

BKB - Back Bay Wildlife Area Description

The Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge consists of 4,589 acres, located in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The Refuge was established in 1938 to provide sanctuary and habitat for migratory birds. The Refuge extends for 4.2 miles along the Atlantic shoreline and barrier beach and dunes and low islands located in Back Bay.

Up to 40,000 Snow geese and 10,000 whistling swans spend the winter on the refuge. Canada geese also stop at the refuge during the Fall. Wintering duck populations are primarily composed of American wigeon and gadwalls. In addition, the refuge is a stopping place during migration for numerous shorebirds and endangered prairie falcon passes through the area. The most evident mammal on the refuge is the Muskrat, this rodent has increased in numbers from 30 in 1965 to estimated population of 10,000. Other mammals characteristic of the refuge are; muskrat, raccoon, opossum, mink, otter, white-tailed deer, cotton tail and marsh rabbits.

Management on the area is somewhat limited with 59 acres on Marsh Island in Back Bay seeded to permanent pasture which supplies food for flocks of geese. In addition, much of the marsh is burned once every three years to encourage new growth and desirable plant species and to make this growth available for use by snow geese. This tends to reduce crop depredations which occur off the refuge.

The refuge is presently opened for fishing in the bay and surf fishing on the Atlantic shoreline. There are no hunting programs on the refuge.

The area recommended for wilderness encompasses essentially all of the marsh islands that lie in Back Bay. In a small area on the outside of the marsh flats on the barrier islands, these lands are in essentially natural conditions and they are not needed for intensive management to meet refuge objectives. Therefore, we heartily endorse the establishment of these areas as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.