

Recreation Guide

Croatan National Forest

Home of the Neusiok Trail



Discover the Croatan National Forest, one of four national forests in North Carolina. Named for the Croatan Indian Tribe, the Croatan National Forest's 160,000 acres are bordered on three sides by the Neuse and White Oak rivers and the Bogue Sound (part of the Atlantic Ocean's Intercoastal Waterway). Visitors will find unique places to enjoy and study the forest's interior woodlands, as well as saltwater estuaries; raised swamps, called pocosins; and other watery areas.

Stands of majestic longleaf pines are being restored in the Croatan's interior forests. The U.S. Forest Service uses a combination of prescribed burning, thinning and replanting to promote and sustain this native ecosystem, home to endangered species like the red-cockaded woodpecker and the rough-leaf loosestrife. Live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, bald cypress, sweetbay and magnolia trees provide a unique sense of place in this coastal forest.

Try canoeing and fishing on blackwater creeks and in saltwater marshes. Comb beaches along the Neuse River, or paddle around the forest on the Saltwater Adventure Trail. Focus a camera or binoculars on a diversity of wildlife ranging from deer, black bears and turkeys to wading birds, crabs, ospreys and alligators. The Croatan National Forest offers a variety of long- and short-distance trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding and motoring in an all-terrain vehicle. Sleep under the stars in a variety of developed campgrounds and dispersed campsites.

The district office for the Croatan National Forest is in New Bern, N.C. Visitors can call the local ranger station for answers to questions.

About Croatan National Forest

- The only true coastal forest in North Carolina
- Home to carnivorous plants, including Venus fly-trap, sundew and pitcherplant
- Catfish Lake, an 800-acre waterfowl impoundment, is managed specifically to attract waterfowl and provide hunting opportunities
- More than 30,000 acres of designated Wilderness Areas (Catfish Lake South, Pocosin, Pond Pine, Sheep Ridge)
- One ranger district (Croatan)
- Many miles of trails, including a bike trail complex at Neuse River/Flanners Beach and an equestrian trail complex in the Pine Cliff area
- Eight miles of off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails on old roads raised above a pocosin at Black Swamp

The Neusiok Trail winds more than 20 miles from a sandy beach on the Neuse River to a salt marsh on the Newport River. The trail meanders through a cypress-lined beach, hardwoods, loblolly pines, savannas and thick pocosins between Oyster Point's estuary and Pine Cliff Recreation Area.

Park at Pinecliff, Oyster Point or the intersection of NC 306 and the Neusiok Trail. Be sure to bring drinking water and wear raincoats, waterproof boots and bug repellent.

The Neusiok Trail is part of the 900-mile Mountains-to-the-Sea National Recreation Trail that begins in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and ends in Jockey Ridge State Park at the ocean. The Mountains-to-the-Sea Trail is blazed with white circles.

Hunting

Hunters sometimes walk the Neusiok, so to ensure safety during hunting season—October through December—wear a bright orange hat or vest; dress your dog in blaze-orange too. Hunters should have a valid license and follow safe hunting practices.

Camping

Dispersed camping is allowed along the trail's route, except at trailheads and in recreation areas. Hikers may camp anywhere along the trail; however, three trail shelters offer a dry refuge:

- Copperhead Landing is about halfway between Pine Cliff and NC 306.
- Dogwood Camp is less than a mile south of NC 101.
- Blackjack Lodge is about one mile north of Mill Creek Road.

Each of the three-sided shelters has a fire grill and accommodates about five people. Developed camping is available at Oyster Point Campground.



The Croatan Ranger District office is a great source for recreation ideas, safety tips and seasonal weather announcements.



The Neusiok Trail is described as an "easy" hike, allowing most visitors to enjoy the beauty and solitude of the forest.

Hiking

Hiking is best from October through May when the brush is thinnest and insects are sparse. The trail crosses several roads, so hikes can be shortened as needed. Parking is available at the trailheads. The trail crosses many wet areas, so visitors may get their feet wet despite a number of bridges and boardwalks.

Nature Viewing

Quiet visitors might be lucky enough to spot white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, black bears, otters, gray squirrels or even an alligator. Bird life abounds including ospreys, bald eagles and red-cockaded woodpeckers. Visitors may see snakes during warm months. Black racers and other snakes sometimes cross the trail. Venomous snakes—Copperheads, Cottonmouths, Timber, Canebrake, Pygmy and Eastern Diamondback rattlesnakes—live in the Croatan National Forest. It's wise to look before placing hands or feet in thick brush. Give snakes a wide berth.

Croatan Ranger District

141 E. Fisher Avenue
New Bern, NC 28560
252-638-5628 croatan@fs.fed.us

Recreation Sites and Activities

Dispersed Camping—unless areas have “No Camping” signs, camping is allowed in undeveloped, non-fee areas in the Croatan National Forest. No dispersed camping is allowed within the boundaries of day-use sites, campgrounds or most wildlife openings, or within 150 feet of a boat launch. Call the ranger station for more information.

camping (# of campsites)
reservations *
fee (\$)

picnic area
restrooms

showers F = flush, V = vault

drinking water
boat ramp

dump station
fishing/wading

trails

CROATAN NATIONAL FOREST

comments

Site Name	Camping (# of campsites)	Reservations *	Fee (\$)	Picnic Area	Restrooms	Showers	Drinking Water	Boat Ramp	Dump Station	Fishing/Wading	Trails	Comments
BRICE CREEK BOAT LAUNCH Open all year. From New Bern, go east on US-70E; cross the Trent River. Turn right on Williams Rd.; go 1.5 mi. Turn left on Madam Moores Ln.; go 1.6 mi. Turn left on Perrytown Rd.; go 1.5 mi. Turn left on Forest Road #121-A; travel 1.2 mi. to the boat launch.												On Brice Creek; courtesy dock.
CAHOOQUE CREEK BOAT LAUNCH Open all year. From Havelock, go southeast on US-70/W Main St. Bear left on NC-101/Fontana Blvd.; follow NC-101 4.8 mi. Turn left on Cahooque Creek Rd., FR# 1717; go 1.5 mi. Bear left on FR# 1717 and travel 1.4 mi. to the boat launch.												On Neuse River; courtesy dock.
CEDAR POINT RECREATION AREA Open all year. From Swansboro, take NC 24E, cross White Oak River, turn left onto NC 58N, go 3.3 miles, turn left on VFW Rd. Go 0.5 mile and turn left on FR 153A at Cedar Point sign.	40	*	\$									Electrical hookups at all sites. Electrical surcharge. On White Oak River. Trailhead for Tideland National Recreation Trail.
DIXON FIELD BOAT LAUNCH Open all year. From Maysville, travel south on Main St/US-17/NC-58. Turn left onto 8th St/NC-58 and travel 3.9 mi. Turn right onto NC-58-LOOP; travel 0.3 mi. Take the second right onto Dixon Field Rd., FR #3057. Travel 1.2 mi. to the boat launch.												On White Oak River.
FISHERS LANDING PICNIC AREA Open all year. From New Bern, take U.S. 70E for about 10 miles. Turn left at sign, 0.5 mile north of Croatan District office.	6											On Neuse River. Near beach and river access. Camping is allowed; six rustic sites with picnic tables and fire rings.
HAYWOOD LANDING BOAT LAUNCH Open all year. From Maysville, travel south on Main St/US-17/NC-58. Turn left onto 8th St/NC-58 and travel 6.9 mi. Turn right onto Long Point Road, FR #120. Take an immediate right onto FR# 157 and travel 1.6 mi. Turn right onto FR# 146 to the boat launch.												On White Oak River; courtesy dock.
LONG POINT BOAT LAUNCH Open all year. From Maysville, travel south on Main St/US-17/NC-58. Turn left onto 8th St/NC-58 and travel 6.9 mi. Turn right onto Long Point Road, FR# 120 and travel 2.2 mi to the canoe launch.	4											On White Oak River; camping is allowed at designated camp sites.
NEUSE RIVER/FLANNERS BEACH RECREATION AREA Open all year. From New Bern, take US 70E about 12 miles. Travel about 2 miles south of Croatan District office, turn left on SR 1107 and go 1.5 miles.	40	*	\$									On Neuse River. Surcharge for electricity at 24 sites.
OYSTER POINT CAMPGROUND Open all year. From Newport, take SR 1154 to FR 181 and turn right, Go 1.1 mile to campground on right.	15		\$									Trailhead for Neusiok/Mountains-to-the-Sea National Recreation Trail. Shallow water at canoe launch. Call for group camping information.
PINE CLIFF PICNIC AREA Open all year. From Havelock, take NC 101 for 4.7 miles to NC 306 and turn left. Go 3.2 miles to Pinecliff Rd., turn left and go 1.5 miles to parking lot.												On Neuse River. Trailhead for Neusiok/Mountains-to-the-Sea National Recreation Trail. Beach and river access. Horse trails and trailhead nearby on Pine Cliff Road.

*Note: To make reservations, call 877-444-6777, TDD: 877-833-6777 or www.recreation.gov

Sleeping Under the Stars

Interested in camping alongside one of the Croatan's large rivers? Three developed campgrounds offer campsites, restrooms and other amenities. The camping fee is discounted with an America the Beautiful Interagency senior/access pass. However, at sites with electrical hookups, there is a non-discountable surcharge for electricity.

Cedar Point Recreation Area

Experience the North Carolina coast by camping at Cedar Point Recreation Area. Located in a coastal forest, just a few yards away from a salt marsh at the mouth of the White Oak River, the campground has dozens of single campsites, each with electrical hookups. Cedar Point offers showers, restrooms, drinking water and a trailer dump station. All facilities are fully accessible. The campground has an on-site host and is open year round.

Reserve a site through www.recreation.gov or



Hike the Tideland Trail while visiting Cedar Point.

by calling 877-444-6777. A few sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

At Cedar Point, enjoy picnicking, fishing or searching for crabs along the shore of the White Oak River. Hike the boardwalk on the Tideland National Recreation Trail (two loops, one is 0.6 miles and the other is 1.3 miles).

Launch a canoe, kayak or flat-bottomed boat into the river's salt marshes. A small-craft boat ramp and fishing pier provide easy access to the river and its bounty. The shallow water is suited to flat-bottom boats. Canoes and kayaks can navigate the maze of canals through the salt marsh. Be aware of the tides; an extremely low tide can leave some canals dry.

The closest ocean beach access is about 3 miles from Cedar Point. Take NC 58 across the causeway and travel about a half-mile to the public beach access sign. Outfitters along the Emerald Coast offer sea kayaking, windsurfing, golf and other outdoor activities.

Neuse River/ Flanners Beach Recreation Area

Situated on a bank of the Neuse River and under tall pines and hardwoods, the Neuse River/ Flanners Beach Recreation Area offers dozens of campsites, many with electricity. Campsites feature a picnic table, fire ring, tent pad and lantern posts. Neuse River/Flanners Beach offers a large grassy picnic area, sandy beach, showers, restrooms, drinking water and a trailer dump station. The campground has an on-site host and is open year round.

Reserve a site through www.recreation.gov or by calling 877-444-6777. A few sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Picnic under a forest of sweet gums, bald cypress and wax myrtle. Hike or ride a bicycle on the three-mile trail near the campground. One mile of this trail is paved and fully accessible. Fish, sunbathe or beachcomb along the shore of the Neuse River. To protect the beauty of the beach, dogs must be on a leash. Glass containers, fires and alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

At times, the Neuse River suffers from Pfiesteria (fist-EER-ee-uh), a microscopic aquatic organism that produces toxins that can injure or kill fish. People may be at risk if the toxins are inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Blamed for fish kills between April and October, Pfiesteria grows where salt water and fresh water mix, like in the Neuse River.

Poison ivy is common around the campground. Remember: “leaves of three, let it be.”

Oyster Point Campground

Oyster Point Campground lies alongside the Newport River. There are a number of wooded sites with fire rings, lantern posts and picnic tables. Other facilities include vault toilets and potable water. The sites are first-come, first-served, and the campground is open year round. Campground hosts reside inside the campground. A canoe launch provides access into the river. Oyster Point is a trailhead for the Neusiok Trail.

Forest Map



Croatan National Forest

4.5 2.25 0 4.5 miles

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| National Forest | Fishing Area, Trailhead | Forest Service Road |
| Wilderness | Hiking, Interpretive Trail, Bike Trail | Primary Highway, Multi-Lane |
| Proclamation Area | Off-Highway Vehicle System | Primary Highway |
| Military Reservation | Horse Trail | Secondary Paved Road |
| District Ranger Office | Non-FS Recreation Sites | Improved Road, May Be Paved or Gravel |
| FS Campground | Interstate Highway | National Recreation Trail |
| Boat Ramp, Canoe Launch, Hand Launch | US Highway | Hiking or Interpretive Trail |
| Picnic Area, Picnic Shelter | State Route | Gate |

The Newport River is one of the many waterways surrounding Croatan National Forest. Check out the river views from Oyster Point Campground and launch your kayak to paddle a portion of the Saltwater Adventure Trail. (See Boating, page 4.)



Enjoying the Great Outdoors

The Croatan National Forest offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities that visitors can experience throughout the year. Whether hiking, biking, hunting or nature viewing, visitors will find numerous special places to enjoy the great outdoors.

Hiking

Hiking is one of the most popular activities at the Croatan National Forest. Here are some places where hikers can take in the natural world:

- Neuse River Trail: 3 miles hiking and biking, 1 mile paved, additional miles under construction
- Patsy Pond Nature Trail: 3.65 miles of interpretive hiking
- Tideland National Recreation Trail: 2 miles of interpretive hiking
- Island Creek Forest Walk: half-mile of interpretive hiking
- Weetok Trail: 7 miles of hiking trail
- Neusiok/Mountains-to-the-Sea National Recreation Trail: 23 miles of hiking trail

Practice these safety tips when hiking:

- Be prepared by carrying a map and compass.
- Dress appropriately for the weather conditions.
- Carry plenty of water and insect repellent.
- Don't hike alone.
- Give trip plans to a friend or relative.
- Know whether the trail is for hiking only or if equestrians or mountain bikers use the trail too.



Horse Riding

The Pine Cliff Equestrian Trail is 14 miles long through pine and hardwood forest. The trailhead is located on Pine Cliff Road, where restrooms are available.

Horses can be hard on the trails, trees and land. Here are some simple ways to reduce effects:

- To protect water quality, keep horses at least 100 feet from water.
- Stay on designated horse trails. To prevent erosion, don't shortcut trails.
- Tether horses using a tree-saver strap tied between two trees. If no trees are near, picket or hobble horses.
- Use weed-free feed. Scatter manure, pick up trash and fill in pawed holes.
- Share the trail. Riders should yield to motorized vehicles, but hikers and bikers should yield to equestrians. Say hello, and give them instructions about where to wait while the horse passes.
- A horse crossing a state line is required to have a negative Coggins test within the last year.
- Before leaving, clean campsites and hitching post areas, pack out all trash or throw it away in provided receptacles and make sure any fire is dead out.

Boating

The waters of Croatan National Forest offer a variety of boating opportunities for motorized and non-motorized vessels.

Try canoeing along the interpretive water trail on Brice Creek. A leisurely paddle round-trip from the boat ramp takes about four hours, or after a two-hour float, boaters can continue along the Saltwater Adventure Trail that nearly surrounds the Croatan National Forest. Beyond Brice Creek, the kayak adventure continues to the Trent and Neuse rivers, Harlowe Canal, Newport River, Bogue Sound/Intercoastal Waterway and White Oak River. The entire trek is approximately 100 miles long and can take up to seven days.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when enjoying the water:

- Learn to swim.
- Wear a life jacket.
- Never go boating under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Supervise children in or near water.
- Always swim with a buddy.
- Learn CPR.
- Check water depth before diving and only dive into familiar waters.
- Learn safe boating practices.

Sightseeing and Picnicking

To enjoy sightseeing and picnicking, visit any of these locations:

- Cedar Point day use picnic area, river access and Tideland National Recreation Trail
- Pine Cliff day use picnic area and river access
- Neuse River/Flanners Beach day use picnic area and river access

Safety Tips

- Lock valuables in the trunk or other locations where they can't be seen.
- Check on-site information boards for safety issues relating specifically to that area.
- Identify potential natural hazards, such as high winds, slippery rocks, flash flooding, bears or other wild animals. Be alert!
- Keep a safe distance from all wild animals, and don't feed them.
- Visitors should trust their instincts. Visitors finding themselves in a place or situation that becomes uncomfortable should leave immediately and get help. Report suspicious individuals or illegal activity to law enforcement.
- Carry a noisemaker, such as a whistle.
- In the event of serious injury, wildfire or other emergencies, call 911.

Ticks can carry diseases such as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme disease. Follow these safety tips to prevent tick bites:

- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks are visible on clothing.
- Tuck pant legs into socks so ticks cannot crawl inside pants.
- Apply repellents to discourage tick attachment.
- Avoid tall grass and brush.
- Routinely check hair and body for ticks.
- Go to a doctor immediately if there is redness, and take the tick in a plastic bag for identification.

Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Riding

The Black Swamp OHV Trail Complex is open year round. The area offers 8 miles of trails for all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) with a wheel base of less than 50 inches. Permits are sold at the Croatan District Office and through authorized local vendors. Practice these safety tips when riding OHVs:

- OHVs/ATVs and motorcycle operators must wear DOT-approved helmets and eye protection.
- Children under 8 may not operate ATVs or motorcycles.
- An operator under 16 must have constant supervision by an adult over the age of 18.
- No passengers are allowed on ATVs, unless vehicles are designed to carry passengers.
- Unlicensed vehicles are not allowed on designated Forest Service roads.
- Spark arresters, mufflers and brakes are required for motorized vehicles.
- Travel only on OHV-designated routes.
- Cross-country travel is prohibited.
- Don't ride during or immediately following rain.

Hunting and Fishing

Outside of developed recreation areas, fishing and hunting are permitted throughout the Croatan National Forest.

While the Forest Service manages the habitat and protects water quality in the national forests, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission regulates fishing and hunting. Valid licenses are required.

For more details, contact the Wildlife Resources Commission at www.ncwildlife.org or call 888-248-6834.

Prescribed Burning

Wildfire has been part of the coastal ecosystem for thousands of years. The Forest Service uses prescribed burning as a management tool to mimic what periodically occurs at the Croatan National Forest. Prescribed burns remove woody debris, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires and protect communities. Such managed fires benefit a variety of native plants and animals. The safety of the public and firefighters is the number one priority. When prescribed burns occur, the Forest Service closes area trails and roads, usually the day before the prescribed burn. Visitors are asked to heed signs posted at trailheads and roads. Stay away from burn sites and closed roads and trails.

National Forests in North Carolina

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