

Discover 11,000 Years of History on our National Wildlife Refuges

National Wildlife Refuges. These words conjure up images of expanses of wild lands, vital habitat set aside for waterfowl, bison, caribou, and other animals. Few people know that wildlife refuges also contain many of our country's most important archaeological and historic sites, ranging from ancient Native American campsites to recent historic properties that reflect local lifeways and traditional cultures. People have been relying on these lands and their wildlife for thousands of years, for food and clothing, transportation, settlement, and farming.



Above: The size and shape of projectile points have changed over thousands of years as humans have adopted new hunting technology. Below: Native American women used grinding stones to prepare various marsh and desert foods (Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Oregon)



Petroglyphs at Sevilleta NWR, New Mexico, dating from about 1300 A.D.

Native American Heritage (11,000 Years Ago to the Present)

Today's national wildlife refuges have always been key areas for animals, where they raise their young, refuel during migrations, or seek shelter for the winter. People were naturally attracted to these areas as well. Our national wildlife refuges contain abundant evidence of Native American occupation and use, from the remains of prehistoric people who hunted mammoths 11,000 years ago to 20th Century traditional subsistence activities.



El Camino del Diablo, "The Devil's Road," was used for exploration, colonization, and scientific expeditions from the 1500's until the end of the 19th Century. (Cabeza Prieta NWR, Arizona)

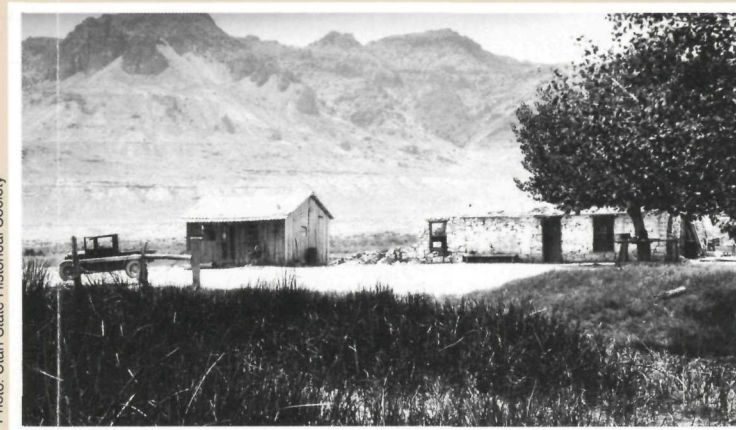


The Bertrand steamship sank in the Missouri River in 1865 on its way to supply a frontier settlement in Montana. Its cargo is displayed at the visitors center at the DeSoto NWR, Iowa.

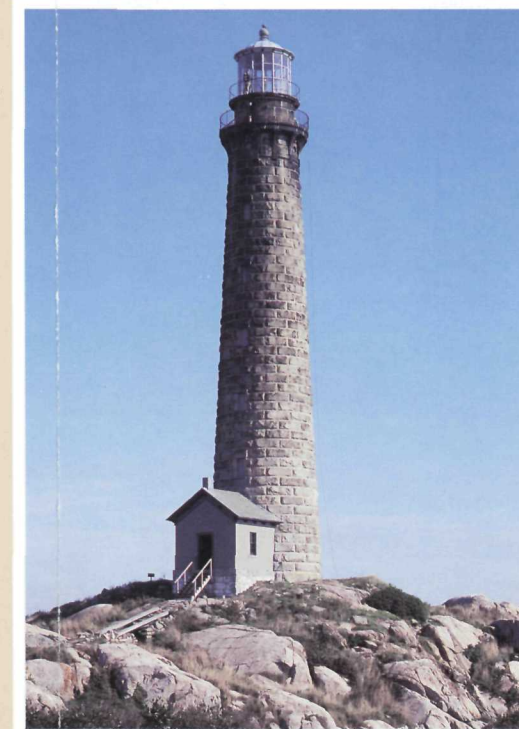
Exploration and Settlement of a Continent (1500's - 1900's)

Spanish explorers were the first Europeans to visit the interior of the continent, establishing outposts and permanent settlements. Later, historic travel routes were critical to the survival of frontier communities.

North Light, Thatcher Island NWR, Massachusetts, was built in 1861 to guide ships along the rocky New England coast.



For a short period during the 1860's, a Pony Express station operated at what is now the Fish Springs NWR, Utah — one of a few watering spots in a huge tract of desert.



These United States (1776 - Present)

Visitors to national wildlife refuges often see reminders of our nation's diverse past — whether it be historic farmsteads, lighthouses, or military sites.



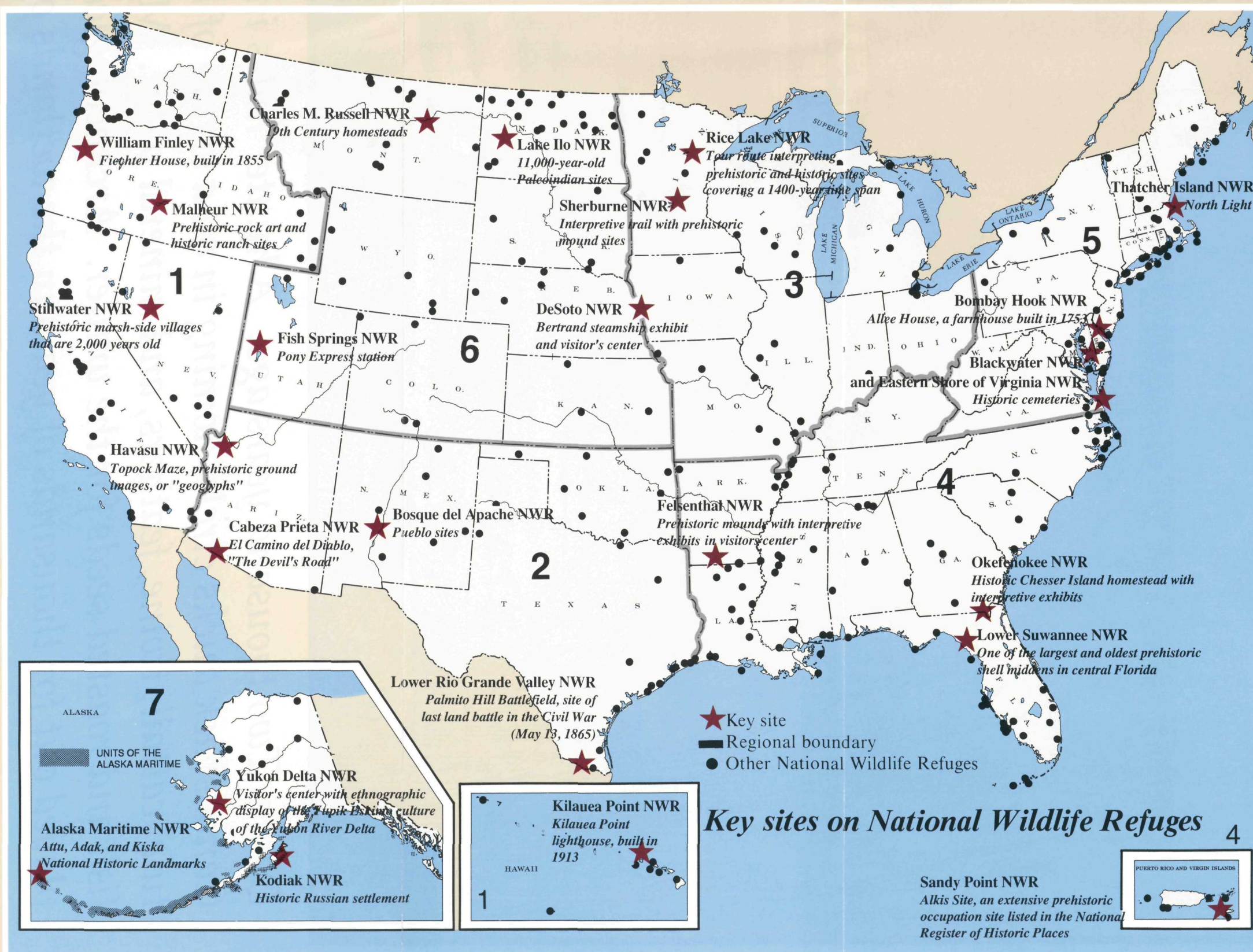
Right: Memorial erected by the Japanese government on Attu to honor all World War II dead. Below: Downed planes are testimony to the Battle of Attu and Kiska, the only WW II battle in the United States outside of Hawaii. (Alaska Maritime NWR)



Photo: Mike Boylan



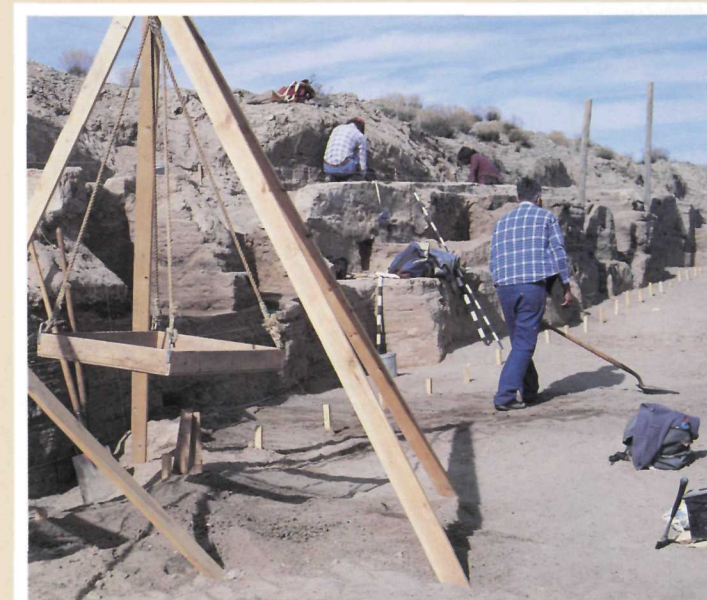
Chesser Island Homestead, Okefenokee NWR, Georgia, was settled in 1858. Exhibits provide visitors with information on the historic settlement and use of swamps in the southeastern United States.



Bringing the Past to Life

Historic sites and exhibits allow us to experience the past directly. We can touch the hand-hewn supports of a 19th-century barn, examine the intricate flaking of an obsidian knife, or participate in a living history demonstration. We gain a better understanding of who we are and where we are going as a nation of diverse cultures.

Archaeological and historic sites provide us with scientific insights into environmental questions. Their study provides us with information that has accumulated over thousands of years on climatic change, wetlands, and wildlife diversity. For example, bones and other materials found in archaeological sites tell us when various animal species lived in an area and how their habitats have been altered over time. Also, many historic sites possess unique architectural qualities of bygone eras that may be adapted for present-day uses.



Excavation of Pueblo site on the Bosque del Apache NWR, New Mexico.

For additional information

about archaeological and historic sites located on national wildlife refuges and volunteer opportunities, contact your local refuge manager or one of the following Fish and Wildlife Service regional offices:

Region 1 (CA, OR, WA, NV, ID, HI)
 Eastside Federal Complex
 911 NE 11th Avenue
 Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Region 2 (AZ, NM, TX, OK)
 500 Gold Avenue, SW
 P. O. Box 1306
 Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103

Region 3 (MN, IA, MO, WI, IL, IN, OH, MI)
 Federal Building
 Fort Snelling
 Twin Cities, Minnesota 55111

Region 4 (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN)
 R. B. Russell Federal Building
 75 Spring Street, SW
 Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Region 5 (CT, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, VA, WV)
 One Gateway Center, Suite 700
 Newton Corner, Massachusetts 02158

Region 6 (CO, KS, MT, NB, ND, SD, UT, WY)
 P. O. Box 25486, Denver Federal Center
 Denver, Colorado 80225

Region 7 (AK)
 1011 East Tudor Road
 Anchorage, Alaska 99503

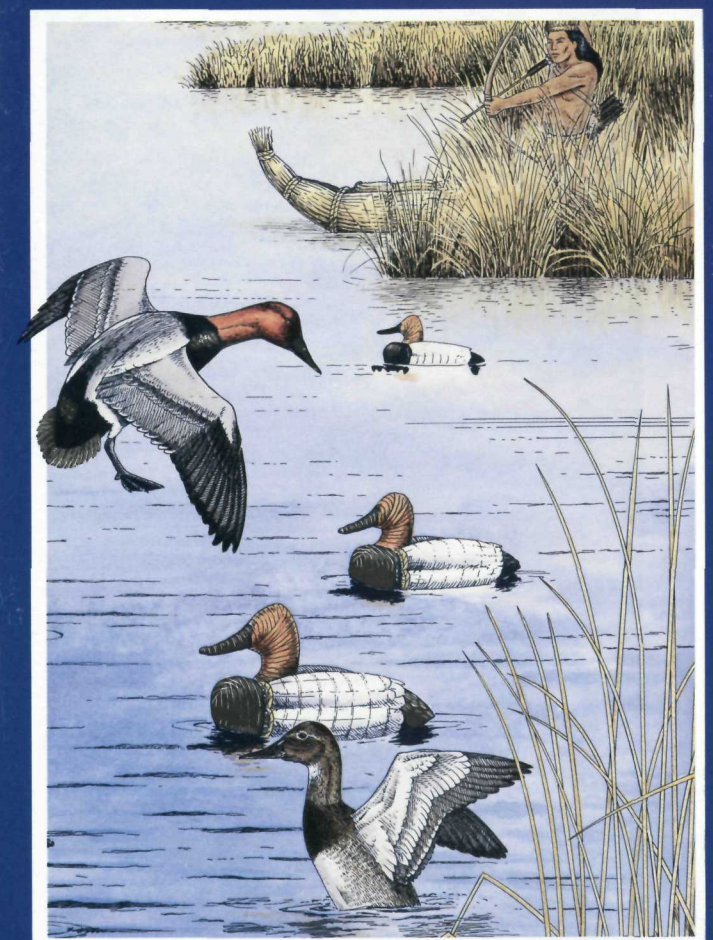
Historic cemetery, Blackwater NWR, Maryland



Many archaeological and historic sites on national wildlife refuges are being lost as a result of illegal collecting, vandalism, and erosion. The physical remains of our nation's heritage are at stake — if allowed to be destroyed at the current rate, our most important archaeological and historic sites will be irretrievably lost for years. Enjoy your visit to national wildlife refuges, but please remember that collecting artifacts or disturbing sites without a permit is prohibited. You can help to preserve and interpret the past by becoming a volunteer with your local archaeological or historical organization and by reporting illegal collecting artifacts to refuge managers.

We Need Your Help

National Wildlife Refuges: Conserving Habitat and History



an overview of historic and archaeological sites

Department of the Interior
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Wildlife Refuges

Conserving Habitat And History



Dawn. Two thousand years ago. A hunter hides in a tangle of bulrush, his arrow nocked and drawn. Canvasback ducks circle, homing in on a string of lifelike decoys which the hunter has crafted from tule, cattail, twine, feathers, and mineral paint. Meanwhile, across the pond, his family lays up dried fish and roasted seeds for the winter. Archaeological discoveries indicate that similar scenes have been played out for thousands of years in the wetlands of our National Wildlife Refuge System.