

# Bayou Boeuf

Between the station stops at Schriever and New Iberia, you can see marshes and wetlands that have been collectively called Bayou Boeuf. This bayou provides resources for both humans and animals, and has for centuries.

The vegetation here is mainly hardwood and cypress trees that you can see emerging from the water. If you look closely you can see small nodules, or knees, rising up from the water around the cypress trees. These “knees” are used to support and stabilize the tree in the soft ground. The cypress tree is an important resource for people past and present, and has been named the state tree of Louisiana. The wood from a cypress tree is called the “eternal wood,” as it is very durable.

The bayou is home to two large animals: alligators and nutria. The alligators here are partially protected but also hunted during the legal season. Their skins are very valuable and are used in a variety of goods including boots, wallets, and luggage. If you spot a rat-like mammal the size of a house cat, you’ve probably seen a nutria. These animals are very adept swimmers above, as well as under, the water. They have teeth similar to those of beavers, which are good for gnawing woody plants.

Imagine paddling through these swamps just as the Native Americans did centuries ago. These swamps and marshes provided food, transportation and lodging for Native Americans, but also presented many dangers and discomforts such as alligators, mosquitoes, and the constant humidity. Native Americans harvested cypress trees to make their main form of transportation, canoes. The giant leaves of the palmetto trees were used to make thatch for the roofs of their home, as well as for woven baskets.

Today, the main resource people extract from Bayou Boeuf is natural gas. This area is one of the largest suppliers of natural gas for the United States. It was difficult to access the gas wells in the wooded, shallow marshland, so canals have been dredged to allow ships to more easily reach these areas. Natural gas and oil is also drilled off of the nearby coast of Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico.

As you leave the region remember that these swamps are just as important today to our natural gas industry as they were for Native Americans’ survival. Come visit the swamps sometime; just make sure to bring mosquito repellent and water proof clothing.

## Source(s):

Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries. “Boeuf.”

<http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/hunting/wmas/wmas/list.cfm?wmaid=15>

Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries. “FAQ.”

<http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/faq/?category=12>

## Author(s):

Written by Andrew Rollwitz (Undergraduate Student) and edited by Andria N. Godfrey (Graduate Student) in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, as part of a National Park Service Trails and Rails project funded by Amtrak, 2009.