

# Sulphur River Wildlife Management Area

The 16,520-acre management area is the largest remaining tract of bottomland hardwoods in the Red River valley of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana. It is in Miller County, south of Texarkana, west of Fouke. This is the extreme southwestern corner of Arkansas, with the management area touching the Texas state line on the west and extending to about nine miles north of the Louisiana state line on the other end. Access is off Arkansas Highway 253 and U.S. Highway 71.

The Sulphur River runs for approximately 10 miles through the management area. Mercer Bayou (an old river channel) located on the west side of the area consists of approximately 1000 acres and is approximately 9 miles long. Days Creek is a major tributary on the northeast side of the area. Bottomland hardwoods, cypress breaks, and the associated oxbows and sloughs dominate this area. A small portion of the area contains rolling hills with mixed pine-hardwood adjacent to the floodplain.

Sulphur River WMA was created in the early 1950s, partially with mitigation lands from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the building of Wright Patman Lake just across the land in Texas. Other tracts were purchased later, including two in 2002.

Migrating ducks in late fall and winter make extensive use of Sulphur River WMA. Retired AGFC biologist Gregg Mathis said, "Waterfowl hunting here is a hidden secret."

But numerous duck hunters from Texarkana, from east Texas and northwest Louisiana know about Sulphur River and come prepared with mobile blinds built on flatbottom boats. If ducks have come to the area, the hunters seldom go home empty handed. They may set up facing a bit of open water but with a huge cypress tree covering their backs.

As with many of Arkansas's wildlife management areas in bottomlands and swamps, the deer are surprising. They are large, there are good numbers of them – but they are difficult to hunt. Deer and the other wild animals know instinctively how to get around the water-dominated surroundings. Humans have to learn.

Raccoon hunters make use of the management area, too, and there is a plentiful and usually constant supply of their quarry in the region. Squirrel hunting is popular, as is rabbit hunting, with the rabbits often the big swamp rabbits as well as the more familiar cottontails.

In recent years, some black bellied whistling ducks have taken up residence on Sulphur River WMA and at other spots in southwest Arkansas, expanding their range from South Texas. There's not a hunting season on them in Arkansas, but they draw curious stares when seen by hunters as well as interest from birders. The black bellied whistling ducks are cavity nesters, like wood ducks, and are easily distinguished by long necks and long pink legs.

Fishing can be extremely productive. Anglers work the main river and also head into long and sprawling Mercer Bayou and into Days Creek. The usual largemouth bass, bream of several species, crappie and catfish are the attractions for fishermen.

Water levels in the management area are managed through a system of water control structures, but overall, they depend on releases from Lake Wright Patman flowing down Sulphur River. In the winter, most of the management area is flooded for a month or so. The control structures include dams, stoplog structures, gated pipes, levees and canals.

The AGFC works 340 acres of wildlife openings on the area, with about 140 acres in wildlife food plots. About 900 acres are managed as moist soil units, devoted to plants adapted to this environment and used extensively by a variety of wildlife.