



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*Celebrating a
Century
of Conservation!*

America's National Wildlife Refuge System

*Celebrating a Century
of Conservation*

Commemorating a Pivotal Moment in History

March 14, 2003 marks a milestone in the history of wildlife conservation in America—the Centennial anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is America's only network of federal lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation, representing a steadfast commitment to protecting our wild heritage.

President Theodore Roosevelt fostered this conservation legacy when in 1903 he set aside tiny Pelican Island on Florida's East Coast as a refuge for birds. What has become the National Wildlife Refuge System now includes more than 530 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas, spanning nearly 94 million acres across the United States and its territories.

A Network of Wildlife Habitats

This vast network of prime habitats gives hundreds of critically endangered species a chance to recover; provides stepping stones for millions of migrating birds, and protects premier fisheries. The National Wildlife Refuge System



USFWS Photo by: Robert Twist



USFWS Photo by: Jim Clark

safeguards plants and animals of virtually every variety, from cactus to caribou, butterflies to bison, and salmon to songbirds.

As the land management arm of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Wildlife Refuge System helps fulfill a critical part of the agency's overarching mission: to conserve the nature of America by protecting fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Scenic Getaways for People

The National Wildlife Refuge System appeals to strong cultural traditions of American society, such as enjoying the wonders of the outdoors and ensuring wild, open space for future generations.

More than 35 million Americans visit national wildlife refuges each year to enjoy unique outdoor experiences. Most people come during peak periods of bird migration, when refuges are thriving with wildlife. Hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren visit national wildlife refuges each year to learn more about our natural world. Sportsmen come to fish or hunt, while others savor the solitude of these special places.

And over the last several years, more and more people and a variety of organizations have united to protect and strengthen the National Wildlife Refuge System. This surge in support is most visible through new legislation and other Congressional action, and growth in community advocacy,



USFWS Photo by: Steve Chase

volunteerism, and partnerships. However, a large segment of the American people have yet to discover their National Wildlife Refuge System.

Poised for a New Century

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is undertaking a number of special, nationwide efforts to strengthen the National Wildlife Refuge System, and will use the Centennial anniversary as a unique opportunity to build broad public understanding and appreciation for these conservation lands and their value to society.

A Lasting Legacy

These special efforts maximize the potential of the National Wildlife Refuge System's Centennial anniversary, to give future generations of Americans respect and pride for our natural heritage, and ensure Theodore Roosevelt's conservation legacy will be even stronger in its next century.



USFWS Photo by: Karen Hollingsworth

The National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act of 2000 paves the way for a special, nationwide outreach campaign. The law calls for a Centennial Commission of distinguished individuals to leverage with partners in carrying out the outreach campaign. The law also calls for a long-term plan to address the major operations, maintenance, and construction needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

These centennial activities will help broaden visibility, strengthen partnerships, and fortify facilities and programs for wildlife and habitat conservation and recreation. They will build a stronghold of support for the National Wildlife Refuge System to sustain it in a new era of both challenge and opportunity.



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