



Hunters Lester Langley and John Hanks use the national wildlife refuges of northern Louisiana to hunt a variety of waterfowl and game. | Photo courtesy of John Hanks

## John Hanks, Hunter, Angler, and Biologist with Louisiana Department of Fish and Wildlife, Louisiana

John Hanks has been a hunter for as long as he can remember, beginning at the age of five when he started accompanying his father, grandpa, and uncle on hunting and fishing trips. By age 9, he was taking waterfowl and game himself, and he now spends “one hundred percent of my recreation time outdoors,” much of it hunting and fishing on the five refuges that make up the Northern Louisiana Refuge Complex. Hunting is not just a pastime in northern Louisiana, “it’s a cultural thing,” says Hanks, who earns his living as a biologist with the Louisiana Department of Fish and Wildlife. “Having a place available where anyone can hunt and fish and use the outdoors is a perfect example of what American freedoms are. I would not be in the profession I’m in today if I hadn’t had these opportunities.”

Louisiana’s refuges provide some of the state’s only opportunities to hunt and fish without paying steep hunt-club leasing fees. “Having a National Wildlife Refuge System that I can use at little or no cost is just invaluable to me,” Hanks notes. “Refuges also are the only lands managed primarily for wildlife, and they’re just about the only remaining places in Louisiana that have bottomland hardwood forest habitats,” he adds. “A lot of the other land available for hunting is either agricultural or single-species pine forest that’s managed primarily for timber.” As a biologist, Hanks also sees hunting as a means to protect refuge flora by keeping species like deer in check. “Hunting is a very valuable tool for wildlife managers,” he notes.