

Facts

National Wildlife Refuge System



“Greatest Hits” of National Wildlife Refuge Recreation

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is wildlife conservation, but refuges are also places for recreation, too. More than 400 of the nation’s nearly 540 refuges offer unparalleled outdoor activities – including fishing, hunting, environmental education, wildlife observation and photography—making them special places for all Americans to connect with nature. Many refuges also offer opportunities for nature hikes, bird tours, wildlife drives and other activities. There are wildlife refuges in every state, and at least one within an hour’s drive of most major cities.

We have prepared these “Greatest Hits” to tempt your interest with a small sample of the recreation stories that are waiting for you -- and to help you get started figuring out how to get them.

The people of the National Wildlife Refuge System are eager to work with you to educate the public about the wildlife and habitat whose care we are entrusted with. We thank you for your understanding and patience with our limited staff resources. Help us help you ensure a successful production by alerting us to your interest and discussing your production needs as far in advance as possible. We may need this time to arrange for permits, transportation, staff to accompany you in sensitive areas if necessary, etc.

Wild animals are notoriously disinterested in your schedule, and staying in touch with refuge staff prior to your arrival can also save you a lot of time and money. Although nobody can predict precisely when the warblers will arrive, when the salmon will run, or when the geese will depart in any given year, refuge staff carefully monitor the conditions that influence wildlife behavior and can help you time your arrival as closely as possible to the event you wish to film or cover.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has two central repositories of public domain footage and images of many national wildlife refuges. In addition, many refuges have videos, which they have produced for their visitor centers. Review this footage as you prepare for your trip to familiarize yourself with the lighting and terrain, and feel free to use it to supplement your own footage in your final production.

...and always remember, this list is just the tip of the iceberg!

***For more information about the refuge system,
point your browser to <http://refuges100.fws.gov> or call 202-208-5634***

—*Northeast*—

Small State is Big When It Comes to Birds

If you're in New England, be sure to visit Parker River NWR in Newburyport, Massachusetts, where the bird list tops more than 300 species. This Atlantic Ocean barrier island refuge is especially noted for its many winter visitors, including snowy owls, northern rough-legged hawks and snow buntings. Parker River has even been known to attract such noted rarities as Ross' gulls, ivory gulls, and European species such as spotted redshank (a sandpiper) and garganey (a duck) have shown up here.

When: Year-round
Where: Newburyport, MA, 38 miles northeast of Boston
Contact: Parker River NWR, (978) 465-5753

A Canoeist's Paradise

The self-guided canoe trail at Prime Hook NWR leads you into the heart of a freshwater wetland and brackish marsh along Delaware's Prime Hook Creek--offering spectacular wildlife viewing opportunities as you work your biceps with the canoe paddle. Whether it's listening to waterfowl during their fall and spring migrations, watching an osprey hover above the creek searching for its next meal or simply enjoying being in the outdoors, the canoe trail offers an memorable experience for everyone. Some seven miles long, Prime Hook Creek is a non-tidal creek that meanders through a predominantly red-maple swamp into an open marsh impoundment.

When: Mid-March-late September
Where: Milton, DE, 22 miles southeast of Dover
Contact: Prime Hook NWR, (302) 684-8419
Website: <http://primehook.fws.gov>

Urban Fishing Continues to Gain in Popularity

More and more these days, people are looking for a quiet place to escape from it all with a rod and reel--and national wildlife refuges are filling that need. With a refuge within an hour's drive of just about every major city, it is easier than ever to find good recreation opportunities even in the busy Boston-New York-Washington metropolitan corridor. John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum in Philadelphia provides year-round fishing opportunities, and is one of the growing number of refuges that has facilities allowing disabled access. Other fishing opportunities close to major cities in the Northeast include Prime Hook near Dover, Delaware; Oyster Bay and Wertheim refuges on Long Island; Stewart B. McKinney in southern Connecticut; and Chincoteague NWR, several

hours south of Washington, DC, on Virginia's eastern neck.

When: Year-round
Where: Refuges around the Northeast
Contact: Your local refuge, or call 202-208-5634 for more details
Website: <http://northeast.fws.gov>

—*Southeast*—

Something for Everyone at Mattamuskeet NWR

Located on North Carolina's Ablemarle-Pamlico Peninsula, Mattamuskeet NWR was established in 1934 to protect open water and marsh habitats for the hundreds of thousands of migratory birds that winter on and around the state's largest natural lake--Lake Mattamuskeet. Today, visitors can see tundra swans, Canada and snow geese, and 18 species of ducks wintering at the refuge, and ospreys and warblers nesting in trees. Mattamuskeet NWR also provides important habitat for endangered and threatened species such as the peregrine falcon, bald eagle and red wolf, and the refuge's diverse habitat also makes it a haven for reptiles including snapping turtles, eastern fence lizards and snakes. Sportsmen will find plenty to do at Mattamuskeet, as well--sportfishing for large-mouthed bass, striped bass and catfish is popular, as well as searching for blue crabs; hunters can pursue white-tailed deer, swans, ducks and coots.

When: Year-round for wildlife observation; March-November for fishing; October-January for hunting.
Where: Swan Quarter, NC, approximately 100 miles from Wilmington
Contact: Mattamuskeet NWR, (252) 926-4021
Website: <http://mattamuskeet.fws.gov>
Footage: 304/876-7675

Our National Symbol--Accessible to All

A disabled-access observation tower at Tennessee's Reelfoot NWR will allow disabled visitors to see the splendors of nature--including our nation's symbol, the majestic bald eagle. A donation by a local sportsman and conservationist to the Friends of West Tennessee Refuges made the tower, built on the Long Point Unit of the refuge, a reality, and now thousands of visitors will be able to ascend the tower and see the dozens of wintering bald eagles that call Reelfoot refuge their winter home. Reelfoot staff installed a ground well to provide wintering habitat for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl as they migrate south along the Mississippi Flyway.

When: December-February

Where: Union City, TN, 70 miles north of Memphis
Contact: Reelfoot NWR, (731) 287-0650
Website: <http://reelfoot.fws.gov/>

Contact: Refuge managers at Florida refuges
Website: A directory of Florida refuges is available online at <http://southeast.fws.gov/maps/fl.html>

Paradise on Water at Key West Refuge

Imagine kayaking or canoeing in a marine paradise that appears unchanged since the first European set sight on the islands and surrounding waters. Key West NWR, a 325-square-mile refuge named for the most famous city in Florida at the turn of the century, comprises 20 islands surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other. Between the islands is a body of water known as "The Lakes" an area of shallow water 10 miles by 3 miles, rarely exceeding five feet in depth and at low tide exposing flats. The waters teem with fish, birds, dolphins and--kayakers take note--the occasional shark or whale. The coral reef that lies on the south side of the refuge is area is known worldwide as a snorkeling and diving paradise. The area is also one of the nation's prime fishing areas; anglers come here to reel in tarpon, bonefish and barracuda. Other sport species can be found in deeper water in the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf. Several of the islands have pristine beaches which are open for day access.

When: Year-round
Where: Key West, FL
Contact: National Key Deer Refuge (administering office), (305) 872-0774
Website: <http://southeast.fws.gov/KeyWest/index.html>

Florida's the Place to Be If You're a Birder

The Sunshine State offers plenty of opportunities for birdwatchers to add to their life lists. Visitors to J.N. "Ding" Darling can see all of Florida's large waders including roseate spoonbills, wood storks, ibises, and a dozen species of herons and egrets, as well as shorebirds, cormorants, gulls and terns. Across the state in Boynton Beach, Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR is the last natural remnant of the Northern Everglades and home to lots of Florida avian specialties including snail kites, limpkins and purple gallinules. A boardwalk and marsh trail let visitors enjoy an inside peek at a cypress swamp. For the more adventuresome, a canoe trail leads to the more remote areas of the refuge. Merritt Island NWR located near Titusville, Florida--in the shadow of Cape Canaveral--offers excellent viewing along an auto tour loop, where visitors can enjoy large numbers of wading birds, shorebirds, terns, grebes, rails and wintering waterfowl, while ospreys and kingfishers hover over the waters in search of a meal.

When: Year-round
Where: Florida national wildlife refuges

—Midwest—

Military Lands Now Home to Wildlife

A number of national wildlife refuges lie partially or entirely on military lands that have been transferred to the National Wildlife Refuge System for management. Indiana's Big Oaks NWR is one of these, comprising some 50,000 acres of habitat for 120 species of birds, 41 species of fish, and bats, deer, wild turkey, river otters and coyotes. The refuge, located on the U.S. Army's Jefferson Proving Ground, also contains a 200-nest great blue heron colony--a bountiful example of making use of the wildlife value of military lands. Excellent fishing opportunities are available at Big Oaks, and hunting for white-tailed deer and wild turkey is allowed as well, with plenty of animals for all--last year, hunters harvested 680 deer and 95 turkeys.

When: Year-round
Where: Madison, IN, approximately 75 miles from Indianapolis
Contact: Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, (812) 273-0783
Website: <http://midwest.fws.gov/BigOaks/>

Experience Outdoor Recreation on the Continent's Longest Refuge

In addition to its lengthy name, the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge has the distinction of being the longest refuge in the lower 48 states--extending 261 miles along the Mississippi River from the Chippewa River in Wisconsin to Rock Island, Illinois. Established in 1924 to protect habitat for migratory birds and fish, Upper Miss encompasses some 194,000 acres in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois. As you might guess, all of that riverside land means fishing opportunities abound. Year-round fishing for walleye, northern pike, bass, perch, crappies and catfish is popular below the dams, in sloughs and in channels between islands. Visitors along the river also bring or rent boats for pleasure trips, or view the refuge from dry land on the continuous system of highways designated as the "Great River Road" that closely follows refuge boundaries. Millions of migratory birds pass through Upper Mississippi refuge annually--including 70 percent of the world's population of canvasback ducks--meaning hunting opportunities abound, for big game as well as ducks. Other activities available include primitive camping on refuge islands and beaches, and swimming and picnicking on the sandbars and beaches along the main channel.

When: Year-round; check with the refuge for hunting seasons
Where: Along the Mississippi River in Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin
Contact: Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, (608) 783-8452
Website: <http://midwest.fws.gov/UpperMississippiRiver/>

Hunt in the “Duck Factory”

The hidden “jewels in the crown” of the National Wildlife Refuge System, thousands of waterfowl production areas are like mini-refuges scattered across the vast, open landscape of the northern Great Plains, providing a critical lifeline for ducks, geese and shorebirds. The refuge system manages more than 3,000 such areas covering 672,000 acres in 10 states and ranging in size from less than an acre to more than 3,500 acres. This spells terrific hunting opportunities in the nation’s historic “Duck Factory.” In north-central Minnesota, for example, the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District manages 218 waterfowl production areas covering more than 42,000 acres. Most of these acres are open to waterfowl and upland game hunting. Start with a phone call to district headquarters and get yourself a map or arrange a tour—or, with proper licenses, a hunt—of these spectacular prairie potholes

When: Year-round
Where: Fergus Falls, MN, 200 miles from Minneapolis
Contact: Fergus Falls Wetland Management District headquarters, (218) 736-0627
Website: <http://midwest.fws.gov/FergusFallsWMD/>

—Southwest/Desert—

Take a Gamble on Desert Refuge

Just beyond the glittering lights of Las Vegas, spiny cacti and sharp-tipped yuccas abound in the Mojave Desert. Desert NWR, the largest refuge in the lower 48 states, encompasses 1.5 million acres and six major mountain ranges in southern Nevada. Annual rainfall ranges from less than four inches on the valley floors to more 15 inches on the highest peaks—creating stunningly diverse habitats suited to a wide variety of desert wildlife. Approximately 1.3 million acres of this mostly untouched refuge are managed as wilderness, retaining its primitive, unspoiled character. The few designated roads within the refuge are rough; access to remote areas is by foot or horseback. But refuge staff may be able to guide you over the terrain to see spectacular birds and wildflowers, and the majestic desert bighorn sheep.

When: April-May, September-October for birds;
March-June for wildflowers*
*Subject to precipitation - call ahead for

conditions

Where: 25 miles northwest of Las Vegas
Contact: Desert NWR Complex, (702) 646-3401
**always call before visiting
Website: <http://desertcomplex.fws.gov>

An Activity for Everyone at Anahuac

At Anahuac NWR, women are given the opportunity to learn how to bait a hook, call in and track game as the refuge and the National Wild Turkey Federation host a one-day event for women interested in learning skills that will increase their enjoyment of the outdoors. But that’s not all that goes on at this south Texas refuge. Wildlife watching opportunities abound as at various times of the year Anahuac NWR is home to 27 species of duck; more than 80,000 snow geese; egrets, ibis and other waterbirds; shorebirds and songbirds; and alligators, muskrats and bobcats. The refuge also hosts an abundance of people at wildlife-oriented festivals held throughout the year. More than 500 children attend the annual Youth Waterfowl Expo each December at Anahuac. The first event of its kind ever to be held in Texas, this gathering highlights waterfowl and wetland conservation and gives kids the chance to win a guided hunt on the refuge. Children and adults alike enjoy Fishing Day at Anahuac NWR, and why not? This special June event gives them the chance to learn how to fly-fish, crab, tie knots and leaders, target cast and identify their catch. Trying the Japanese art of *Gyotaku* (fish prints) is a favorite part of this free event, held each June in conjunction with National Fishing and Boating Week.

When: Refuge is open year-round
Where: Anahuac, TX, 48 miles from Houston
Contact: Anahuac NWR, 409-267-3337
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/texas/anahuac.html>

Whooping Cranes Winter in Texas

Aransas NWR is the winter home of America’s only migratory whooping crane flock. But there’s more to this south Texas refuge than just whoopers—Aransas hosts nearly 400 species of birds throughout the year and stands as a fascinating example of the evolution of our natural world. The refuge is dedicated to protecting the vanishing wildlife of coastal Texas in an ever-changing landscape shaped by the waters and storms of the Gulf of Mexico. Grasslands, live oaks and red bay thickets cover its deep sandy soils; the blackjack peninsula is ringed by tidal marshes; and the uplands are coastal prairie with long narrow swales that often flood. Wildflowers make a stunning appearance each spring at Aransas, welcoming a new season and a new year of change.

When: November-March

Where: Austwell, TX, 171 miles from Houston
Contact: Aransas NWR, (361) 286-3559
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/texas/aransas.html>
Footage: (361) 286-3559

Identified Flying Objects Descend on Roswell

With some sixty sinkholes—habitat favored by dragonflies and damselflies—Bitter Lake NWR supports one of the most diverse populations of these fascinating insects. The largest North American species of dragonfly, as well as the smallest damselfly, also make their homes at the refuge, and some species, such as the banded pennant dragonfly, were not known to exist in New Mexico until spotted at Bitter Lake, in the town of Roswell—well known itself for the mysterious 1947 crash of what has long been believed by some to have been a UFO. Dragonflies have been around for about 300 million years. Some have eyes so big they cover half their heads; all have voracious appetites. At a community festival held each summer at Bitter Lake, visitors can take tours, see nature programs and participate in workshops—and of course, see hundreds of dragonflies—to learn more about these ancient creatures.

When: Refuge is open year-round; dragonflies peak in August
Where: Roswell, NM, 200 miles from Albuquerque
Contact: Bitter Lake NWR, (505) 622-6755
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/newmex/bitter.html>

Those *Other* Cranes Are Spectacular, Too

Though the Fish and Wildlife Service has been making news lately with its historic reintroduction of endangered whooping cranes in the eastern United States, sandhill cranes, equally majestic cousins to the whooper, are not to be ignored. Each autumn thousands of sandhill cranes descend upon Bosque del Apache NWR in central New Mexico—and the refuge throws a party to celebrate. The 14-year-old Festival of the Cranes, honoring sandhills and whooping cranes, draws national and international visitors and acclaim, and you won't want to miss the incredible photo opportunity of the spectacular early morning “fly-outs” of thousands of cranes.

When: November
Where: Socorro, NM, 100 miles south of Albuquerque
Contact: Bosque del Apache NWR, (505) 835-1828
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/newmex/bosque.html>
Footage: 202-208-5611

Hunting African Ungulates in New Mexico

Oryx—antelope native to Africa—were intentionally released in southern New Mexico in the early 1970s. Since then populations of oryx have expanded beyond what anyone imagined. The herd has grown to more than 4,000, which causes problems for native ungulates such as desert bighorn sheep and desert mule deer at San Andres NWR. Herd reduction on the refuge is often hampered by rough mountainous terrain, limited access, and NASA and U.S. Army concerns (the refuge lies within the White Sands Missile Range). Hunts for the exotic oryx are held annually on the refuge to reduce the herd to 1,000.

When: December through March
Where: Las Cruces, NM, 47 miles from El Paso, TX
Contact: San Andres NWR, (505) 382-5047
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/newmex/sanand.html>

Where Endangered Antelope Play

Endangered means there's still time—especially for the Sonoran pronghorn, the last remaining population of which lives in the southwestern United States. Thanks to recovery efforts by biologists from Cabeza Prieta NWR and the State of Arizona, this national wildlife refuge is the only place in the country where you can capture on film a Sonoran pronghorn racing across broad valleys nestled between seven rugged mountain ranges. Cabeza Prieta is known for brilliant desert skies and quiet wilderness solitude, and its vast 803,418 acres of wilderness area provides a safe haven for an abundance of desert wildlife. In all, nearly 400 plant species live in this one-of-a-kind Sonoran Desert ecosystem, a number unmatched anywhere in the world.

When: March
Where: Ajo, AZ, 167 miles from Tucson
Contact: Cabeza Prieta NWR, (520) 387-4988 (permit required as some of the refuge lies on U.S. Army land)
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/arizona/cabeza.html>

Digging for Crystals is Groovy

At Salt Plains NWR, you can get down in the dirt to find shimmering crystals from under this unique geological area. The Oklahoma refuge—divided into nearly equal parts of salt flats, open water and vegetated land—encompasses 11,000 acres of barren salt plain, land that is nearly flat with a wafer thin salt crust. The salt was formed by repeated flooding by sea water millions of years ago—sea water was cut off from the sea and evaporated, depositing thick layers of salt. The area was subsequently covered by erosion from mountain ranges. Below the

plains, ground water travels through the salt-saturated sand and comes to the surface where it evaporates, leaving the crust of salt. The concentrated saline solution combines with gypsum to promote selenite crystal growth in a portion of the salt flats. Recreational digging for crystals is allowed year-round.

When: Year-round
Where: Jet, OK, 138 miles from Oklahoma City
Contact: Salt Plains NWR, (580) 626-4794
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/oklahoma/saltplns.html>

Bird Hunting in the Desert

When you picture waterfowl hunting, you might picture a crisp fall morning on a marsh surrounded by colorful foliage. Imperial NWR, north of Yuma, Arizona, offers waterfowl hunters a different kind of hunt, set in the beauty of the southwest desert. The refuge protects wildlife habitat along 30 miles of the lower Colorado River in Arizona and California, including the last unchanneled section before the river enters Mexico. The river and its associated backwater lakes and wetlands are a green oasis, contrasting with the surrounding desert mountains. Ducks, geese, shorebirds and other waterbirds flock to the lower Colorado River each year to spend the winter in Imperial's wetlands, marshes and backwater lakes—meaning spectacular hunting opportunities for species such as gadwalls, mallards, northern pintails, cinnamon teal and Canada geese.

When: November-January
Where: Yuma, AZ, on the California-Arizona border near Mexico
Contact: Imperial NWR, 602-783-3371
Website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/arizona/imperial.html>

—Mountain West—

Views from a Blind

In the chill of a fall morning, two people sit quietly in a blind on Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, observing waterfowl on a wetland. They are soon inundated with calling ducks, honking geese and myriad other species of waterfowl. Fish Springs is the most geographically remote refuge in the lower 48 states and the nearest gasoline and grocery store are more than 40 miles away. But despite its isolation, the refuge maintains three fully disabled-accessible blinds for hunting, wildlife observation and photography. The blinds are available to waterfowl hunters with mobility impairments during the waterfowl hunting season, allowing them to experience the excitement of the hunt. Outside of the waterfowl hunting season, the general public may use the blinds for wildlife

observation and photography.

When: Year-round, with exclusive reservations for waterfowl hunters with mobility impairment during the state waterfowl season (the first weekend in October to the middle of January)
Where: Refuge headquarters is in Dugway, UT, 74 miles from Salt Lake City
Contact: Fish Springs NWR, 435-831-5353
Website: <http://fishsprings.fws.gov>

Take a Sleigh Ride Among a Thousand Elk

Imagine a horse-drawn sleigh ride on a crisp, clear day, surrounded by an elk herd that can number anywhere from a few hundred and a few thousand animals. As the sleigh schusses across new-fallen snow, you are immersed in the beauty of a Wyoming winter and the wonderment of the majestic elk. Human sounds are diminished as nature takes center stage. In December and January, large bulls, still carrying magnificent antlers, can be seen resting or feeding along your route. Cows and calves call softly to each other as they dig through the snow with their hooves to forage on the buried grasses. You'll find this cold-weather adventure at the National Elk Refuge, just north of Jackson, Wyoming. Rides take approximately 1 hour.

When: Mid-December through the end of March
Where: Jackson, WY
Contact: National Elk Refuge, (307) 733-9212
Website: <http://nationalelkrefuge.fws.gov>
Footage: (304) 876-7675

Big Game Hunting and Big Fishing in Big Sky Country

Extending 125 air miles up the Missouri River from Fort Peck Dam in Montana, Charles M. Russell NWR comprises more than a million acres of wildlife habitat, including the 245,000-acre Fort Peck Reservoir. The refuge features the picturesque native prairies, river bottoms and badlands so often portrayed in the paintings of Charlie Russell, the colorful western artist for whom it is named. Charles M. Russell NWR also features extensive hunting and fishing programs. The refuge's big game hunting program allows both bow hunting and shooting of white-tailed and mule deer, antelope, elk, coyotes and bighorn sheep; bird hunters can bag upland game birds and waterfowl. For anglers, Charles M. Russell is an ideal place to try your hand at catching paddlefish in the Missouri River.

When: September-March for hunting; spring for fishing
Where: Along the Missouri River in north-central

Montana; refuge headquarters
is in Lewistown,
105 miles from Great Falls

Contact: Charles M. Russell NWR, (406) 538-8706
Website: <http://cmr.fws.gov>

—Northwest—

Whale Watching Spoken Here

At refuges along the Oregon coast, visitors look for the tell-tale sign of migrating gray whales spouting during peak migration times in the winter and spring. The gray whale's annual 10,000-12,000-mile migration between its wintering grounds on Mexico's Baja coast and summer areas in the cold Arctic seas is the longest known migration for any mammal. Trained volunteers stationed at 30 locations along the coast help visitors by providing information on whales and assistance in spotting them. Visitors can also see seals and sea lions, bald eagles, and nesting sea birds such as puffins, guillemots and storm-petrels.

When: March-May and December-January for whale migrations; March-August for sea birds
Where: Three Capes Scenic Route begins 80 miles southwest of Portland, OR
Contact: Oregon Coast NWR Complex, (541) 867-4550
Website: <http://pacific.fws.gov/refuges/OCR.pdf>

—California Coast—

Kids Go on a Sweetwater Safari

Sweetwater Safari provides an opportunity for students to learn about science, the environment and the wildlife conservation mission of the refuge system through a hands-on experience in Sweetwater Marsh, the largest remaining salt marsh on San Diego Bay. Teachers and students follow refuge trails to identify plants, animals, birds, plankton and the often unusual aquatic life of the bay. Transportation grants for under-served schools in this urban area are available, allowing students who might not otherwise have the chance to visit a national wildlife refuge to experience their natural world. Sweetwater Marsh NWR supports more than 270 species of birds, rare eel grass beds that are nurseries for fish and many rare and endangered species, including the light-footed clapper rail and California least tern.

When: Year-round
Where: Chula Vista, CA, 8 miles from San Diego
Contact: Chula Vista Nature Center, (619) 409-5903
Website: <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>

New Life for an Old Bridge

When transportation improvements made a highway bridge across San Francisco Bay obsolete, part of the bridge was converted into a public fishing pier at Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The Dumbarton Fishing Pier is open year-round—though the road leading to it is closed to motorized vehicles from April through August 31 to protect nesting birds. Free shuttle service is offered on weekends during the months the pier is closed, offering Bay Area anglers the chance to catch rays, leopard sharks, white sturgeon, striped bass and shiner surfperch without disturbing other wildlife.

When: Year-round
Where: Fremont, CA, 38 miles from San Francisco
Contact: Don Edwards San Francisco Bay NWR, (510) 792-0222
Website: <http://desfbay.fws.gov>

Waterfowl by the Millions

The six national wildlife refuges in the Sacramento River valley comprise the most important wintering area for Pacific Flyway waterfowl. Attracting ducks and geese by the millions, four of these refuges--Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa and Sutter--also provide a variety of outstanding waterfowl hunting opportunities. Hunting areas on Sacramento and Delevan refuges are divided into two sections – a spaced blind or spaced hunt site section and a free roaming section. Spaced blinds and sites provide opportunities for quality hunts with little interference or competition from other hunters. Free roaming areas allow unrestricted hunter movement. Colusa and Sutter NWRs have only free roaming areas.

When: October-January
Where: 80 miles north of Sacramento, CA
Contact: Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, (530) 934-7135
Website: <http://sacramentovalleyrefuges.fws.gov>

—Alaska—

Go River Rafting and Sport Fishing on Togiak Refuge

Southwestern Alaska is well known for its wide variety of sport fishing opportunities. Anglers travel from around the world for a chance to catch five species of Pacific salmon, rainbow trout, Arctic char, Dolly Varden, lake trout, northern pike and Arctic grayling. One of the premier fishing destinations is 4.7-million-acre Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, where virtually every species of freshwater sport fish in Alaska can be found and pursued in a setting rich in wilderness solitude. Although fishing has increased in popularity in southwestern Alaska over

the past 20 years, the number of anglers encountered on even the most popular waters is still just a fraction of that found in most areas in the Lower 48. Private lodges, motorboat base camps and float trips are all options for those seeking a guided experience. Unguided visitors can fly into the village airstrips or gravel bars and either rent or bring a boat. One of the most popular ways to access these wilderness rivers is to be dropped off by float plane at a headwater lake and drift the river in an inflatable raft.

When: Late June through mid-September
Where: Dillingham, AK
Contact: Togiak NWR, (907) 842-1063
Website: <http://togiak.fws.gov>

Big Game is *Big* on Alaska Refuges

All national wildlife refuges in Alaska are open to sport hunting, their 77 million acres of pristine habitat offering many visitors "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunities to hunt moose, caribou, brown and black bears, and Dall sheep--and in some areas, mountain goats and muskox. Hunters come from around the world to try for the exceptionally large moose found on several Alaska refuges. The moose populations at Innoko, Kanuti, Kenai, Koyukuk, Nowitna, Selawik and Tetlin refuges offer excellent, though often challenging, hunting opportunities. Much of the terrain on these refuges is dominated by large rivers, lakes, sloughs, ponds and bogs. Access to these remote areas is typically by float plane or boat; with few exceptions, there are no roads in or near Alaska's refuges. Many visiting hunters elect to be dropped off by float plane and drift a section of river in inflatable rafts, checking side sloughs and nearby woods and wetlands. There are no visitor facilities or services on most refuges, so hunters must be self-reliant and camping is required. Sport hunters are encouraged to hunt the upper river reaches away from villages where native residents such as Athabascan Indians and Yupik and Inupiaq Eskimos hunt and fish for subsistence. Non-residents are required to employ licensed guides when hunting brown bear, Dall sheep and mountain goats.

When: Late August through mid-September.
Where: All national wildlife refuges in Alaska are open to hunting.
Contact: The manager of the refuge you are interested in. A list of refuges in Alaska is available by calling (907) 786-3909.
Website: <http://alaska.fws.gov/refuges.cfm>

A Wonderland of Waterfowl

Established in 1960 to protect the habitat of the Pacific black brant, Alaska's Izembek NWR presents a panorama of natural beauty characterized by hundreds of freshwater lakes, meandering streams, U-shaped valleys, ancient glaciers, thermal springs and smoking volcanoes. At the

heart of the refuge lies Izembek Lagoon, 150 square miles of brackish water containing one of the world's largest eelgrass beds. Waterfowl and wildlife viewing opportunities abound at Izembek. Critically important to migrating birds, the lagoon was the first U.S. site designated as a "Wetland of International Importance," and the American Bird Conservancy has designated Izembek NWR a "Globally Important Bird Area." Among the reasons why: the world's total population of approximately 135,000 Pacific black brant, along with thousands of Taverner's Canada geese and other waterfowl, congregate on the lagoon from late August through early November. Each spring and fall the world's entire population of 62,000 emperor geese migrate through or winter on Izembek, and the refuge provides the final opportunity for many migrating shorebirds to feed and rest before their long over-water flights to wintering areas as far away as South America, Polynesia and New Zealand. The lower Alaska Peninsula tundra swan population is also an important and visible component of refuge wetland habitats. Some 500 to 600 of these magnificent birds remain year-round on Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. Daily commercial flights are available from Anchorage to Cold Bay, Alaska.

When: Mid-September through October
Where: Cold Bay, AK
Contact: Izembek NWR, (907) 532-2445
Website: <http://izembek.fws.gov>

Take a Ride on Alaska's Marine Highway

The Alaska State Ferry M/V *Tustumena* plies the wildlife rich--but seldom visited--waters of western Alaska, passing through five national wildlife refuges and stopping at the headquarters for three in Homer, Kodiak and Cold Bay. Along the way, a refuge naturalist is on hand to point out the sights, which can include 6 species of whales, seabirds by the hundreds of thousands, smoking volcanoes, sea otters, rugged coastlines and fishing boats of all shapes and sizes. Refuge-oriented programs explore the natural and human history of the route using slides and videos, and Native presenters contribute programs on the Native experience, using media ranging from bear hunting stories to performances by the Atka dancers. Trip lengths vary from a one-day run to Seldovia to the seven-day round trip to Unalaska in the misty, mysterious Aleutian Islands. All nine communities along the ferry route are accessible only by water or air.

When: Memorial Day to Labor Day
Where: Embark in Homer, AK, 5 hours from Anchorage
Contact: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, (907) 235-6546
Website: <http://alaskamaritime.fws.gov>

Snap the Photo of a Lifetime in the Arctic Wilderness

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge--stark, powerful, humbling and vibrant--provides superb opportunities to photograph a truly untamed wilderness. Discover sweeping vistas, glacial valleys, jeweled lakes and windswept tundra. The patient and lucky may frame within these larger settings the image of a napping grizzly or a wolf stalking wandering caribou. Those with an eye for detail may capture the warmth of the northern sun on a swan's feather or the rippling wind on an arctic poppy. Photographers are challenged to convey the mystery of horizons unexplored, the delight of an explorer's anticipation: "What might I find over the next rise, around the next bend?"

When: Year-round, but most visitation occurs from June through August
Where: Northeast corner of Alaska. Refuge headquarters is in Fairbanks
Contact: Arctic NWR, (907) 456-0250
Website: <http://arctic.fws.gov>
Footage: B-roll available, (907) 786-3695

Ride into "Combat Fishing" on the Russian River Ferry

The confluence of the Kenai and Russian rivers at Kenai NWR is the busiest sportfishing spot in Alaska. A Fish and Wildlife Service contractor provides ferry service across the Kenai River for more than 30,000 anglers each summer so they can better reach the huge runs of sockeye salmon that crowd the waters on the way to their annual spawning areas. This area is famed for its "combat fishing," with crowds of anglers standing shoulder to shoulder, sometimes two and three deep, along the most productive and accessible stretches of water. When the sockeye are in and the bite is on, the Kenai/Russian River confluence hosts a frantic festival of fisherfolk from across the United States and overseas. For residents of south-central Alaska, the return of the sockeye marks the true start of another brief but beautiful and bountiful Alaska summer.

When: Mid-June to mid-July
Where: Soldatna, AK, 4 hours from Anchorage
Contact: Kenai NWR, (907) 262-7021
Website: <http://kenai.fws.gov>
Footage: Kenai fishing footage available, (907) 786-3695

Flock to the Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival

A hundred thousand shorebirds stop off along the shores of Alaska's Kachemak Bay adjacent to the arts, tourism

and fishing community of Homer. For nearly a decade, the Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival has taken advantage of the juxtaposition of people and birds to teach about migration, wetlands and shorebirds in a festive atmosphere. The Shorebird Sister Schools Program, a national education program, grew out of this festival when a local teacher hit upon the notion of connecting kids along the flyway as an innovative way to teach migration concepts. Now school groups come from around Alaska to participate in "Club Mud" with refuge educators during the two weeks of the migration that culminate in the festival. Adults and kids enjoy and learn from seminars, nationally known keynote speakers, teacher training and guided bird viewing at the four day event.

When: The second Thursday - Sunday of May
Where: Homer, AK, 5 hours from Anchorage
Contact: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, (907)235-6546
Website: <http://alaskamaritime.fws.gov>

Point Your Camera at Pacific Walrus

Located at the southwestern tip of Togiak NWR. Cape Pierce is one of the largest regularly used haulouts for Pacific walrus in the United States, and probably the best place in the country to see and photograph these 2,000 to 4,000-pound animals at ground-level and from above, on land and in the water. While female and young walrus migrate north in the spring, many males remain behind to complete molting and rest on shore between feeding forays into the Bering Sea. The number and timing of walrus congregations at Cape Pierce vary from year to year, but mid to late summer typically provides exceptional photographic opportunities. Seasonal peak numbers have hit 12,500 walrus that haul out onto shore at the base of steep cliffs and along a lowland beach and journey back into the waters for an occasional dip. Cape Peirce may be reached only by charter airplane and no public camping facilities are available. Togiak refuge allows only 6 people per day into the viewing area, so near solitude is guaranteed. Permit applications and viewing information may be obtained by contacting the refuge manager.

When: Late June through early October
Where: Dillingham, AK
Contact: Togiak NWR, (907) 842-1063
Website: <http://togiak.fws.gov>