



# NEWS

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## **NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK OFFERS AMERICANS CHANCE TO RECONNECT WITH THEIR WILDLIFE HERITAGE**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is issuing an open invitation to the public to celebrate their wildlife heritage by visiting one or more of America's 514 national wildlife refuges during National Wildlife Refuge Week, October 11-17.

"The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest network of lands protecting plant and animal habitats . . . there just isn't anything else like it anywhere!" said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "During this special week, we make every effort to showcase refuges and thank the American public for helping conserve these remarkable natural areas. Visiting a refuge and actually seeing and learning something about the wildlife there can be a refreshing, even inspiring, experience."

During National Wildlife Refuge Week, the Service is laying out the welcome mat to the public as it hosts hundreds of events nationwide, such as nature and birding tours, hunting and fishing events, wildlife art contests, environmental education programs, nature photography demonstrations, special volunteer tributes, clean-up days, and a host of other activities.

The National Wildlife Refuge System--the only network of Federal lands devoted specifically to wildlife--began when President Theodore Roosevelt set aside tiny Pelican Island, Florida, as the first refuge in 1903 to protect nesting brown pelicans from plume hunters. Today, the system encompasses almost 93 million acres of spectacular, incredibly diverse, and carefully managed wildlife habitat in every state.

Many refuges and hundreds of smaller waterfowl production areas are located along the four major migratory bird flyways where they play a critical role supporting ducks, geese, shorebirds, and songbirds during breeding seasons and long annual migrations every fall and Spring. Some 60 refuges are set aside primarily for endangered species such as bald eagles, manatees, desert pupfish, and whooping cranes.

An increasing number of refuges are located a short drive from major metropolitan areas such as John Heinz at Tinicum (Philadelphia), Don Edwards San Francisco Bay (San Francisco), Marais des Cygnes (Kansas City), Great Swamp (New York City), San Diego (San Diego), Mason Neck (Washington, DC), Bayou Sauvage (New Orleans), Great Meadows (Boston), Bosque Del Apache (Albuquerque), and Minnesota Valley (Minneapolis-St. Paul).

October and November are spectacular months to visit many national wildlife refuges as millions of ducks, geese, and other birds hop-scotch from refuge to refuge during their massive southern migration. During this time, magnificent concentrations of snow geese, Canada geese, sandhill cranes, and even bald eagles intermingle with resident populations of white-tailed deer, grouse, wild turkeys, elk, moose, coyotes, and other wildlife to delight refuge visitors.

More than 30 million Americans visited national wildlife refuges last year, taking advantage of hiking trails, hunting, fishing, birdwatching, and nature photography or just enjoying an outdoors getaway. Hundreds of thousands of school children visit refuges yearly to learn more about nature and the environment. An economic study estimates recreational visits to national wildlife refuges generated more than \$400 million in sales in regional economies during 1995, providing nearly \$170 million in payrolls supporting some 10,000 jobs.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.

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*For more information about National Wildlife Refuge Week Special Events, go to <http://refuges.fws.gov/> on the Internet, then click on "Special Events." For more information about national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas generally, or for a map of the refuge system or a copy of the National Wildlife Week poster, call 1-800-344-WILD (1-800-344-9453). For information about individual refuge activities, call the refuge nearest you: look under "Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service" in the U.S. government listing of your telephone directory.*