

# LWF 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention – General Session & Tour

## Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge

### LINKS

<http://www.friendsofblackbayou.org>

<http://www.fws.gov/southeast/pubs/nlabrd.pdf>

<http://www.fws.gov/northlouisiana/blackbayoulake/>

<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/profiles/index.cfm?id=42652>

Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge is one of five refuges managed in the North Louisiana Refuges Complex and one of 545 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It was established in 1997 through a unique partnership with the city of Monroe, Louisiana.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a free 99-year lease to manage the city-owned lake. The 1,600 acre scenic lake, a central feature of the refuge, is studded with picturesque baldcypress and tupelo trees and surrounded by swamps that graduate into bottomland hardwoods and then into upland mixed pine/hardwoods.

The 4,600-acre refuge (6,000 acres within the authorized refuge boundary) supports an excellent fisheries resource and provides valuable habitat for migratory waterfowl, neotropical migratory songbirds, and many resident wildlife species.

Just north of Monroe off Hwy 165 on Richland Drive, this semi-urban refuge is ideally located to provide a great place for wildlife and a great place for people to connect with the natural world.

### **Refuge Objectives**

- Protect and enhance habitat for endangered species, waterfowl, neotropical migrants, and resident wildlife.
- Provide environmental education/ interpretation in a semi-urban setting.
- Provide high quality recreational fishing and hunting opportunities.
- Protect the long-term water quality of Black Bayou Lake.

## Facilities



Credit: USFWS

### Visitor Center

The complex visitor center, a restored 19th-century planter's house, is situated on the 40-acre Black Bayou Lake Environmental Education Center. It was moved about a quarter-mile to its current location and renovated by members of the nonprofit group, Friends of Black Bayou with funds raised almost entirely from the private sector. The beautifully restored building contains interactive exhibits, which introduce visitors to the refuge's wildlife and habitats. A "Touch Me!" table filled with bones, snake skins, fur, feathers and turtle shells provides hands-on learning for children. The center also has a meeting room and nature shop on the main floor and offices for the refuge's professional staff upstairs. Because the refuge is wildlife habitat, everything from small alligators, turtles and wading birds to swamp rabbits, coyote and deer live in and around the ponds surrounding the Visitor Center. A large covered amphitheater behind the visitor center accommodates groups participating in refuge educational programs. A Nature Trail begins near the Visitor Center, beside an authentic plantation bell.



Credit: USFWS

### Conservation Learning Center

In October 2005, the refuge opened the Conservation Learning Center. It was funded with \$300,000 of community support, and a \$150,000 matching grant from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Two main features of the facility are the Aquarium Room with live exhibits of native fishes, reptiles and amphibians, and the Discovery Room with six learning stations, five computer stations, sinks, reading corner with books and wildlife puppets, and state of the art audio/visual equipment. The Discovery Room can be set up for seating over 100 or with tables and chairs for 40

There is also an arboretum with more than 100 native Louisiana woody plants, and a prairie demonstration area with native grasses and wildflowers.

### Other facilities include:

- A 400-foot [wildlife pier](#) (privately funded by International Paper). An [observation deck](#) in a more remote area of the lake (privately funded by Cleco Corporation).
- A [boardwalk](#) that traverses 1.2 miles of representative wetlands (grant from the LA Governors Rural Initiative).
- A 100-seat shaded outdoor pavilion.
- A [birdwatching blind](#) funded by a grant from the National Wildlife Refuge Foundation.
- A [wetlands art project](#) that opened up a little-visited part of the refuge.
- A marked canoe trail on Black Bayou Lake that helps paddlers explore the lake without getting lost.

### Wildlife Pier



Credit: USFWS

A 400-foot wildlife pier extends onto Black Bayou Lake, offering visitors a chance to view wildlife up close, or in the distance through two spotting scopes. Visitors can fish, view the diverse bird life on the lake using spotting scopes, watch alligators stalk their prey or simply observe the rich diversity of aquatic plant life amid the bald cypress and tupelo trees. The wildlife pier is handicap accessible.

### Nature Trail



Credit: USFWS

A one mile, raised asphalt/boardwalk nature trail winds through a forested wetland and baldcypress brake. Tree identification labels, inspirational interpretive panels and benches are located along the trail. “Wetland Connections,” a trail brochure with natural history information, is available in the Visitor Center. The trail has two half-mile loops and can be accessed from the Visitor Center parking lot, the amphitheater and the Wildlife Pier parking lot.

## **A window on wildlife**

The Photo Blind was opened in autumn 2005, providing a shaded, dry and protected place from which to observe birds and other wildlife. The project was funded by a grant from the National Wildlife Refuge Foundation.

## **Wetlands Art Project**



Credit: USFWS

The Wetlands Art Project opened up a little-visited part of the refuge with nature trails and interpretive stones. The installation by artist Alexis Wreden was fully funded by a grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Arts.

*Pay close attention to what you see and feel in this place. The Wetlands Art Project invites you to notice the textures of the ground, grasses and wood and to experience the water, sky and wildlife. Project elements . -- Alexis Wreden*

## **Wildlife & Habitats**



Credit: USFWS

Black Bayou Lake NWR consists of a beautiful 1,600 acre baldcypress/tupelo studded lake surrounded by swamps which graduate into bottomland hardwood forests and mixed pine/hardwood uplands. Cherrybark oak, cedar elm, green ash, and water and willow oaks dominate the lower areas while shortleaf pine, loblolly pine, mockernut hickory and post oaks dominate the upland sites.

Wildlife commonly seen at Black Bayou Lake NWR includes: alligators, great egrets, wood ducks, green and great blue herons, numerous songbird species, broad-banded water snakes, red-

eared sliders, green anoles, coyotes, skunks, white-tailed deer, dragonflies and butterflies. The lake supports an abundant fisheries resource.

## **Fishing & Hunting**

The primary objective of a national wildlife refuge is to provide habitat for the conservation and protection of all species of native wildlife. The harvest of animals is one tool used to manage fish and wildlife populations. Carefully managed hunting and fishing help maintain these populations at a level compatible with the environment, provide wholesome recreational opportunities, and permit the use of valuable renewable resources.

### **Fishing/Boat Launch**



Credit: USFWS

Black Bayou Lake is open for fishing from dawn to dusk every day, offering excellent year-round fishing opportunities in a beautiful setting. Fishermen commonly pursue largemouth bass, crappie, catfish and redeer, bluegill and other bream species. Over 5,000 fishing boats are launched on the lake each year from a boat launch located near the visitor center. Motors are restricted to no more than 50 HP. A \$2 launch fee is required for any watercraft and anglers must adhere to Louisiana freshwater fishing regulations.

### **Hunting**

Black Bayou Lake NWR offers an either sex archery season for whitetail deer. There is a long squirrel and rabbit season and they can be hunted with dogs after deer season closes. Raccoon and opossum can be hunted at night for one month and they can be hunted during daylight hours throughout the small game season. Recognized breeds of bird dogs may be used to hunt quail and woodcock. Historically a duck hunter's paradise, most of the lake is now a waterfowl sanctuary. Duck hunting, like all other hunting on the refuge, is allowed in the designated hunting area only. Review the Black Bayou Lake NWR Hunting and Fishing Regulations pamphlet for specifics.

### **Other Interesting Refuge Facts**

Biology professors and students from the University of Louisiana at Monroe have partnered with Black Bayou Lake refuge in research projects on fishes, reptiles and amphibians. The alligator snapping turtle, a species that has declined drastically across most of the south, nests along the shores of the lake. Nest surveys are conducted annually. Reducing the raccoon population helps to prevent destruction of all the alligator snapping turtle nests and many of other turtles species. The refuge has a large nest box program for prothonotary warblers and wood ducks. Wood ducks are banded on the refuge each year.

Eight hundred acres of former agricultural fields have been reforested with eleven bottomland hardwood tree species. Existing forested wetlands are managed for forest health and wildlife habitat. The small upland area on the east side of the refuge is home to a remnant red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) cluster. Some hardwoods have been removed to create preferred habitat for this endangered species. Establishing the arboretum and prairie demonstration areas required repeated plantings and waterings. Annual mowing or burning maintains the prairie area. Some of the young arboretum trees must be protected from deer and rabbits with wire cages.

Control of exotic species (those not occurring naturally in this area) is a major activity on this refuge. Herbicide spraying helps to prevent water hyacinths from covering the lake. Controlling Chinese tallow trees is a matter of educating the public not to plant them as ornamental shade trees (birds disperse the seeds) and physically removing the trees, which are invading the reforested area of the refuge.