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July 2002



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Prime Hook

National Wildlife Refuge

Canoe Trail





USFWS

Canoe Trip on Prime Hook Creek

Welcome to Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge's Canoe Trail



This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Refuge System.

This self-guided trail leads you into the heart of a freshwater marsh along Prime Hook Creek. Whether listening to waterfowl during fall and winter migration, watching an osprey hover above the creek searching for its next meal, or simply enjoying the outdoors, the canoe trail offers a memorable experience for everyone.

Approximately seven miles long, the trail is accessible at three locations. At the trail's eastern end, you can launch your canoe or kayak at the boat ramp located at the refuge office. At the trail's western end, you can launch at a private boat ramp in Brumbley Family Park, located on the southeast bank of Waples Mill Pond. Waples Mill Pond is located at the intersection of Route 5 and State Route 1. A small fee is required at both launch sites. Parking is limited at Brumbley Family Park (only six parking spaces), and it is preferred that large groups arrange to park their vehicles at the parking lot at the refuge office boat ramp. A third boat ramp is located in the middle of the trail at the State of Delaware's Prime Hook Wildlife Management Area.

Most canoeists launch from the Waples Mill Pond site and canoe eastward toward the refuge office. To travel the entire trail, plan to have a vehicle at the refuge office for canoe transport. Remember, the trail has no stopping or resting areas. Depending on how fast you paddle, the trip generally takes four to five hours. To reduce disturbance to wildlife, canoeing is only permitted in the main channels. When traveling west to east, always bear right; however, do not travel down small side ditches. It is highly recommended that you bring a compass. Please observe area closed signs.

The refuge office boat ramp and the ramp at the State of Delaware's Prime Hook Wildlife Management Area are closed each year from the beginning of October to March 15. All entry during this time is from the Waples Mill Pond launch site and is limited to the western most four miles of Prime Hook Creek. For your safety, do not pass the area closed signs without a written permit. Portions of the trail may be closed at the discretion of the refuge manager. Please check at the refuge office for hunt dates and associated closures.

Blue Goose



Lewis & Elizabeth Dumont

*Black-necked
stilt*



Bill Buchanan/USFWS

**Description of
Trail Traveling
Eastward on
Prime Hook
Creek**

Prime Hook Creek flows from Waples Mill Pond to the Broadkill River. It is a non-tidal freshwater creek meandering through forested wetlands into an open marsh impoundment. An impoundment is like a shallow pond. Water levels in the impoundment are manipulated using water control structures to optimize food resources for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, yet creek levels are only minimally affected. At the Waples Mill Pond launch site, the canoe trail is very narrow and shallow for the first 700 feet, after which it widens into a moderately deep, slow moving stream. After about 1.5 miles, Prime Hook Creek becomes winding and narrow. Approximately two miles later, you will reach the refuge maintenance area at Foord's Landing. No public entry or exit is permitted at this dock. Past Foord's Landing, you will enter open marsh, which is only a short distance from the refuge office.

Along with binoculars and cameras, field guides to birds, trees, reptiles, amphibians, aquatic vegetation, mammals or flowers are recommended and will help you enjoy all the trail has to offer. Please remember this is a natural area, if you carry it in, please carry it out.

As you travel on the canoe trail, notice the many colorful plants on the creek side. The most common trees are red



Sylvia Pelizza/USFWS

Winterberry



USFWS

*Marsh Mallow
in Bloom*

maple and sweet bay magnolia. The spring and fall colors of the red maple are often spectacular. Late spring and early summer are the best chance to smell the fragrant white flower of the sweetbay magnolia. Atlantic white cedar, sweet gum, green ash, American holly, and sandbar willows are some of the other trees that line the banks of Prime Hook Creek.

You'll see a variety of shrubs on your trip. Winterberry, sweet pepper bush, bayberry, marsh mallow, and seaside alder (a rare species in Delaware) are common along the trail. The colorful red berries of winterberry are an important food for bluebirds, thrushes, robins, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, deer, and raccoons.

Marsh mallow, with its large pink and white blooms, color the marsh in August. The blooms attract butterflies, bees and other insects. You may also notice swamp rose, poison ivy, common greenbrier, and redberry greenbrier as you make your way down the trail. As you take in the sights on the creek banks, don't miss the many plants in the water. Pickerelweed with its upright purple flower, fragrant water lily, scythe-shaped arrowheads, a variety of sedges, and threesquare will be seen throughout your journey. Keep your eyes open too for nature's engineers, beavers and their dams occur throughout the trail.

The tall bamboo-like plant in the marsh is *Phragmites australis*. Sometimes called feathergrass or common reed, *Phragmites* is an invasive plant that grows in dense stands that crowd out other plants. Because most wildlife prefer other kinds of plants and dense stands of *Phragmites* are at high risk of wildfire, the refuge controls its spread through a variety of methods.

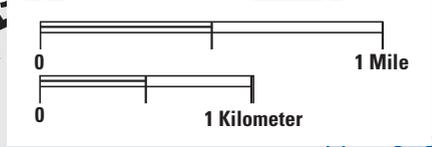
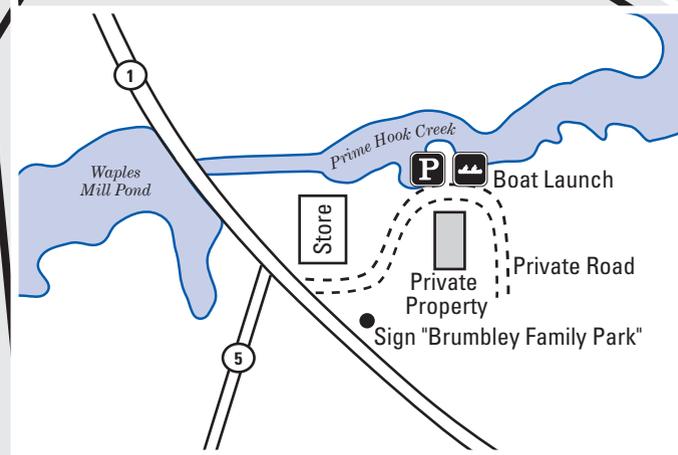
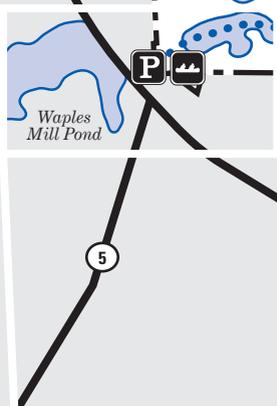
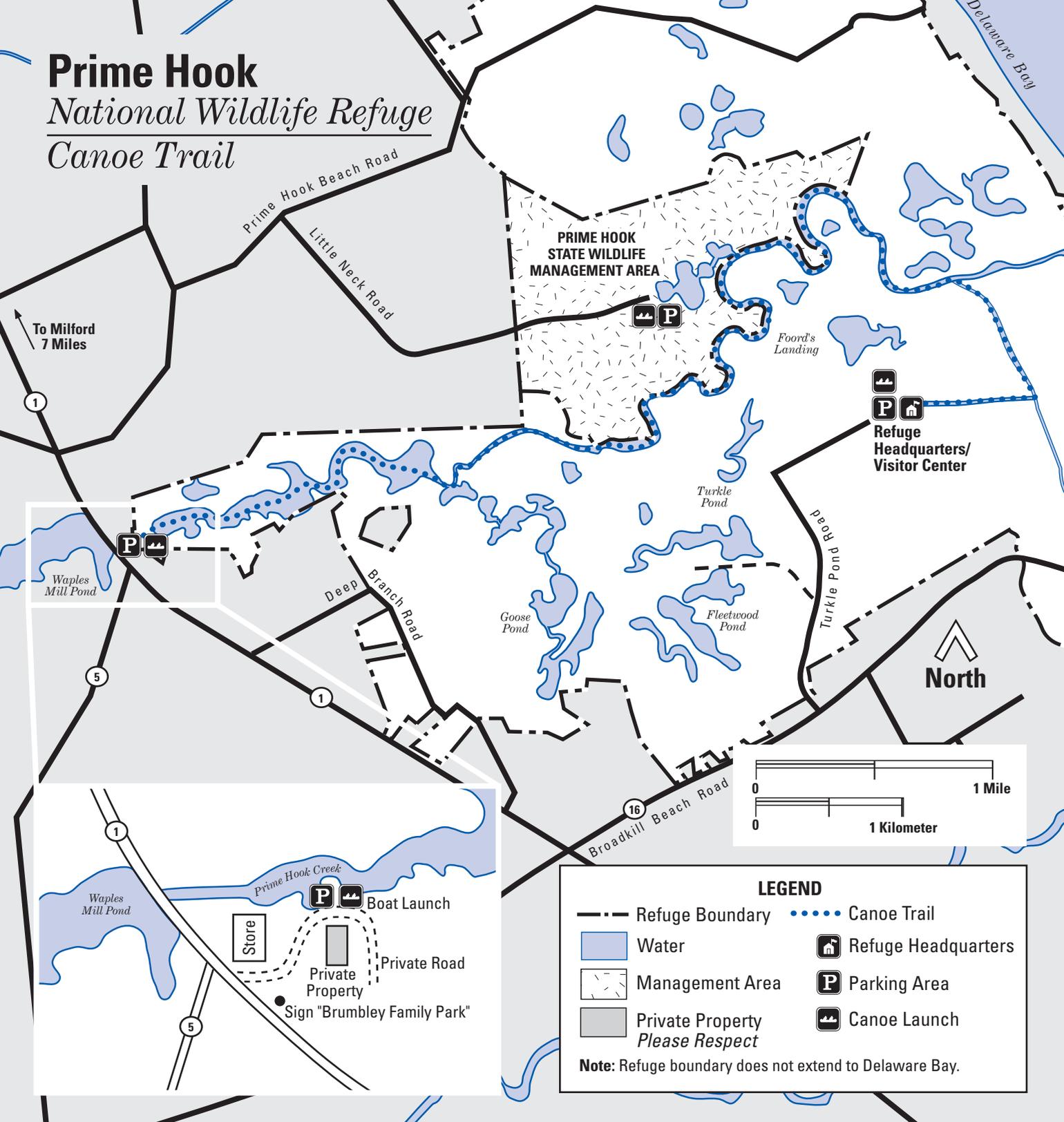


USFWS

*Phragmites on
Prime Hook
Creek*

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge

Canoe Trail



LEGEND

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Refuge Boundary | Canoe Trail |
| Water | Refuge Headquarters |
| Management Area | Parking Area |
| Private Property <i>Please Respect</i> | Canoe Launch |

Note: Refuge boundary does not extend to Delaware Bay.

Snowy Egret



Lewis & Elizabeth Dumont

In the shallow ponds along the canoe trail, notice the narrow-leaved cattail, patches of pickerelweed, arrowhead, arrow arum and Phragmites. These ponds are favorite feeding grounds for long-legged wading birds like egrets, herons, and bitterns. Waterfowl use these ponds too. The seeds of arrow arum are an important food source for wood ducks. Geese prefer the roots of cattail. Near the refuge maintenance area at Foord's Landing there is a stand of old growth loblolly pines.

A portion of Prime Hook Creek forms the boundary of the Prime Hook Wildlife Management Area managed by the Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife.

As you travel east from Foord's Landing and make your way into the open marsh, you'll notice a change in the plants. In the more fresh water areas, cattail, wild rice, Walter's millet and rice cutgrass are common. In brackish or slightly salty waters you'll see salt grass and cordgrass. The dense stands of these plants camouflage the nests of red-winged blackbirds, marsh wrens, and other marsh birds. In the early spring and

summer, listen for the calls of secretive marsh birds, like sora, Virginia rail, and bittern. In the fall, the seeds of Walter's millet and wild rice feed tens of thousands of migrating ducks.



Sylvia Pelizza/USFWS

Fowler's Toad

As you make your travel through the marsh, look carefully and you may see the several species of frogs, snakes, and various invertebrates that call the refuge home. On sunny days, you can catch the refuge sunbathers, painted and redbelly turtles, as they bask along the marsh. River otters, muskrats, raccoons and deer are the mammals that you may encounter. Most visitors will see many different kinds of waterfowl, shorebirds, long-legged marsh birds, and song birds.

Marshes are a type of wetland. Marshes like the one you traveled through today are very important to plants, animals, and people. As you've observed, there are a variety of unique plants and animals that depend on marshes for their survival. Marshes are important to people too. Marshes are like gigantic sponges. They soak up water during wet periods to reduce flooding and slowly release the water during dry periods. Marshes help to keep our water cleaner. They are able to absorb or break down many pollutants.

Ducks and Geese



Charles Darling

Sylvia Pelizza/USFWS



Eastern Box Turtle

Marshes and other wetlands were once seen as wastelands. They were drained and filled for development, landfills, or agriculture. In fact in North America, more than ninety percent of wetlands have been destroyed since 1900. As you've seen today, marshes are a diverse system that can be beautiful.

In 1934, Congress passed the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act. More than half a century later, more than \$500 million has been used to buy and preserve some 4.5 million acres of wetland habitat.

The funds raised through the purchase of duck stamps help provide unspoiled areas where people can view and photograph wildlife, hunt, fish and simply enjoy nature. Many of the more than 500 national wildlife refuges, including Prime Hook, were purchased entirely or in part with the money raised from duck stamps. You can help others enjoy wetlands by purchasing the current duck stamp at the refuge office.

We hope you enjoyed your trip along Prime Hook Creek. Please come back again.

Male Wood Duck



Lewis & Elizabeth Dumont



*Wood Duck
Nesting Box*

Sylvia Pelizza/USFWS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Prime Hook is one of more than 530 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 habitat of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

Prime Hook was established in 1962 under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. The refuge is located in a key position in the Atlantic flyway and each year, hosts tens of thousands of migratory birds. The Refuge's primary objectives are to provide habitat for waterfowl, waterbirds, other migratory birds, and endangered species; and to insure the availability of these resources to the American people for their enjoyment now and in the future.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service also manages National Fish Hatcheries and provides federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance, and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from, the programs and activities of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is available to all individuals, regardless of age, race, religion, color, sex, national origin or disability. For more information contact: U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, 1849 C Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240.



Lewis & Elizabeth Dumont

*Double Crested
Cormorant*