




## A Call to Action

Each generation has its struggles and its heroes. Certainly this holds true for conservation.

At the turn of the 20th century, market hunting threatened to wipe out wild bird populations, prompting President Theodore Roosevelt to create the first national wildlife refuge at Pelican Island in 1903. Today the 548-unit National Wildlife Refuge System is the greatest system of lands in the world dedicated solely to wildlife conservation.

In the 1930s “Dust Bowl,” the nation was devastated by a gripping drought that severely impacted waterfowl populations and other wildlife. Through the leadership of conservationists such as Aldo Leopold, Ira Gabrielson, J. Clark Salyer and J.N. “Ding” Darling, a cadre of wildlife professionals and citizens began to take on the cause of wildlife conservation in unprecedented ways. Darling, who served as Chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey in 1934 and 1935, designed the first Duck Stamp (which then sold for \$1), with proceeds used toward the purchase of refuge lands. To date, the sale of Federal Duck Stamps has raised more than \$700 million to acquire habitat at hundreds of refuges in nearly every state in our nation.

In the 1960s, Rachel Carson sounded the alarm on the effects of chemical pesticides with her book *Silent Spring*, sparking the modern environmental movement. Two decades later, plummeting waterfowl populations caused in large part by the destruction of wetlands prompted the United States and Canada to create the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership that fostered hundreds of other partnerships to restore and protect habitat.

Today, climate change has emerged as the defining environmental and conservation issue of our time. As scientific knowledge continues expanding, many sobering facts and disconcerting predictions about implications for fish and wildlife resources are emerging.

This is not cause for despair, but rather, a call to action.

The Service cannot effectively respond to climate change with a species-by-species, station-by-station, program-by-program, or region-by-region approach. Because climate change affects all kinds of species and habitat in all kinds of places, it is becoming clearer that a consistent approach to business—

built upon landscape conservation and the adaptive management framework outlined in the 2006 Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) report—is needed for us to meet this challenge. Our work and decisions must be structured through biological planning; measurable biological outcomes; monitoring and evaluation; and research addressing key uncertainties.

But more than that, we need to have a larger vision of how we approach conservation.

As the Service Spotlight feature in this issue of *Fish & Wildlife News* illustrates, the Arctic may provide a glimpse of the future. The region’s rapidly declining ice pack is not only affecting polar bears, but also walrus and a host of other species dependent on sea-ice habitat. These changes are requiring managers and biologists alike to rethink traditional approaches to wildlife management.

The pace and scale of change driven by global warming challenges our ability to ensure self-sustaining wildlife and plant populations in the future—and the very notion of place-based conservation. Like our conservation heroes, we must now identify and champion innovation. Our strategy must be based upon a vision of landscape conservation that builds on our past successes, as well as partnerships with neighboring landowners, other federal agencies, county governments and local citizen groups to develop a connected landscape of habitat “safety nets” to aid wildlife as they adapt to climate change.

In the coming year, each region will host climate workshops, focusing directly on this challenge. We will educate and inform our partners, our visitors and the public with quality information and begin identifying and building the new scientific, legal and policy tools necessary to address this challenge. We will see dedication, commitment, intelligence and innovation from every employee, every station, every program and every region. Not just as individuals or individual units, but as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson had their time. This is our time. This is why each of us has chosen a career of public service—to deal with issues of consequence and make a difference for our nation. Together we can face the challenge of climate change and turn it into an opportunity for leadership and success. □