

## Part III In the Beginning

### *Centennial Handbook*



*Tired of searching for information  
about the Centennial? Good news!  
It's all right here!*



*Celebrating a  
Century  
of Conservation!*

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# 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 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 Robert Tavit*



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.



USFWS Photo by Karen Hollingsworth

#### **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.

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.

#### **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 George Gentry

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## Fish and Wildlife Programs Improvement and National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act of 2000 (Engrossed Senate Amendment)

### **TITLE III—NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM CENTENNIAL**

#### **SEC. 301. SHORT TITLE**

*This title may be cited as the ‘National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act’.*

#### **SEC. 302. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.**

(a) *FINDINGS*-Congress finds that--

(1) *President Theodore Roosevelt began the National Wildlife Refuge System by establishing the first refuge at Pelican Island, Florida, on March 14, 1903;*

(2) *the National Wildlife Refuge System is comprised of more than 93,000,000 acres of Federal land managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in more than 532 individual refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas located in all 50 States and the territories of the United States;*

(3) *the System is the only network of Federal land dedicated singularly to wildlife conservation and where wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education are priority public uses;*

(4) *the System serves a vital role in the conservation of millions of migratory birds, dozens of endangered species and threatened species, some of the premier fisheries of the United States, marine mammals, and the habitats on which such species of fish and wildlife depend;*

(5) *each year the System provides millions of Americans with opportunities to participate in wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation;*

(6)(A) *public visitation to national wildlife refuges is growing, with more than 35,000,000 visitors annually; and*

(B) *it is essential that visitor centers and public use facilities be properly constructed, operated, and maintained;*

(7) *the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 1998 (16 U.S.C. 742f note: Public Law 105-242), and the amendments made by that Act, significantly enhance the ability of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to incorporate volunteers and partnerships in refuge management;*

(8) *as of the date of enactment of this Act, the System has an unacceptable backlog of critical operation and maintenance needs; and*

(9) *the occasion of the centennial of the System, in 2003, presents a historic opportunity to enhance natural resource stewardship and expand public enjoyment of the national wildlife refuges of the United States.*

(b) *PURPOSES*- The purposes of this title are--

(1) *to establish a commission to promote awareness by the public of the National Wildlife Refuge System as the System celebrates its centennial in 2003;*

(2) *to develop a long-term plan to meet the priority operation, maintenance, and construction needs of the System;*

(3) *to require an annual report on the needs of the System prepared in the context of--*

(A) *the budget submission of the Department of the Interior to the President; and*

(B) *the President’s budget request to Congress; and*

(4) *to improve public use programs and facilities of the System to meet the increasing needs of the public for wildlife-dependent recreation in the 21st century.*

#### **SEC. 303. NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM CENTENNIAL COMMISSION.**

(a) *ESTABLISHMENT* - There is established the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Commission (referred to in this title as the ‘Commission’).

(b) *MEMBERS*-

(1) *IN GENERAL*- The Commission shall be composed of--

(A) *the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service;*



# NEWS

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## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Office of the Secretary

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### **NEW LAW NAMES 2003 "YEAR OF THE WILDLIFE REFUGE," CALLS FOR BOOSTING SUPPORT FOR REFUGES BY CENTENNIAL YEAR**

The world's largest network of lands dedicated to wildlife conservation received a strong boost on November 1, 2000, when President Clinton signed into law the National Wildlife Refuge Centennial Act. Intended to strengthen and highlight the 93-million-acre Refuge System for its upcoming 100th birthday, the legislation names 2003 as "Year of the Wildlife Refuge," charges the Secretary of the Interior with recruiting a commission of distinguished citizens to rally public support, and requires the Department of the Interior to develop new benchmarks for Congress to evaluate progress on the System's maintenance, operations and construction backlog.

"The National Wildlife Refuge System is absolutely vital to the conservation, protection and enhancement of our nation's wildlife and their habitat," said Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. "This legislation will serve as the cornerstone for our efforts to use the 100th birthday of the system to strengthen it for the benefit of future generations. We are grateful to the President and Congress for their leadership to ensure that the Refuge System receives the recognition it deserves, and for their vigorous efforts to save America's natural heritage."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior, manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas.

Finding that the System "has an unacceptable backlog in critical operations and maintenance needs" that approaches \$800 million, and that "visitor centers and public use facilities must be properly constructed, operated, and maintained," the new law calls for the Secretary of the Interior to prepare a long-term plan by March 2002 to address the priority operations, maintenance, and construction needs of the Refuge system, ("Operations" refers to all efforts to protect wildlife, improve habitat, and serve visitors.) The Secretary of the Interior must report annually on progress towards meeting this backlog and priority transition costs for newly acquired refuge lands.

The legislation also requires the Interior Secretary to recommend a National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial commission to the next President. The President must appoint the commission within 90 days after taking office. Modeled after a similar distinguished group that oversaw the National Park System's Centennial celebrations in 1972, members will include the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Congressional leaders, and up to ten distinguished private citizens. This commission is charged with developing and coordinating a plan to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the System, and to host a major conference in 2003.