



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Areas of Unique Interest

The National Wildlife Refuge System

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 number of wildlife refuges contain areas of unique interest and are specially managed. These include wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, wetlands of international importance, shorebird reserves, national natural landmarks, monuments, memorials, and historic landmarks. Some of these designations place wildlife refuge land within national or international protected networks, all of which affect how the land is used and cared for.

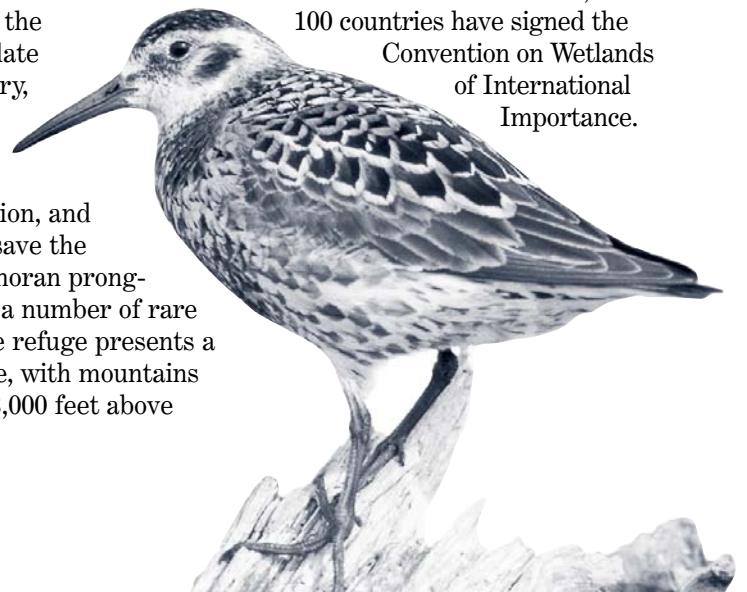
Wilderness is a special designation applied to federal lands “where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain.” More than 20 million acres on 66 wildlife refuges have been designated as wilderness and are managed in a way that preserves the wild and undeveloped character of the land. There, people can enjoy solitude and the beauty of nature without many of the intrusions of the modern world.

Nearly 1,000 square miles of Arizona's Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge is designated as wilderness. One of the wildest, most desolate places in the country, it was set aside in 1939 to save the desert bighorn sheep from extinction, and it also has helped save the extremely rare Sonoran pronghorn antelope and a number of rare plants. The wildlife refuge presents a beautiful landscape, with mountains suddenly soaring 3,000 feet above the desert.

Wild and Scenic Rivers are rivers in their natural state, free of dams or power plants, that provide vital fish and wildlife habitat or that possess scenic, recreational, geologic, historic, cultural or other unique values worthy of preserving. The National Wildlife Refuge System contains more than 1,400 miles of wild and scenic rivers.

A five-mile segment of the Niobrara River flowing through Nebraska's Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge has been designated as wild and scenic. Canoeing the river, which runs through wooded areas and deep canyons, provides an ideal vantage point for seeing buffalo, deer, elk, red-tailed hawks, great blue herons, and a variety of wildflowers. A nearby nature trail winds past the river's waterfall.

Wetlands of International Importance include a variety of marsh, peatland, and salt, fresh, and brackish water. Protected since 1971 by an international conservation agreement, these wetlands are home to an amazing diversity of wildlife, and they offer some of the best bird-watching opportunities in the world. So far, more than 100 countries have signed the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.



Seventeen areas within the National Wildlife Refuge System have been designated as wetlands of international importance.

The world's largest bed of aquatic eelgrass attracts the entire world population of Pacific black brants and virtually all of the world's emperor goose population to the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, located on the southern end of the Alaska Peninsula. Thousands of migrating Taverner's Canada geese and ducks also pass through, as do rock sandpipers, ruddy turnstones, and semipalmated plovers. The wetlands of Izembek are also home to Alaskan brown bears, caribou, red foxes, river and sea otters, sea lions, and harbor seals.

The *Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network* exemplifies the intense conservation challenge that wetlands face, as well as the need for international cooperation to protect these areas. A voluntary coalition of more than 200 private and public organizations, the network links owners and managers of crucial wetlands in a program of research, training, and environmental education. Seven countries manage lands within the network, which includes 20 areas within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

As a part of the shorebird reserve network, Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge employees manage thousands of acres of salt marsh for more than 300 bird species that call the refuge home. The refuge's bird list includes Atlantic brant, American black ducks, pied-billed grebes, northern harriers, Cooper's hawks, peregrine falcons, ospreys, and least terns. The wildlife drive allows visitors to view these birds as they feed throughout the marsh.

National Natural Landmarks encompass some of the best-known examples of unique biological or geological features. More than 40 natural landmarks are located on wildlife refuges, where they are maintained relatively free of human disturbance to approximate a stable environment.

Native grasses, sand dunes, brushy bottomlands, seven lakes, and a red-

rimmed plateau surround the 10,090-acre National Natural Landmark at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, providing a winter home for thousands of migratory birds. The refuge's namesake is a shallow playa lake, that often goes dry during the summer, leaving only a white alkaline lake bed. The water from the springs is brackish and too bitter to drink, but is a favored roosting site for majestic sandhill cranes. Each year more than 40,000 visitors arrive at Bitter Lake refuge to see spectacular flocks of waterfowl and millions of colorful dragonflies against the rose-colored western sunsets.

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.



National Monuments and Memorials include "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" located on Federal lands, including wildlife refuges.

During World War II, Midway Island and the adjacent waters played a critical role in the Allied victory in the Pacific. The Battle of Midway, June 4-6, 1942, one of the most decisive naval battles in history, is often called the turning point of the war. In fierce fighting, the American defenders of Midway withstood massive Japanese airstrikes, while our carrier-based planes located the enemy fleet and sank four Japanese aircraft carriers, against the loss of one American carrier. This forced the Japanese invasion fleet to turn back, securing the victory at Midway and gaining the initiative for the United States throughout the remainder of the Pacific war.

Today, Midway Island is both a National Memorial to that victory and a National Wildlife Refuge, important to many species of wildlife, including the famous "gooney birds." Amid more than one million birds, the refuge preserves 63 historic sites, including Marine barracks and pillboxes above the water and the beauty of the Pacific Ocean below. Coral reefs surrounding the island host Hawaiian spinner dolphins, green sea turtles, and endangered Hawaiian monk seals. More than 250 species of fish swim within the lagoon, including colorful coral fish, offering spectacular views to visitors diving and snorkeling around the island.

National historic places and national historic landmarks on wildlife refuges include archaeological and anthropological sites, such as shipwrecks, historic plantations and buildings, burial grounds, lighthouses, and battlefields.

North Dakota's Lake Ilo National Wildlife Refuge is the site of an ongoing archaeological study that is teaching us about the behaviors and habits of the earliest inhabitants of the northern plains.

U.S. Department of the Interior
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4401 N. Fairfax Drive
Room 670
Arlington, VA 22203

1 800/344 WILD
<http://refuges.fws.gov>