlife

Refuges (NWRs), along with many other refuges along the Mississippi flyway, work together to achieve a common goal: to provide high quality habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Refuge management includes forest management, protection and enhancement of wetlands, production of waterfowl foods through managed croplands, and manipulation of native vegetation in shallow wetlands, along with managing the water levels of Reelfoot Lake.

The primary purpose of Reelfoot NWR and Lake Isom NWR is to provide habitat for migratory birds with a specific emphasis on providing food and sanctuary for wintering waterfowl. One method these Refuges use to provide food



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is through a cooperative farming program which allows local farmers to plant agricultural crops on Refuge lands on a crop share basis. The Refuges' share, normally corn, is left unharvested in the field and then flooded to provide high energy food for wintering waterfowl.

The Refuges also manage moist soil impoundments for the production of natural foods including smartweeds and wild millet. The seasonal manipulation of water levels within these impoundments stimulates the growth of natural seed bearing plants which are important for providing a balanced nutritional diet necessary for the spring reproduction process.

Waterfowl

The Refuges and surrounding Lake provide major wintering, migrating, and production areas for waterfowl in the southeast. Ducks, primarily mallards, gadwall, American widgeon, and ring-necked ducks begin arriving in October. Blue-winged teal can be seen as early as September. The mallard population can peak around 150,000 in midwinter. The wood duck, a summer resident, nests in large numbers at Reelfoot Lake during the spring and summer period.

Bald Eagles

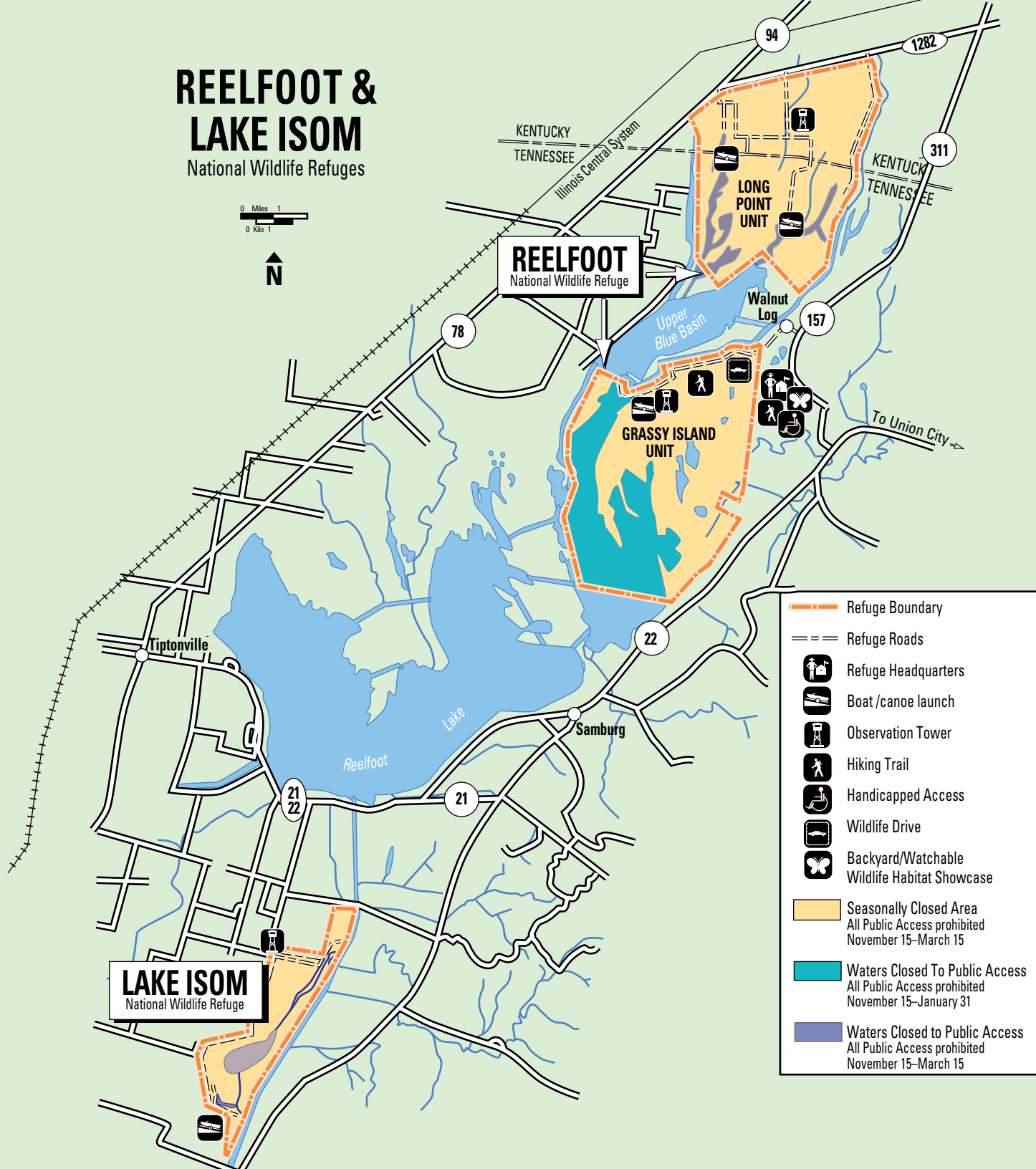
Reelfoot Lake has long been known for its large wintering population of bald eagles. Normally 100-200 bald eagles spend their winter at Reelfoot Lake. The majestic birds are primarily fish eaters, but also prey on waterfowl and other wildlife. Eagles nested regularly in the area until 1963. The environmental effects of DDT contamination in the 1950's and 60's caused a nationwide decline in eagle populations, prompting its listing as an Endangered Species. In 1988 a nesting population became reestablished on Reelfoot Lake as a result of a successful eagle hacking release program. Since then, local and



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REELFOOT & LAKE ISOM

National Wildlife Refuges



- Refuge Boundary
- Refuge Roads
- Refuge Headquarters
- Boat /canoe launch
- Observation Tower
- Hiking Trail
- Handicapped Access
- Wildlife Drive
- Backyard/Watchable Wildlife Habitat Showcase
- Seasonally Closed Area
All Public Access prohibited
November 15–March 15
- Waters Closed To Public Access
All Public Access prohibited
November 15–January 31
- Waters Closed to Public Access
All Public Access prohibited
November 15–March 15



national populations have increased or stabilized, and the bald eagle was delisted in 2007.

Public Use

Reelfoot and Lake Isom NWRs provide interpretive, educational, and wildlife recreation opportunities for the visiting public.

All of Reelfoot and Lake Isom NWRs are open to the public from March 16-November 14 for fishing and wildlife observation, with the exception of the waters of Grassy Island, which are open to the public from February 1-November 14. Hunting is also permitted within specific seasons. Public boat launches are available for lake access and Refuge roads provide access to upland portions of the Refuge.

Visitor Center/Office

The Reelfoot NWR Visitor Center contains a number of displays describing refuge wildlife and historic events in the Reelfoot area and is open daily from 8am – 4pm, except for federal holidays.

Grassy Island Auto Tour

A self-guided wildlife drive is available on the Grassy Island Unit. The drive is open year-round during daylight hours. A boardwalk with an observation platform awaits visitors at the end of the drive. Additional Refuge roads are seasonally open for wildlife recreational pursuits.

Boat Access

Boating on Refuge waters is probably the best way to experience the Refuge. Several public and commercial boat ramps are available on or adjacent to the Refuge. Only boat motors with 10 horsepower or less are permitted at Lake Isom NWR.



Wildlife Observation

Brochures describing public use, access, and checklists for birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles are available.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing are permitted on a seasonal basis. Consult the Refuges' Public Use Regulations brochure for further information.

Observation Towers

Two observation towers are available to the public year-round at Reelfoot NWR: one on the Grassy Island Auto Tour and the other in the main entrance to the Long Point Unit. An observation tower at Lake Isom NWR is also available to the public year-round.

Hiking Trails

The Grassy Island hiking trail is located at approximately the halfway point of the Auto Tour. The half-mile gravel/boardwalk semicircle exits on the Auto Tour for a short trip back to the parking area.



The Backyard Habitat Trail is located at the Visitor Center.

Canoe/Kayak Trails

The Glory Hole Trail, which is located on the Grassy Island Refuge unit, is open February 1-November 14. The Goose Pen Trail and West Boat House Trail, which are located at Long Point Refuge unit, are open from March 16-November 14. Due to water level fluctuations, some canoe trails may not be fully accessible during the open season. Please contact the Reelfoot NWR Visitor Center for water level information and other canoe trail questions.

Accessibility for the Disabled

The Visitor Center is fully accessible for the disabled, as are the main trail of the Backyard Habitat Showcase,

the Grassy Island hiking trail, and the boardwalk at the end of the Grassy Island Auto Tour.

Calendar of Wildlife Events **January**

Waterfowl concentrations of up to 150,000 ducks and 50,000 geese can be observed. Guided eagle tours are offered.

February

Bald eagle population is at its peak in the Reelfoot Lake area. Cold weather crappie fishing is going strong. Grassy Island unit is open for fishing on the first. Guided eagle tours are offered.

March

Bald eagles begin northward migration. Nesting osprey return. Long Point and Lake Isom open to sport fishing on the sixteenth. Resident wood ducks return and begin nesting activity. Large numbers of northern shovelers and blue-winged teal arrive on northward migration. This is a good month for crappie fishing.

April

The spring turkey hunt is conducted this month. Spring wildflowers are blooming. Shorebirds and ducks can be seen in Refuge moist soil units and temporary wetlands. This is a great time for canoeing and kayaking. Crappie fishing is still going strong.

May

Bluegill fishing is at its peak. Songbirds are abundant, especially warblers. Mississippi kites can be observed. This is a great month for frog listening. Whitetail deer and wild turkey can be easily viewed in the early morning and late evening.

June

Deer fawns become visible this month. Herons and egrets can be observed fishing in shallow water.

Paul Hamilton



Gerald A. Gray



USFWS



Jon R. Nicklles



David Haggard



Emergent and floating aquatic vegetation are blooming. Annual youth fishing rodeo is held at the Visitor Center ponds. Environmental education programs are offered weekly throughout the month.

July

Environmental education programs are offered weekly throughout the month.

August

Refuge squirrel season opens on the fourth Saturday of the month.

September

Fall fishing for “stripes,” crappie, and bass begins.

October

Good hiking and canoeing weather. Large numbers of gadwall and American widgeon begin arriving. Migration Celebration hayride is held at the Long Point unit in honor of National Wildlife Refuge Week. Squirrel, raccoon, and archery deer seasons are open.

November

The Reelfoot NWR quota deer gun hunt is conducted this month. The Grassy Island Auto Tour, hiking trails, and viewing towers are all open for excellent opportunities to view wildlife. Management units are closed to public entry on the fifteenth.

December

Excellent opportunities to observe ducks, geese and eagles. Guided eagle tours begin.

David Haggard



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National Wildlife Refuges
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January 2014

