**Acknowledgements:**

The Northeast Louisiana Outdoor Series is a joint project of the Louisiana AgCenter's AgCenter New Orleans and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

**Photo by Charman Cupit**

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**Lower Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

The Lower Mississippi River Refuge Complex includes St. Catherine Creek, Bayou Cocodrie and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuges. All three are within 5 miles of the Mississippi River. From loess bluffs to cypress swamps, each refuge has its own unique landscape. These lands were set aside to allow our nation's wildlife to thrive, but, you can experience the refuges by hiking or paddling on designated trails listed in this brochure. Both activities offer a safe way to learn and observe nature in the Miss-Lou area. All trail distances are round trip unless stated otherwise.

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**All-Terrain Vehicle Trails**

Many trails on all three refuges are marked for ATV use during hunting seasons, from September through February. This should not steer hikers away. Hikers are encouraged to explore designated hiking trails as well as ATV trails year-round.

**Signage**

All trails and boundary areas are clearly marked. Hikers should pay close attention to signs. Be safe, respect wildlife, please pack out what you pack in, and leave no trace.

**Hunter Orange**

National wildlife refuges welcome many different kinds of use, and one of those uses is hunting. For that reason, hikers are encouraged to wear hunter orange during hunting seasons. Hunting is not allowed on some trails but hikers should be aware of hunting seasons and share the space with other users.

**Canoeing the Refuges**

Canoeing and kayaking are great ways to explore the beautiful lakes and bayous on St. Catherine Creek, Cat Island and Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuges.

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**River Stages**

St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuges are not protected by levees from flooding on the Mississippi River. Lakes and some trails on these refuges are not accessible during flood events. Call the refuge headquarters or go to refuge websites to see if the lakes are accessible.

**Personal Flotation Devices**

The use of personal flotation devices is highly recommended. By state law, all watercraft must carry at least one personal flotation device. All children 12 years and under are required to wear a personal flotation device.

**Waterfowl Hunting**

Waterfowl hunting is allowed on Butler Lake and Gilliard Lake Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays during the state waterfowl season. Hunting is allowed until 12 noon on these days. Those canoeing and kayaking should be aware of open hunting seasons.

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Exploring the Lower Mississippi River Refuge Complex

**Big Cypress Trail**

Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge

Distance: 1.5 miles

The Big Cypress Trail is a short out-and-back trail through a unique mixture of bottomland hardwood forest. The destination is the National Champion Bald Cypress tree, an extraordinary landmark to the state of Louisiana. It is the largest tree east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Parking is located at the trail head, 4.6 miles from the main gate. This easy, short walk guides you to a boardwalk and platform where hikers can view this natural landmark.

**Butler Lake**

St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge

Butler Lake is another great opportunity for canoeing and kayaking. This lake is open and provides visitors with bountiful opportunities to view wildlife. The northern end of the lake connects to “old” St. Catherine Creek, which is perfect for paddling. The boat launch and parking area are easily accessible from Hutchins Landing Road. Refer to the refuge website for a map.

**Gilliard Lake**

St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge

Gilliard Lake is a beautiful cypress lake. This maze of trees provides spectacular views of large cypress trees, as well as many opportunities for wildlife observation. The lake is frequented by great blue heron, great egrets and alligators. The lake has an easily accessible boat ramp and parking area off Gilliard Lake Road. Gilliard Lake is an extraordinary natural area that is perfect for canoeing and kayaking. Refer to the refuge website for a map.

**Impoundment Overlook Trail:**

Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuge

This is the shortest trail within the refuge complex. The path quickly leads to a roofed observation deck, where hikers can experience a wide view of the moist-soil impoundments. Refuge staff manages the water levels here to create a haven for migratory birds. Spring and summer months bring wading birds, while fall marks the arrival of several species of ducks. (See map below.)

**Bayou Cocodrie Canoe Trail**

Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuge

Distance: 11 miles

Bayou Cocodrie is a state designated scenic stream. The trail starts at the Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuge’s boat ramp and runs to the Wallace Lake check station. The canoe trail features all-weather access points. In between are miles of forest-lined shores featuring huge cypress trees and sections of marsh. The bayou supports excellent fishing and a variety of birds and other wildlife.

**Photo by USFWS**

Photo by Alex Strader

Photo by Owen Donohue

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