U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

America's National Wildlife Refuges

The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of America's greatest conservation success stories. In its first hundred years, it helped save our national symbol, the American bald eagle, from extinction and has protected hundreds of other wild species—including—fish, migratory birds, and many other plants and animals and the habitats that support them.

A Century of Conservation

A hundred years in the making, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of habitats that benefit wildlife, provide unparalleled outdoor experiences for all Americans, and protect a healthy environment.

Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida's Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, this network of protected lands has grown to encompass more than 535 wildlife refuges and more than 3,000 small waterfowl breeding and nesting areas. Refuges are special places where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners restore, protect, and manage habitat for America's wildlife.

Today, there is at least one wildlife refuge in each of the 50 states, and one within an hour's drive of every major U.S. city.

Wildlife First

True to their name, wildlife refuges give wildlife top priority.

- Wildlife refuges are home to more than 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species, and more than 200 species of fish.
- Wildlife refuges provide habitat for more than 250 threatened or endangered plants and animals, including manatees, bald eagles, and the California jewelflower.
- Each year, millions of migrating birds use refuges as stepping stones to rest as they fly thousands of miles south for the winter and return north for the summer.

CELEBRATING A CENTURY of CONSERVATION

Grizzly Bear | Erwin and Peggy Bauer | USFWS

- Numerous waterways and coastlines restore and protect important fisheries like bluefish, bass, and walleye.

Welcoming People as Well as Wildlife

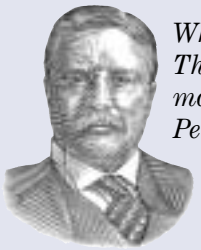
National Wildlife Refuges are far more than havens for wild plants and animals. In fact, visitors—more than 40 million each year—are welcome on 98 percent of wildlife refuges, where they are encouraged to take part in one or more outdoor pursuits designated by law as priority activities offered by the National Wildlife Refuge System.

- *Hunting and fishing.* Hunters are welcome on more than 300 national wildlife refuges and on 3,000 waterfowl production areas, which are small wetlands located mainly in the upper Midwest. Anglers also enjoy the outdoors at more than 260 wildlife refuges where they catch a variety of fish.

- *Wildlife observation and photography.* Birdwatchers and other nature lovers visit wildlife refuges to be awed by amazing congregations, numbering in the thousands at peak migration. Nature trails and observation decks provide superb vantage points for what undoubtedly are some of the best birding opportunities in the world.

- *Interpretation and environmental education.* There's no better place than wildlife refuges for children and adults alike to learn about the natural world and what it means to take care of it. Innovative programs that engage and involve visitors of every age are offered at more than 230 wildlife refuges around the country.

America's Best Kept Secret



When President Theodore Roosevelt made Florida's tiny Pelican Island a refuge for birds in 1903, he wrote the first chapter of a great American conservation success story. And the story of safeguarding America's migratory birds, endangered species, and other wildlife keeps getting better and better. Entering its second century, the National Wildlife Refuge System comprises 95 million acres, protected within more than 535 refuges and thousands of small prairie wetlands that serve as waterfowl breeding and nesting areas. There are wildlife refuges in every state, and at least one within an hour's drive of every major American city, providing much-needed refuge for people as well as wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a Federal agency whose mission, working with others, is to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Under the management of fish and wildlife professionals, the National Wildlife Refuge System has become the world's premier network of wildlife habitats.

U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
National Wildlife Refuge System

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