

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Prime Hook

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*





## Welcome

The Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1963 primarily to preserve coastal wetlands as wintering and breeding habitat for migratory waterfowl. It is located on the west shore of Delaware Bay, approximately 22 miles southeast of Dover, the State capital, and 64 miles southeast of Wilmington, Delaware.

The refuge consists of over 9,700 acres, approximately 7,400 acres of which are fresh marsh, tidal marsh, and open water. Other habitats include approximately 1,000 acres of timber and brush and 1,300 acres of grasslands and croplands.

## Management

Water levels on more than 4,200 acres of marsh are raised or lowered at different times of the year through a system of low dikes and water control structures. This management stimulates the growth of emergent aquatic plant species for wildlife use. Management of the water level is important for restoring and maintaining suitable resting and feeding habitat for migratory wintering waterfowl and shorebirds. The refuge provides nesting habitat for wood ducks, black ducks, and other species. Overall refuge

*Below: Wood ducks.  
Left: Prime Hook  
NWR's intensively  
managed marshes.  
USFWS photos.*



management is directed toward providing a variety of habitat types for maximum wildlife diversity.

Upland fields are managed under an agreement with local farmers who plant supplemental food for waterfowl and other wildlife.

Prime Hook manages the forested lands as habitat for the Delmarva Peninsula Fox Squirrel which was reintroduced to the refuge in 1986. The management of this endangered species includes monitoring the squirrel boxes, and capturing, tagging and releasing the squirrels to get an index of their population.

### **Wildlife Calendar**

The varied marsh habitat of the Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge provides homes for numerous species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.

Spectacular concentrations of migrating waterfowl can be observed during certain periods in the spring and fall. Shorebirds can be observed in the spring eating invertebrates in the wetland areas, and horseshoe crab eggs along the Delaware Bay beaches.

*Below: Shorebirds,  
photo by Shireen  
Gonzaga.*



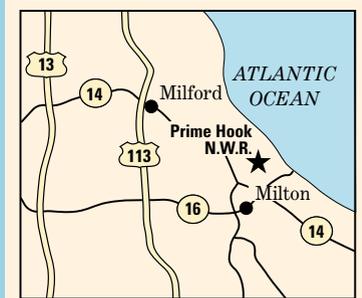
*Right, from  
top: Painted  
turtle, photo by  
Karen & John  
Hollingsworth;  
Snow goose, photo  
by Glen Smart.*



Migrations through the refuge provide an excellent opportunity for nature study. Fall concentrations of Canada geese, snow geese, black ducks, mallards, pintails, teal, and wood ducks are of particular interest. Many waterfowl winter on the refuge. A variety of wading birds, shorebirds, terns, and songbirds provide additional interesting observations. May is the best time for viewing shorebirds and warblers. Several species of waterfowl and other waterbirds commonly nest in the marshes.

Spring is the best time for observing amphibians and reptiles. The most frequently sighted wetland species are the red-bellied and painted turtles, while various frog species such as spring peeper, cricket, green and bull frogs can be heard and sometimes seen. Upland species frequently spotted are garter and black rat snakes, red-backed salamander, American and Fowler's toads, and the less commonly seen fence lizard. A list of amphibians and reptiles using the refuge is available at the Visitor Center.

# Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge

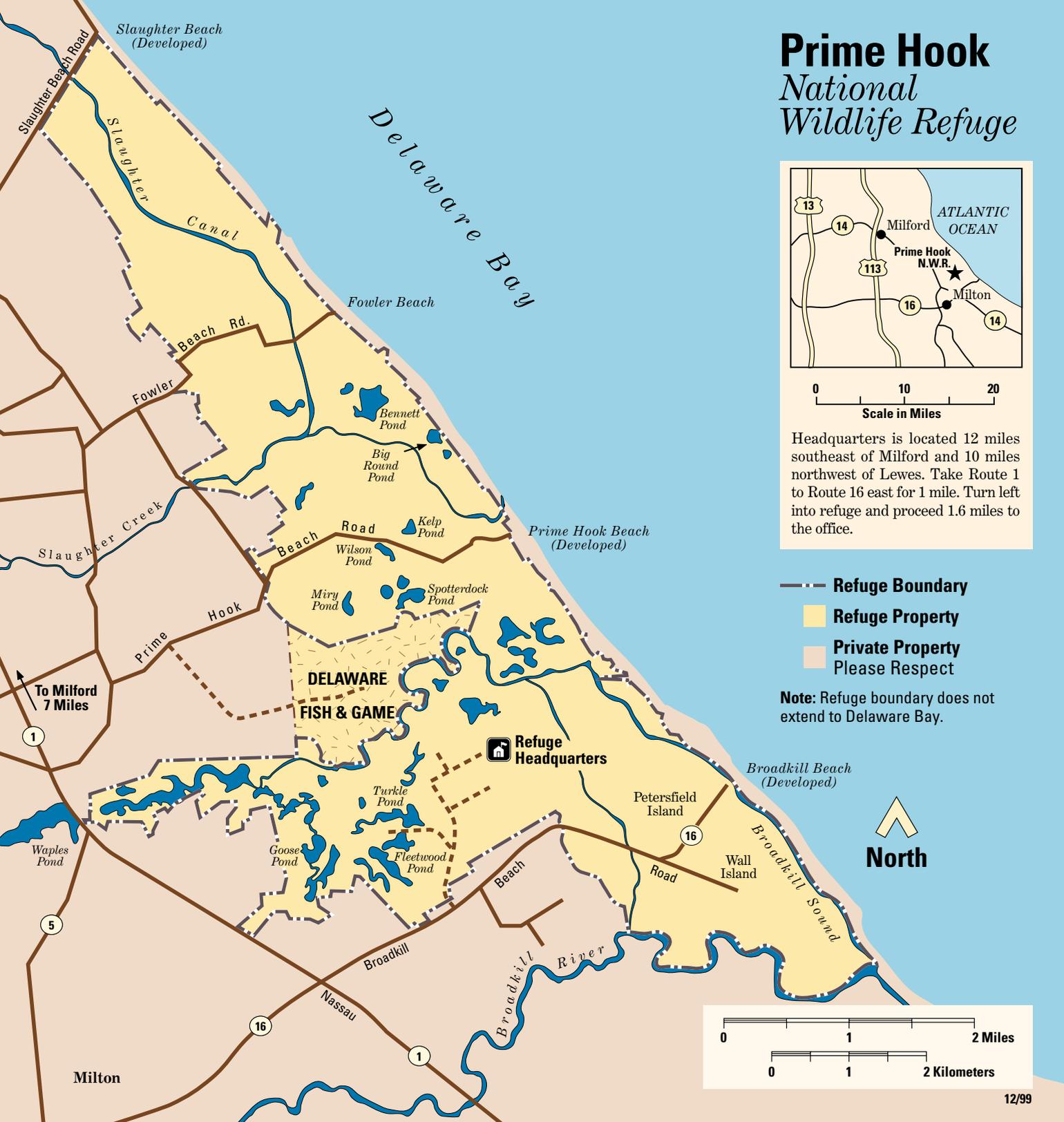


0 10 20  
Scale in Miles

Headquarters is located 12 miles southeast of Milford and 10 miles northwest of Lewes. Take Route 1 to Route 16 east for 1 mile. Turn left into refuge and proceed 1.6 miles to the office.

- Refuge Boundary
- Refuge Property
- Private Property  
Please Respect

**Note:** Refuge boundary does not extend to Delaware Bay.



0 1 2 Miles  
0 1 2 Kilometers

## Public Use

A Visitor Center is the welcoming point for visitors to the refuge. It is located just off of Broadkill Beach Road (Route 16) as are the trails and boat ramps. The Visitor Center was opened to the public in 1997 and contains wildlife displays, an auditorium, and Friends of Prime Hook sales outlet. The hours are 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Volunteers staff the Visitor Center on weekends from April 1 to Thanksgiving from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Volunteers are involved in the public use, maintenance and biological programs. Call if you would like to help. Other facilities include the Boardwalk Trail which is near the Visitor Center, and the Pine Grove Trail, is next to Fleetwood Pond.

## Hunting

Hunting of waterfowl, deer, upland game birds, and small game is permitted within season. Special regulations apply for these hunts, and such information is available from the refuge headquarters.



## Fishing

Tidal waterways and Turkle and Fleetwood Ponds are open to sportfishing in accordance with State and Federal regulations. Largemouth bass, pickerel, white perch and crappies are most sought after and abundant. Favorite fishing sites are Prime Hook Creek, Turkle Pond, and Fleetwood Pond. Boats using Turkle and Fleetwood Ponds may only be propelled manually or with electric motors. Also, Petersfield Ditch and Slaughter Canal are popular sites for crabbing and fishing where no boat is required.

## Canoeing and Boating

Canoe enthusiasts have over 15 miles of streams and ditches to enjoy. Favorite routes are along Prime Hook Creek and Petersfield Ditch. Boating is permitted in tidal waters and Turkle and Fleetwood Ponds in accordance with State and Federal regulations. Several boat launching ramps are available to provide convenient access. These are delineated on maps available at headquarters.

*Above: Fishing along HQ dike, photo by Sylvia Pelizza.  
Left: Deer, USFWS photo.*



### **Wildlife Observation and Photography**

Four trails and four State highways which transect the refuge afford the visitor an ideal opportunity to observe and photograph a variety of wildlife and plants. Please remember that the taking of any plant or animal without a permit is prohibited. Many species may be observed relatively undisturbed in their natural habitat.

*Above: Canoeing  
at Prime Hook,  
photo by Marian  
Pohlman.*

*Right: Swamp  
Mallow, photo by  
Shireen Gonzaga.*



### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**



*This blue goose,  
designed by J.N.  
“Ding” Darling,  
has become a  
symbol of the  
National Wildlife  
Refuge System*

Prime Hook is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

The Service also manages national fish hatcheries, and provides federal leadership in habitat protection, technical assistance, and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.

*Below: Black duck,  
USFWS photo.*



**Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge**  
RD 3, Box 195  
Milton, DE 19968  
302/684-8419  
302/684-8504 fax  
E-mail: r5rw\_phnwr@fws.gov

**Hearing impaired visitors may call  
the Delaware Relay Service at  
800/232-5460 TDD 800/232-5470 voice.**

**This brochure is also available upon  
request in a large print version.**

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>**

**January 2000**



**Cover: Delmarva Fox  
squirrel, USFWS photo.**