



As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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

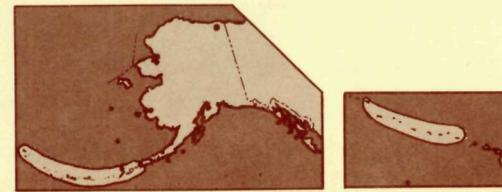
# Our Heritage Protected

Under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 384 national refuges (totaling nearly 33 million acres) have been dedicated to guard our natural heritage. Legislation introduced in Congress in the fall of 1977 concerning lands in Alaska would more than double the size of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Developed and managed to preserve the diversity of America's wildlife, these refuges are home to a wide spectrum of animals, including waterfowl, songbirds, mammals and amphibians. Refuges are now found from Alaska to the Rio Grande and from Hawaii to Puerto Rico.

The refuges vary in size from small tracts to huge areas covering hundreds of thousands of acres. Although the national refuges protect many types of wildlife, they play an especially important role in the management of international migratory waterfowl. In addition, a number of refuges are known for providing habitat for rare species, such as the whooping crane, trumpeter swan, key deer and bighorn sheep.

Although refuges are popular as places to find large numbers of wildlife, they harbor more than just birds and mammals. Protection is given for many species of plants, insects, amphibians and reptiles that each year become more difficult to find elsewhere. Many refuges also provide fine scenic and historical values that are preserved along with the wildlife.

Our national refuges are often thought of as being self-operating wildlife paradises from the moment they are established. More often, however, they

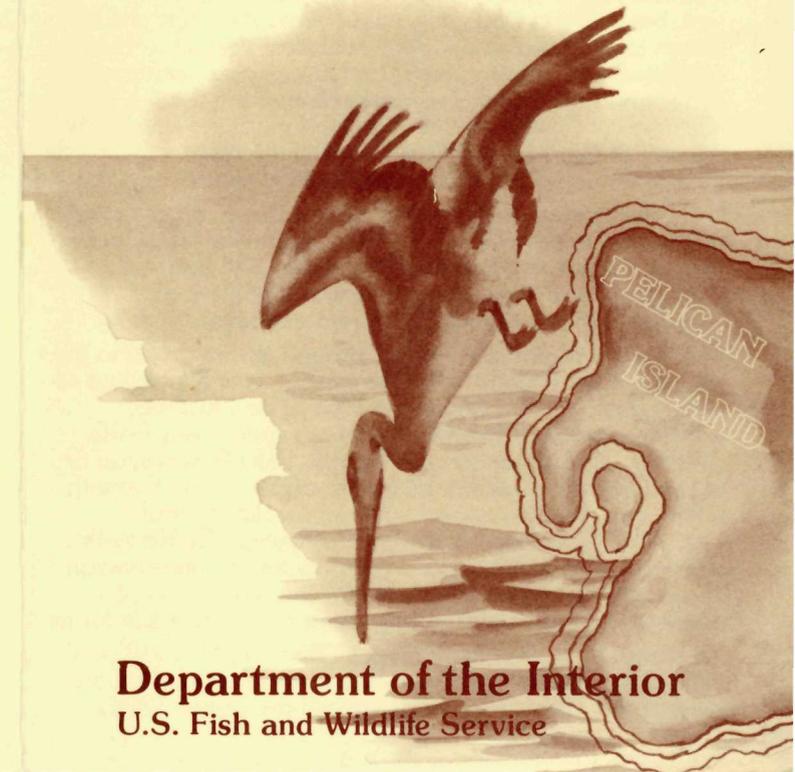


are developed from areas which have been misused in the past by drainage, lumbering, burning or overgrazing. These lands, therefore, need restoration to become viable habitat. This is done by using dikes, dams, fences, and planting to produce special or supplemental wildlife foods. Management may also employ irrigation systems, soil conservation practices, forestry programs, rough fish control or other methods to restore and maintain suitable habitat.

Nearly 30 million visits are made each year to national wildlife refuges. Visitors are welcome when their activities do not interfere with the primary wildlife program. Walking trails, visitor centers, auto tours and other programs are provided on many refuges. Fishing and limited hunting may be provided on some refuges if appropriate to the specific management program. About 200 of the national wildlife refuges have resident staffs of professionally trained U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel.

National Wildlife Refuge System

# Celebrating 75 years



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

# Recounting 75 years of lands, water and wildlife

A funny looking brown bird and a Presidential decree issued 75 years ago have had a lasting impact on the wildlife resources of this country. On March 14, 1903, conservationist President Theodore Roosevelt issued an Executive Order, seemingly insignificant at the time, which made the Federal Government responsible for providing refuge for the brown pelican. The Order set aside Pelican Island, a 2½ acre tract on the east coast of Florida, as a bird sanctuary. The brown pelican had rapidly neared extinction because of human harassment in its nesting habitat. Egrets, which nested near the pelicans, were the target of plume hunters who disturbed both species — until the creation of sanctuary on Pelican Island.

The Executive Order made Pelican Island the first National Wildlife Refuge and, in effect, established the land management responsibility of what would later become the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior. Roosevelt, an ardent outdoorsman, had heard and understood the plea to save the brown pelican, and his concern opened the way for a system to save America's dwindling wildlife.

At the birth of our country, wildlife was ever abundant. This marvelous resource served the founders of America well, but as the nation grew, man altered the lands and waters to suit his own use. Unfortunately, that use often conflicted with wildlife needs, for animals also need places to live and repopulate. The destruction of the wildlife resource continued into the 20th century, but, through the wisdom of Roosevelt and his advisors, a catalyst was formed to help offset the ravages against nature.

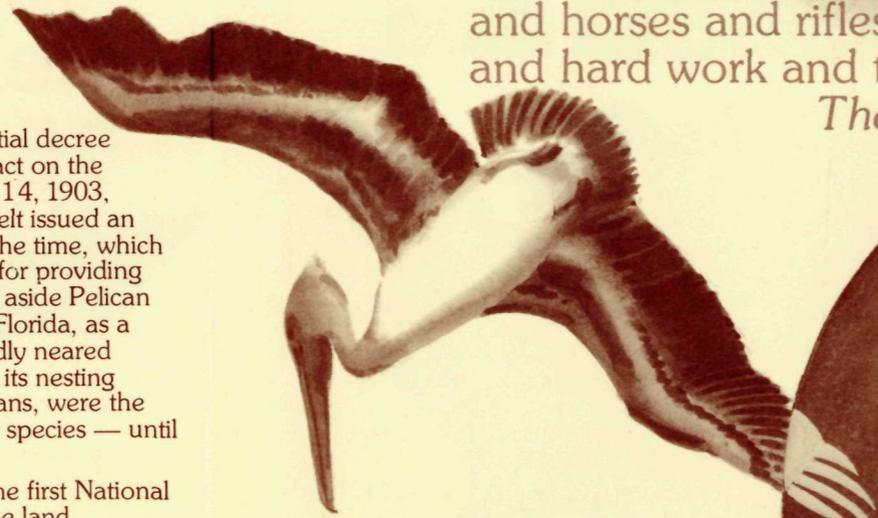
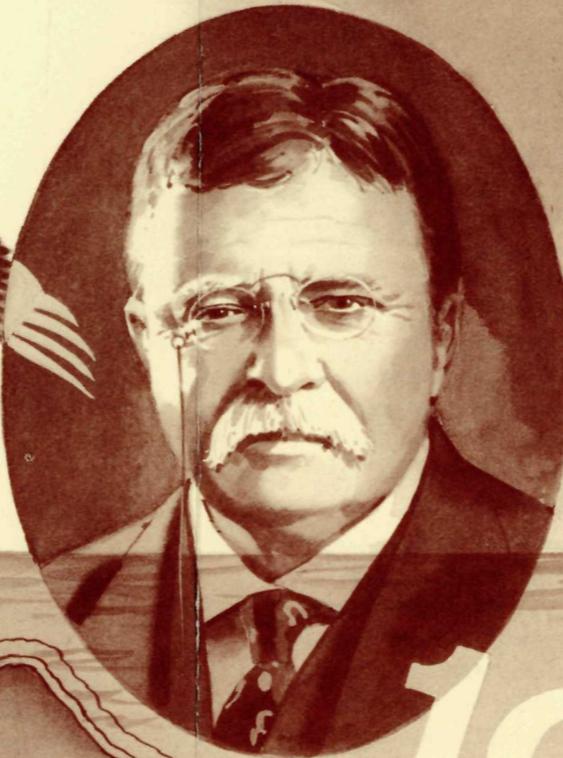
From the modest beginning at Pelican Island, other parcels of land and water were soon dedicated to the protection of various species of colonial nesting birds. The need for management of these refuges became apparent as the knowledge of preservation requirements began to grow.

The Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, so important to the survival of the American buffalo (bison), was established as a big game unit by Congress in 1905. Then, in 1908, another notable addition to the refuge system was made with the development of the Klamath Lake Reservation as the first migratory waterfowl nesting reserve. The Klamath Basin, site of a then annual commercial slaughter of waterfowl, is centered in the Pacific Flyway. The Klamath addition recognized the need not only for the preservation of colonial nesting birds but also for the reservation of larger land areas to extend protection to other wildlife forms.

The passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918 put into effect a treaty with Great Britain and provided for the protection of birds migrating between the United States

“We loved a great many things —  
birds and trees and books  
and all things beautiful  
and horses and rifles and children  
and hard work and the joy of life.”

*Theodore Roosevelt*



1903  
1978

and Canada. This put the problem of migrating waterfowl under Federal jurisdiction and, while making no direct provision for refuges, stimulated conservation activities. Now migratory birds could be offered protection during both nesting and wintering cycles.

As the Depression and Dust Bowl of the early 1930's developed, much of the migratory waterfowl population appeared doomed. In 1929, the Migratory Bird Conservation Act provided authority for the purchase of lands needed for migratory bird refuges. However, due to the Depression, the Act could not furnish the money necessary to carry out this effort. Then, in 1934, a Presidential committee on wildlife restoration, consisting of Thomas Beck, Jay N. “Ding” Darling and Aldo Leopold, was appointed to find ways to help restore the dwindling waterfowl population. More funds and the restoration of nesting habitat were the recommended solutions. Darling was then appointed Chief of the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey (forerunner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and he spearheaded an all-out effort to secure and develop wildlife lands.

The Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act of March 16, 1934, bolstered the refuge program by providing the much needed funds. Since the passage of the Act, much of the money used to purchase waterfowl refuges has come from the sale of migratory bird hunting stamps.

From the mid-1930's, the refuge concept continued to grow. The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 authorized the acquisition of refuge lands for the conservation and protection of all kinds of wildlife, and the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1966 provided the first specific authority to establish refuges for protection of vanishing wildlife. The National Wildlife Refuge System was officially designated that same year.

The Refuge System also includes many units known as Waterfowl Production Areas. These are small pothole marshes in the northern prairie states that are able to produce large numbers of ducks. Since 1962, emphasis has been placed on the acquisition of these areas to prevent their destruction by drainage and conversion to non-wildlife uses. So far, almost 1.5 million acres of these small wetlands have been purchased or leased.

Looking toward the future, there is a great opportunity for the Refuge System to help preserve the still relatively unspoiled natural resources of Alaska. Under the terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the System may eventually receive a number of additional refuges important to shore birds, migratory waterfowl, marine mammals and other wildlife of this unique region.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes that the extent of secure habitat for many kinds of wildlife is still inadequate. More areas throughout our nation are needed to provide living space for water-loving species and those in danger of extinction from many types of human pressure. In the tradition of “Ding” Darling, and mindful of the precedent set by tiny Pelican Island (now a National Historic Landmark), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is pledged to carry out its important mission.