

# Aroostook

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

### **A Legacy of Protection**

Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge is located on part of the former Loring Air Force Base in Limestone, Maine. It was established in 1998 when 4,700 acres were transferred from the U.S. Air Force to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Since then the refuge has grown to 5,252 acres and also includes more than 2,400 acres in conservation easements.

Loring Air Force Base played a key role in assuring our country's safety during the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) was stationed here from 1950 to 1994 flying long-range bombers capable of delivering nuclear weapons. Caribou Air Force Station was a top-secret, self-contained base in the northeast corner of the site.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the refuge as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This network of lands is set aside specifically for the protection of wildlife. It contains 550 refuges, comprising more than 150 million acres. Wildlife comes first on refuges with public uses allowed only when they do not interfere with wildlife management objectives.

### **A Focus on Wildlife**

Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge protects valuable wildlife habitat in northern Maine where the landscape is dominated by agricultural crops such as potatoes and broccoli. A wide variety of habitats in the area attract many wildlife species.

Precious wetland and streamside habitats are found on the refuge. Ponds such as East Loring Lake, and streams like Butterfield Brook and Greenlaw Brook provide habitat for American black ducks whose populations are



*Moose in mist*

decreasing. Wood ducks, ring-necked ducks, and hooded mergansers are also common. Canada geese may be seen on the refuge during spring and fall migrations.

The majority of the refuge is forested uplands, offering nesting habitat for migratory songbirds. Warblers, such as the black-throated green, Canada, bay-breasted, Cape May, and Blackburnian, are common in the spring and summer. These "neotropical migrants" breed here and winter in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Habitat destruction throughout the Western Hemisphere threatens these species.

### **A Helping Hand for Habitat**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service actively manages habitat to benefit wildlife. Initial efforts at Aroostook are focusing on reclaiming land as wildlife habitat. Refuge staff are working to remove structures, including buildings, storage bunkers, roads, and fences.

Birds, such as upland sandpipers, chestnut-sided warblers, American woodcock, and ruffed grouse, require open fields in which to live. Controlled burns remove old vegetation, promote new growth, and rejuvenate grasslands. Timber harvesting in small blocks opens additional areas for these species.

Dabbling ducks, such as black ducks and wood ducks, need water not more than 15 inches deep in which to feed. Water control structures on refuge wetlands allow staff to regulate levels to benefit these waterfowl.

More than 2,000 acres of conservation easements have been established within Aroostook County. Refuge staff manage these properties in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. The agencies provide landowners with technical assistance to improve habitat for fish and wildlife on their land.

## **A Place for You**

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 established six priority uses for national wildlife refuges. These are: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. As long as these activities are compatible with the purposes of the refuge, they are encouraged. It is likely that all of these will be offered at Aroostook, as funding and staffing permits.

The Service has converted the Alert Visitation Center, a building on the east side of the refuge, to a visitor center. The building, when fully operational, will provide orientation for visitors, access to printed materials, and information about activities available on the refuge. A network of hiking trails will start at the visitor center, and the refuge headquarters will be located in the building.

The Friends of Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge support the refuge's programs through education, fundraising, and volunteer projects. Members include federal, state, county, and local officials, the Loring Development Authority, civic leaders, area businesses, the local National Guard Unit, nongovernmental organizations, University of Maine educators, the Maine School of Science & Mathematics, and local citizens. The members' diverse backgrounds, interests, and skills are valuable resources for the refuge. The group meets with Service staff on a regular basis to learn more about the Service, its mission, and its work at the refuge.

Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge is the sixth national wildlife refuge in Maine. It joins Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in Calais, Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Wells, Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuges in Milbridge, Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Milford, and Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge with headquarters in Errol, N.H.

Office hours: Please call

Trails are open 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset.

**For more information, contact us at  
Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge  
PO Box 554  
97 Refuge Road  
Limestone, ME 04750  
207/328 4634  
207/328 4660 Fax**

**The refuge is administered from  
Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge  
Please contact the Refuge Manager  
Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge  
103 Headquarters Road  
Baring, ME 04694  
207/454 7161**

**Federal Relay Service  
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing  
1 800/877 8339**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>**

**May 2009**

