



# National Wildlife Refuge System

## *Chronology*

*Wild Things*

1903: President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island (FL) as the first bird sanctuary. During his term, he created 51 bird reservations and 4 big game preserves.

1905-1912: The first refuges for big game animals were Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge (OK)-1905; National Bison Range (MT)-1908; and National Elk Refuge (WY)-1912.

1918: The Migratory Bird Treaty Act between the U.S. and Great Britain (for Canada) became the foundation for future legislation that would greatly expand the refuge system.

1924: Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (IA, IL, MN, WI), the first refuge designated for wildlife and fish, was established. Izaak Walton League founder Will Dilg was instrumental in this effort.

1929: The Migratory Bird Conservation Act authorized the Interior Secretary to acquire areas for migratory birds with approval by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission.

1934: FDR convened a committee to determine how to save waterfowl during the Dust Bowl era. Aldo Leopold, cartoonist J.N. "Ding" Darling, and publisher Thomas Beck suggested a "duck stamp" to raise funds for acquiring wetland habitat. Congress passed the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act ("Duck Stamp" Act).

1935-36: "Ding" Darling, head of the U.S. Biological Survey (the predecessor agency of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), sent biologist J. Clark Salyer to identify prime wetlands nationwide. The 600,000 acres he purchased became over 50 refuges, including Red Rock Lakes

(MT) for trumpeter swans and Agassiz (MN) for waterfowl.

1940: Rachel Carson, then a scientist v the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, wrote series of "Conservation in Action" booklets examining wildlife and habita on refuges.

1939-45: The Interior Secretary opene refuge lands to oil and gas drilling and allowed the Department of Defense to refuge lands for bombing practice.

1958: Duck Stamp Act amended to authorize acquisition of small wetland "potholes" as Waterfowl Production A (WPAs). The Service has acquired mor than 2 million acres of wetland and grassland habitat from 28,000 landown in 8 north-central states. The resulting WPAs vary in size from one acre in La County (MT) to 20,480 acres in Edmur County (SD).

1962: The Refuge Recreation Act (amended in 1966) permitted secondar recreational uses on refuges where suc activities do not conflict with refuges' primary purposes, when there is mone administer them.

1964: Land and Water Conservation F Act authorized appropriations of Land and Water Conservation Funds derive from off-shore oil leases to acquire wildlife habitat.

1964: The Wilderness Act established guidelines for designating wilderness areas to protect unspoiled habitat with national parks, refuges, and other pub lands. More than 20 million refuge acr are designated wilderness areas.

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System Administration Act created the "compatibility" standard that secondary uses must be consistent with the major purposes for which refuges are established.

1966: The National Wildlife Refuge System Act included measures to preserve ecosystems for endangered species, perpetuate migratory bird species, preserve natural diversity, and create public appreciation for wildlife protection.

1974: Amendment to Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 reassigned U.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries responsibilities to the newly created U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

1980: Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act adds almost 54 million acres to the Refuge System in that state.

1994: 500th refuge established at Canaan Valley (WV) with purchase of initial 86 acres of critical habitat supporting diverse wildlife and plants, including endangered species. Refuge will ultimately encompass 100,000 acres.

1997: President Clinton issues Executive Orders. Clearly defines the Refuge System's mission and guiding principles. The EO defines six compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) as priority uses of the Refuge System.

1997: President Bill Clinton signs into law the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 which amends the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1996 in a manner that provides a comprehensive "Organic Act" for the Refuge System. The Act establishes in law fish, wildlife and plant conservation as the mission of the refuge system and gives priority to certain wildlife-dependent recreational uses on national wildlife refuges, when they are compatible with refuges' purposes and the mission of the Refuge System. These uses are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Want more? Call—better yet, visit—your local refuge!

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**National Wildlife Refuge System**  
**1-800-344-WILD**  
**<http://refuges.fws.gov>**