

# CROATAN

# NATIONAL FOREST



Alligators roam the Croatan marshes.

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All Photos by Bill Lea

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The Neusiok Trail allows visitors to experience the beauty of the beach, forest, and salt marsh.

# LAND OF MANY ECOSYSTEMS

**T**he Croatan National Forest's 161,000 acres of land offer an exciting variety of opportunities. You can camp under the pines, canoe past giant cypress trees hung with Spanish moss, or stroll boardwalks over salt marshes and view wading herons.

The Croatan's wide diversity of ecosystems ranges from freshwater pocosins to longleaf pine savannas to salt marsh. With such an array of habitats, it's no surprise that the Croatan is home to a variety of wildlife: waterfowl, wading birds, deer, bears, snakes, and alligators.

The U.S. Forest Service manages the forest for many uses—recreation, water quality, timber, fish and wildlife habitat, and wilderness. Conserving the Croatan's resources while making them available for people to enjoy is the Forest Service's challenge.

## Forest offers variety of waters

Bordered by tidal rivers and the Bogue Sound, the Croatan is defined by water. Scattered throughout the forest are evergreen-shrub bogs known as "pocosins," an Indian word meaning "swamp on a hill."

Catfish and Great Lakes and other freshwater lakes are in the forest's center. The 820-acre Catfish Lake Waterfowl Impoundment consists of a series of canals and dikes surrounded by pocosins. The area is managed to provide habitat for ducks and geese.

Estuaries, one of nature's most productive ecosystems, form along the mainland's edge where freshwater rivers mix with ocean saltwater. Estuary waters serve as nurseries by providing critical cover for infant crabs, shrimp, oysters, and other young inhabitants as they develop and eventually make their way to the ocean.

Throughout the estuaries, tall wiry grasses grow. These grasses play a key role in recycling nutrients and maintaining water quality. Salt marshes also protect the coastline from erosion by acting as storm buffers.

White Oak River and Brice Creek are scenic rivers. Huge bald cypress draped with Spanish moss line these "blackwater" streams, named after their tea color. Cypress trees release tannic acid to produce this color. A variety of plants and animals thrive in the fluctuating water levels of these blackwater rivers.

## Croatan contains 4 wildernesses

In 1984, the North Carolina Wilderness Act established four wildernesses, totaling 31,221 acres in the Croatan National Forest. These four wildernesses—Catfish Lake South (7,600 acres), Pocosin (11,000 acres), Pond Pine (1,860 acres), and Sheep Ridge (9,540 acres)—are primarily pocosins. These peat-filled depres-



**From the Tideland Trail, visitors can view Cedar Point's salt marsh, wading birds, and wildlife.**

sions covered by thick shrubs and small trees are difficult to cross. They protect diverse populations of plants and animals and provide large areas of relatively undisturbed wildlife habitat that is especially good for black bears. However, pocosins have limited recreation opportunity.

## Fire manages plant diversity

About 70 percent of the Croatan National Forest—pine forests and pocosins—are naturally fire-adapted and fire-dependent. Recurring, low-intensity fires play a key role in maintaining plant diversity and healthy ecosystems.

The Forest Service attempts to mimic nature by using fire to maintain and restore natural communities, such as longleaf pine savannas. Foresters ignite prescribed fire only when weather and site conditions permit control of fire and minimize the adverse effects on other resources.

Prescribed fire is also used to reduce the amount of vegetation and minimize the risk of wildfires. The Forest Service works with local and State cooperators to identify places most threatened by wildfires. Forest neighbors are encouraged to learn how to protect their property. For more details, see this web site: <http://www.firewise.org/>.

## Timber management restores habitat

The Forest Service uses timber management to increase forest health and restore longleaf pine forests critical to endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers. Young pine stands are thinned to reduce the risk and damage caused by southern pine beetles. Where trees are harvested, pines or bottomland oaks are planted.

## Unique plants thrive in forest

Several unusual plant species thrive within the boundaries of the Croatan National Forest. The Venus flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*) lives only in the eastern coastal plain. The plant makes a meal on insects after its hinged leaves close and entrap prey. The plant absorbs the insects that provide needed nutrients lacking in the soil. Other carnivorous or insect-eating plants of the Croatan include sundew, butterwort, and pitcher plants; all are protected by law.

## Variety of wildlife live in Croatan

A variety of bird life lives in the Croatan. Creeks, swamps, marshes, and bays provide habitat for ducks, gulls, wading birds, osprey, and a few bald eagles. The forests harbor many warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. Mixed hardwood and pine woodlands are home to tanagers, thrushes, nuthatches, Carolina chickadees, wrens, and woodpeckers. Federally endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers nest in mature longleaf pines.

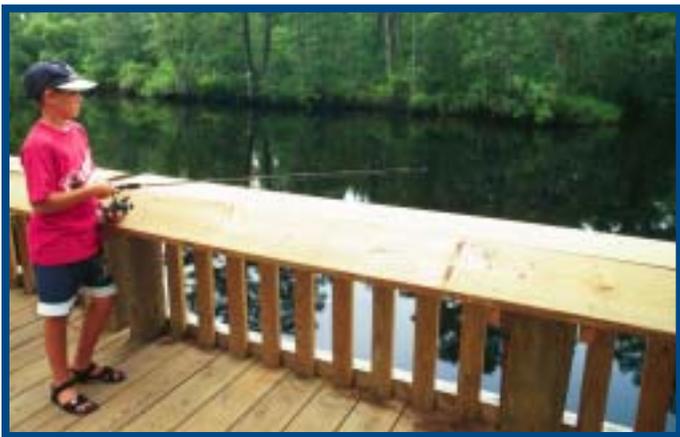
Reptiles—snakes, turtles, lizards, and alligators—are frequently observed in the forest and coastal environments. The largest and most awesome reptile, the American alligator, lives in deep swamps and waterways. While many nonpoisonous snakes live in the forest, five species of poisonous might be spotted: eastern cottonmouth, southern copperhead, and timber (sometimes called a “canebrake”), eastern diamondback, and Carolina pigmy rattlesnakes.



The carnivorous Venus flytrap feeds on insects.



Fire plays a major role in maintaining and regenerating longleaf pine forests on the Croatan.



An angler fishes at Brice Creek's accessible pier.



A couple relaxes at Neuse River Campground.

## Hunting & Fishing regulations

Hunting and fishing are allowed under State regulations. While the Forest Service manages the habitat, the State sets the limits and seasons. Please check with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission for licenses and regulations. Address: 512 N. Salisbury Street, Raleigh, NC 27604-1188; telephone: 919-662-4381. Get a copy of the Regulations Digest at <http://www.wildlife.state.nc.us/>. Click "regulations" on the sidebar. Federal and State duck stamps are required to hunt waterfowl in the Catfish Waterfowl Impoundment.

## Recreation fees

A fee is charged for some recreation areas in Croatan National Forest. Passports, both the Golden Age and Golden Access passports, provide a 50 percent discount on fees charged for some facilities and services, such as camping, swimming, and parking. The passport usually admits passport holders and their passengers.

The Golden Age Passport is available for all U.S. citizens who are 62 years old or older. The passport may be purchased at any Forest Service office for \$10. The Golden Access Passport is free to any U.S. citizen who is blind or permanently disabled.

## Discover Croatan National Forest trails

**Cedar Point Tideland Trail**, a National Recreation Trail, includes a 0.6-mile loop and a 1.3-mile loop that provide excellent opportunities to view wildlife and explore the salt marsh and adjoining forest. Interpretive signs along the short loop tell the story of the ever-changing salt marsh. The trail meanders through pine and hardwood forests damaged by Hurricanes Bertha and Fran in 1996. Boardwalks cross marshes and open water and offer views of wading birds and other wildlife.

The Tidelands Trail is at Cedar Point in the southwest corner of the Croatan National Forest. Cedar Point Recreation Area offers camping, picnicking, a ramp for small boats, a fishing pier, canoeing, and kayaking.

**Neusiok Trail** travels from the Newport River to the Neuse River at Pine Cliff Recreation Area, this trail passes through pine and hardwood forests, pocosins, and a portion of the Neuse River shoreline. The trail covers 26 miles of national forest and crosses several paved and unpaved roads. No developed camping facilities are available along the trail, but primitive camping is permitted. Trail users must pack out their trash. Hikers need to wear boots to cross several wet areas and must carry drinking water. Most people prefer fall, winter, and early spring hiking to avoid the heat, insects, and snakes.

**Island Creek Forest Walk** is a half-mile trail that winds through a mixed pine and hardwood forest and a stand of old hardwood trees that are unusual in eastern North Carolina. The trail is peaceful, relaxing, and particularly alive with color during the fall and spring. To reach this trail, go south from New Bern on U.S. 70 for 1 mile, turn right (west) and travel 8 miles on SR 1004.

## Camping regulations

The rules at national forest recreation areas are for your protection. By observing these regulations, you and your camping neighbors will enjoy the peace, beauty, and serenity of the forest.

- In developed recreation sites, place vehicles, tents, and trailers only in designated areas.
- Occupy your campsite the first night you arrive; don't leave it unoccupied over 24 hours at a time during a stay.
- Camping is not permitted in day-use areas, such as picnic grounds and boat launches.
- Length of stay must not exceed 14 consecutive days.
- Campers only are permitted inside campgrounds during night hours.
- Build fires only in stoves, grills, and fireplace rings.
- Help preserve vegetation and all facilities. Protect recreation areas for future generations.
- Throughout the forest, primitive camping is permitted outside developed recreation areas.

# CAMPING IN THE CROATAN NATIONAL FOREST

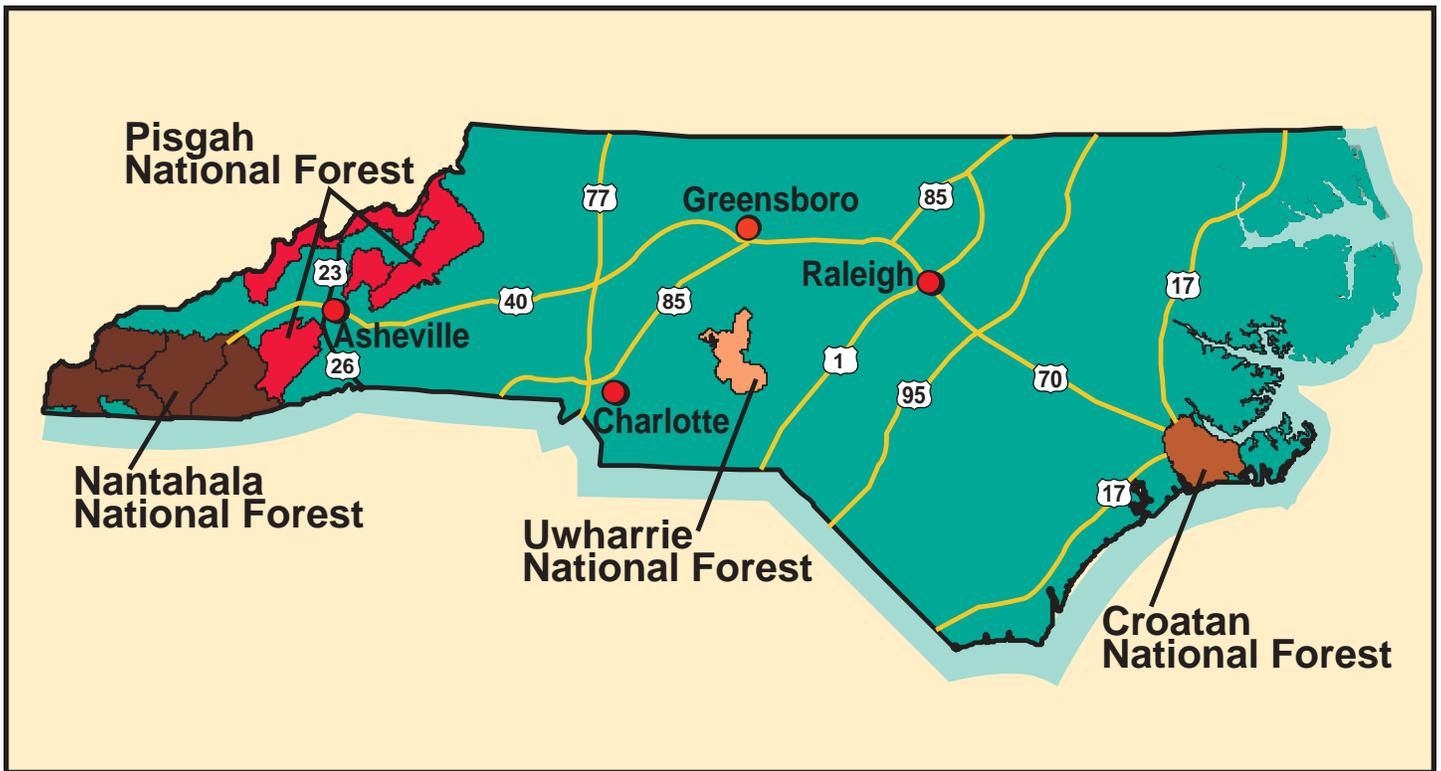
DEVELOPED CAMPGROUNDS	# OF SITES	FACILITIES	ACTIVITIES
<b>CEDAR POINT</b> Open all year. Off NC 58, 1 mile north of NC 24 and NC 58 junction Fee.	40, all with electricity		 (shallow launch)
<b>FISHERS LANDING</b> Open all year. Off U.S. 70-E, about 10 miles south of New Bern, 0.5 mile north of the Croatan Ranger office.	9 for tents only		
<b>NEUSE RIVER (FLANNERS BEACH)</b> Open all year. Off U.S. 70-E about 12 miles south of New Bern, 2 miles south of the Croatan Ranger Office. Fee	42, some with electricity		
PRIMITIVE CAMPING	SYMBOL KEY ON OTHER SIDE (F=Flush; V=Vault)		
<b>GREAT LAKE</b> Open all year. From Maysville, take NC 58E, turn left on SR 1101 (turns to dirt). Continue on FR 126.	undesignated	none, primitive	 (shallow launch)
<b>LONG POINT</b> Open all year. From Maysville, take NC 58E, turn right on FR 120.	undesignated	none, primitive	
<b>CATFISH LAKE/WATERFOWL IMPOUNDMENT</b> Open all year. From Maysville, take NC 58E, turn right on SR 1105 (turns to dirt). turn left on FR 158.	undesignated at lake and impoundment	none, primitive	 (shallow launch at lake)
<b>OYSTER POINT</b> Open all year. From Newport, take SR 1154 to FR 181.	undesignated	none, primitive	 (shallow launch)
<b>SIDDIE FIELDS</b> Open all year. From Havelock, take NC 101 to SR 1716 (Ferry Road), the last mile is gravel.	undesignated	none, primitive	



*“Remember, only you can prevent forest fires!”*

## FIRE SAFETY

- Extinguish your match; break it in two before discarding.
- Use the ashtray in your vehicle. Away from the vehicle, stamp out your smoke on mineral soil—never in dry grasses, leaves, or needles. Then take the butt with you.
- Never leave a campfire or campstove unattended—put fires DEAD OUT before leaving.
- Be especially careful with fire when the wind is blowing.



## For more information, contact:

**Forest Supervisor**

**National Forests in North Carolina**

160A Zillicoa Street  
Asheville, NC 28801  
828-257-4200

### **Croatan National Forest**

141 E. Fisher Avenue  
New Bern, NC 28560  
252-638-5628

**Directions:** Off U.S. 70  
south of New Bern

**Visit National Forests in NC web site:**

[www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc](http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc)