



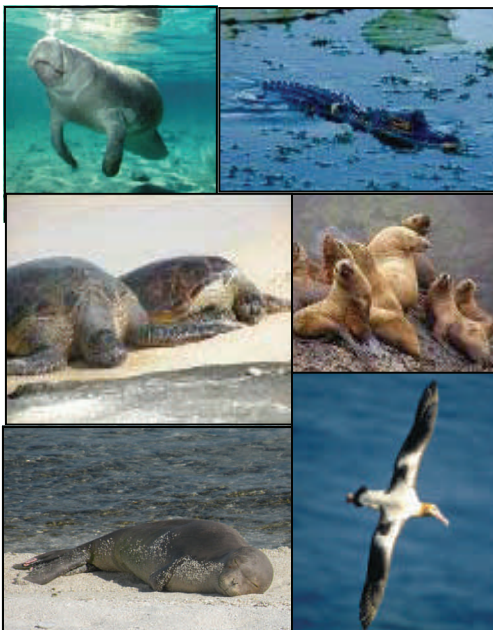
Marine and Coastal National Wildlife Refuges

The National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), is the world's premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve America's fish, wildlife and plants. The Refuge System includes 180 units that protect ocean, coastal, or Great Lakes habitats. Spanning from above the Arctic Circle to below the equator, these refuges represent the world's most geographically diverse and ecologically comprehensive system of marine protected areas under unified conservation management.

The Refuge System protects an incredible diversity of marine and coastal ecosystems including salt marshes, rocky shorelines, sandy beaches, kelp forests, mangroves, seagrass meadows, barrier islands, estuaries, lagoons, tidal creeks, tropical coral atolls, as well as open ocean. With the addition of the Marianas Trench and the Arc of Fire National Wildlife Refuges in 2009, the Refuge System can now add deep-sea hydrothermal vent communities to this list of protected habitats.

The USFWS is mandated by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration and Improvement Acts to manage refuges using a "wildlife first" conservation ethic. This means the needs of wildlife and their habitats should always take priority. However, these acts also formally recognize that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of refuges.

Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida's Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the Refuge System has grown to 553 units and more than 150 million acres. This corresponds to an area greater than the states of Arizona and New Mexico combined.



Some of the threatened and endangered species protected by marine and coastal refuges. Clockwise from top left: Florida manatee; American crocodile; Stellar sea lions; Short-tailed albatross; Hawaiian monk seal; and green sea turtles. Photo credits: USFWS.



NWRS marine and coastal refuges, location and (year) designated. From top to bottom: Blackwater NWR, Maryland (1933); Oregon Islands NWR, Oregon Coast (1935); Midway Atoll NWR, Northwest Hawaiian Islands (1988); Cross Island NWR, Maine (1980). Photo credits: USFWS.

National Wildlife Refuge System Marine Facts

- ◆ 106 National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) are members of the National System of Marine Protected Areas (learn more at www.mpa.gov).
- ◆ The Refuge System protects some of the most remote and pristine coral reef ecosystems in the entire world.
- ◆ The largest refuge is the Marianas Trench NWR at over 50 million acres (That's bigger than the State of Nebraska!)
- ◆ The Alaska Maritime NWR spans more than 1000 miles and includes more than 2,500 islands, islets, spires, rocks, reefs, waters and headlands.
- ◆ The southernmost U.S. controlled territory is Rose Atoll NWR in American Samoa, nearly 1000 miles below the equator.
- ◆ Kingman Reef NWR contains only about 3 acres of emerged land and 483,751 acres of shallow coral reef and other marine habitat.
- ◆ Over 90% of all the green sea turtles in the Hawaiian archipelago nest at French Frigate Shoals in the Hawaiian Islands NWR.
- ◆ Navassa Island NWR, located about 35 miles west of Haiti, has been called the "Galapagos of the Caribbean" because of the incredible variety of marine life present in its waters.
- ◆ The Farallon Islands, protected by the Farallon NWR since 1909, have been called "California's Galapagos".
- ◆ Each winter, over 100,000 people visit the Crystal River NWR in north Florida to view the more than 500 endangered West Indian Manatees that congregate there.
- ◆ Sandy Point NWR in the U.S. Virgin Islands was specifically created in 1984 to protect the largest nesting population of endangered leatherback sea turtles under U.S. jurisdiction.
- ◆ Palmyra Atoll NWR supports more than twice the number of stony coral species as found in Hawai'i, nearly four times as many as Florida Keys, and nearly three times as the entire Caribbean.



Pelican Island NWR (above), established in 1903 as America's first National Wildlife Refuge, is also the Nation's oldest marine protected area.

Photo credit: USFWS



MISSION STATEMENT

"The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."



To learn more about the National Wildlife Refuge System's important marine and coastal role contact:

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