

LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond Research Natural Area (RNA) became our nation's 250<sup>th</sup> RNA in 1991. RNAs are permanently protected to maintain biological diversity and to provide places for research and monitoring of natural communities. More than 1350 species of plants and animals make their homes in the LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond RNA. Many are threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Prairie plants, southern swamp types and plants typical of the eastern and western forests all exist here within 14 different natural communities. Thirty-five percent of Illinois' plant species can be found in the RNA and it is one of only two sites in the state where the native shortleaf pine grows naturally.

## Protecting the Reptile and Amphibian Population

Perhaps this area is most famous for the biannual 'Snake Migration' across the LaRue Road at the base of the bluffs, adjacent to LaRue Swamp. The road is closed to vehicular traffic every spring and fall to help protect thousands of reptiles and amphibians during their migration between their summer and winter habitats. About 66 percent of the amphibians (or 23 species of amphibians) and 59 percent of the reptiles (or 35 species of snakes) known to occur in Illinois are found here. Approximately 90 percent of the Illinois mammal species and 175 bird species inhabit the RNA. It is an important resting area for migratory birds and waterfowl. Some unusual animals that make LaRue-Pine Hills their home include the bobcat, bald eagle, Indiana bat, spring cavefish, eastern woodrat, golden mouse, armadillo and Mississippi kite.



Scott Ballard

*Eastern Hognose Snake*

The yearly migration involves the hibernation of the animals during the winter months in the bluffs. These animals then move to their feeding grounds in the swamp during the summer months. Herpetologists have reported that the main factor in triggering the seasonal migration is ground temperature. This road was open to traffic year-round prior to 1972. This resulted in the death of many animals that were crossing the road. Consequently, the Forest Service closed a 2.5-mile segment of the road during the seasonal migration to protect the reptiles and amphibians. The road is now closed for two months in the spring and fall to further ensure the protection of early or late migrating species. **The closure dates are March 15 to May 15 in the spring and September 1 to October 30 in the fall. Collecting of plants and animals is prohibited without a permit.** The impact of the road closure on people is minimal. People who want to enter this area of the Shawnee National Forest for recreation are welcome to travel the snake road on foot. The closure does not interfere with waterfowl hunting, a popular late fall activity in the LaRue Swamp.



Scott Ballard

*Midland Brown Snake*

### Common names of some of the animal species are:

Spiny Softshell	Northern Red-Bellied Snake	Spotted Salamander	Slimy Salamander
Broadheaded Skink	Eastern Hognose Snake	Red Milk Snake	
Midland Water Snake	Western Ribbon Snake	Eastern Rough Green Snake	Eastern Garter Snake
Western Lesser Siren	Marbled Salamander	Small-Mouthed Salamander	Midwest Worm Snake
Central Newt	Zigzag salamander	Long-Tailed Salamander	Black Rat Snake
Cave Salamander	American Toad	Fowler's Toad	Copperhead
Blanchard's Cricket Frog	Northern Spring Peeper	Eastern Grey Treefrog	Black Racer
Bullfrog	Green Frog	Southern Leopard Frog	Midland Brown Snake
Common Snapping Turtle	Stinkpot Turtle	Eastern Box Turtle	Ringneck Snake
Eastern Painted Turtle	Red-Eared Turtle	Northern Fence Lizard	King Snake
Ground Skink	Western Cottonmouth	Five Lined Skink	Chorus Frog
Western Earth Snake	Western Mud Snake	Diamond-Backed Water Snake	

**Length:** Snake Road is 2.5 miles

**Walking Time:** 1 - 2 hours (one-way)

**Difficulty Level:** Easy

**Surface Type:** Gravel

**Facilities:** Winters Pond parking (~12 vehicles); parking at south gate (3 vehicles)

**Recommended Season:** Spring and fall

**Directions to Winters Pond Parking:** From Jonesboro: Take Hwy 146 west 8 miles to Hwy 3; then north 8 miles on Hwy 3 to Muddy Levee Road. Turn east (right) onto Muddy Levee Rd. and go 3 miles to LaRue Rd. Here it will end at a 'T'; turn right and proceed to Winters Pond parking lot.

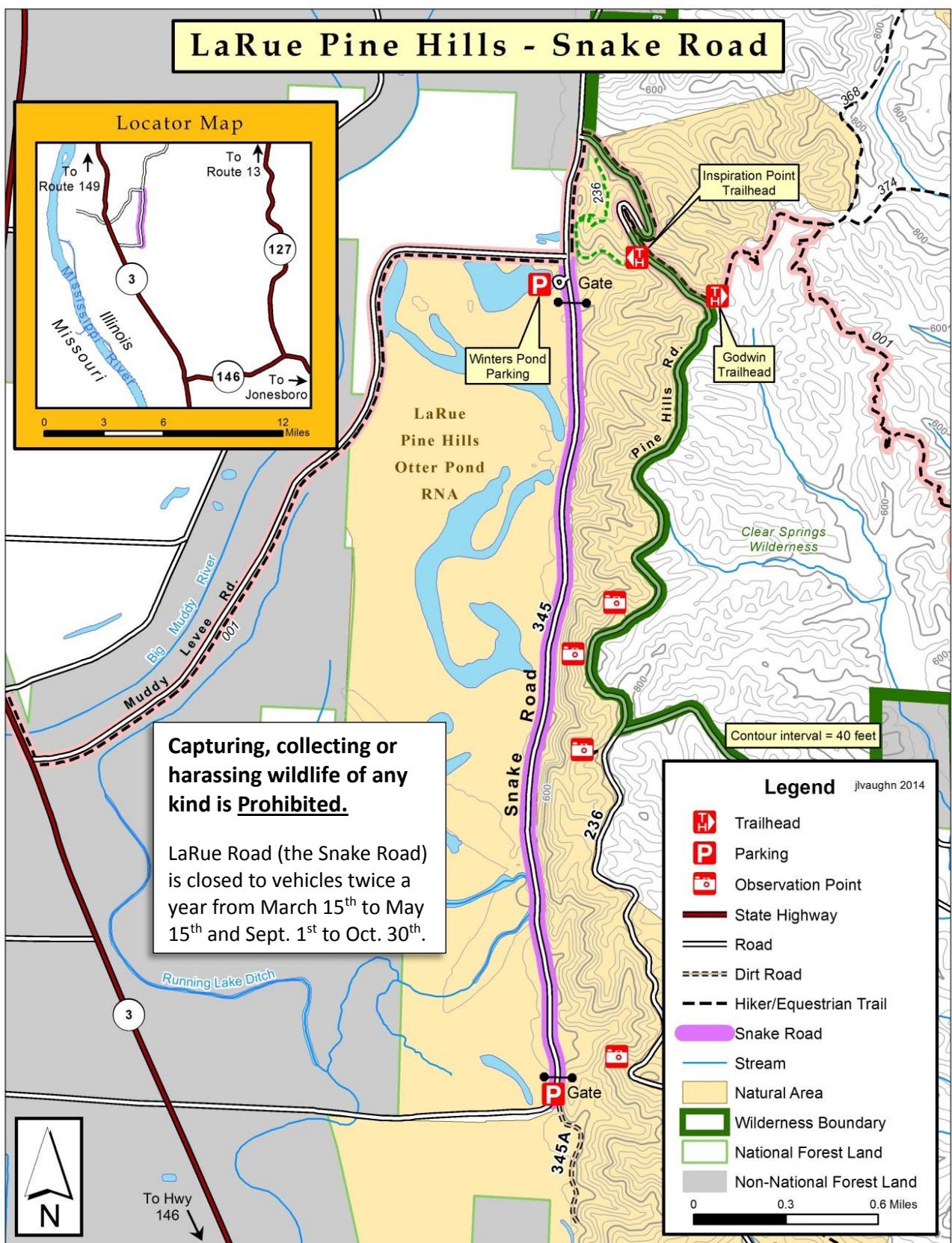
From Murphysboro: Take Hwy 149 west 7 miles to Hwy 3; then south 13.6 miles on Hwy 3 to Muddy Levee Road. Turn east (left) onto Muddy Levee Rd. and go 3 miles to LaRue Rd. Here it will end at a 'T'; turn right and proceed to Winters Pond parking lot.

**Safety:** Venomous snakes are in the area. If you encounter any snake avoid being bitten by slowly moving away.

**Surrounding Area:** Oakwood Bottoms Greentree Reservoir, River to River Trail and Pine Hills Campground.

### For More Information

Mississippi Bluffs Ranger District  
521 North Main  
Jonesboro, IL 62952  
(618) 833-8576



### LaRue-Pine Hills/Otter Pond Research Natural Area Regulations

This Research Natural Area has been established to protect a number of special plants, animals and natural community types. To help meet these objectives the following restrictions apply to public use and occupancy of the area.

**The following is prohibited:**

- Collection, handling or removal of any snake species. This includes gathering, herding, harassing or having in possession. Also to have in your possession collecting equipment (unless authorized).
- The use of horses except on Forest Road 345.
- Overnight camping.
- Building, maintaining, attending or using a campfire (gas stoves are allowed).
- Excavation, disturbance or removal of any soil, stone, or material lying upon or contained in the rock or soil of the area.
- Cutting, killing, destroying, injuring or removing living vegetation.
- Taking or killing of any animal, bird, fish, reptile or amphibian, except for game species as defined and permitted by Illinois state laws.
- Conducting certain activities such as, research projects, tours, group visits, etc. which the Forest Service has not approved in writing.\*
- To possess or use motorized or non-motorized vehicles and cycles off-road.
- Using a gas-powered motorized watercraft.
- Rappelling or rock climbing.
- Abandonment of garbage brought to the LaRue-Pine Hills RNA.
- Establishment of commercial enterprise, construction of any improvements, establishment of permanent or semi-permanent camps or erection of structures. Temporary waterfowl blinds are permitted, but must be removed at the end of each hunting day.

\*For more information about obtaining a Research Natural Area Use Application contact the Shawnee National Forest's RNA Coordinator at (618) 658-2111. Some activities may require a separate special-use permit.