



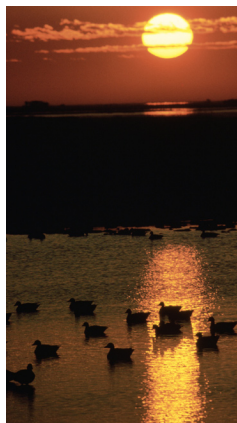
National Wildlife Refuge System

Program Overview

Lands for Wildlife

A product over 105 years in the making, the National Wildlife Refuge System is an extensive network of lands set aside for wildlife. In addition, they provide unparalleled outdoor experiences for all Americans and help to 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 96 million acres. The system is comprised of 548 National Wildlife Refuges, 37 Wetland Management Districts, and 49 Coordination Areas.



USFWS

one wildlife refuge in each of the 50 states, and one within an hour's drive of most major U.S. cities.

Guided by Priorities

National Wildlife Refuges are far more than just places dedicated to wild plants and animals. In fact, visitors—more than 40 million each year—are welcomed 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 that the National Wildlife Refuge System

offers. Those priority public uses are:

Hunting and Fishing. Hunters are welcome on more than 300 national wildlife refuges and 7,000 waterfowl production areas, which are small wetlands located mainly in the upper Midwest. Anglers can fish at more than 260 wildlife refuges.

Wildlife Observation and Photography. Birdwatchers and wildlife observers can visit wildlife refuges and be awed by amazing congregations of birds, numbering in the tens of thousands during peak migration. Nature trails and observation decks provide superb vantage points for some of the best birding opportunities in the world.



USFWS

Interpretation and Environmental Education. There's no better place than a wildlife refuge for children and adults alike to learn about the natural world and what taking care of it involves. Innovative programs to engage and involve visitors of every age are offered at more than 230 wildlife refuges around the country.

Facts and Figures

- 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 280 threatened or endangered plants and animals, including manatees, brown pelicans, and the California jewelflower.
- Each year, millions of migrating birds use refuges as stepping stones to rest as they fly



USFWS

thousands of miles south for the winter and return north for the summer.

- The Refuge System has more than 200 nonprofit Friends groups; 10 were formed in the last year.
- Operation and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System is funded at \$434.1 million, in FY 2008.

Nearly 3,000 FTEs staff the National Wildlife Refuge System to ensure that wildlife and fish and their habitats are managed and protected for future generations of Americans.

Laws the Program Administers

National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.). Provides authority, guidelines and directives for the Service to improve the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-57).

Spells out wildlife conservation as the fundamental mission of the refuge system; requires comprehensive conservation planning to guide management of the refuge system; directs the involvement of private citizens in land management decisions; and provides that compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate use that should receive priority in refuge planning and management.

Conservation Challenges

- Urban encroachment
- Habitat fragmentation
- Degradation of water quality
- Increasing demands for recreation
- Increasing demands for energy development and extraction

Conservation Successes

- Implementation of the NWRS Improvement Act
- Hiring and deployment of 200 law enforcement officers
- Increased availability of priority public use and recreational opportunities
- Acquisition and protection of key critical inholdings
- Leaders in habitat restoration and management

Emerging Issues

- Climate change is having a substantive impact on a variety of our lands.

- Invasive species continue to be a major resource management challenge.
- Adequate quantity and quality of water is crucial to healthy habitats.
- The NWRS is an incomplete land system and new lands need to be strategically added.
- Ocean/marine resources are under increasing stress and the NWRS is playing a larger role.
- The NWRS has increasing opportunities to work with local communities, volunteers, and partners.



USFWS



USFWS



USFWS

USFWS



**James Kurth, Acting Assistant Director
National Wildlife Refuge System
<http://www.fws.gov/refuges>**

November 2008