



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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AMERICA'S 500th NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE CELEBRATED NATIONWIDE

It started small nearly 100 years ago when tiny 3.5-acre Pelican Island in Florida became the very first national wildlife refuge.

Today, the National Wildlife Refuge System spans 92 million acres nationwide and, on October 22, will mark an historic occasion as the 500th refuge at Canaan Valley in Tucker County, West Virginia, is dedicated. Other national wildlife refuges across the country will hold special events and ceremonies to commemorate this conservation milestone.

"The 500th national wildlife refuge is a statement by the American people that we care about conservation, we care about wildlife, and that we'll protect it for future generations," said Mollie Beattie, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the National Wildlife Refuge System.

"Canaan Valley is a particularly appropriate place for our 500th national wildlife refuge," Beattie said. "It is a rare ecosystem, a rare wildlife habitat, and a very special place."

Senator Robert C. Byrd will keynote the 11 a.m. dedication at the Canaan Valley State Park and Resort, along with George T. Frampton, Jr., Assistant Interior Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. Other activities include ski-lift rides, bus tours of the valley, and exhibits and demonstrations.

"It is truly remarkable that in less than 100 years, we've been able to assemble on behalf of the American people the world's greatest system of lands dedicated to wildlife," Beattie said. "I hope Americans everywhere will discover these little-known natural treasures they own."

The National Wildlife Refuge System extends from U.S. territories in the South Pacific, up to Alaska, across the United States, and into the Caribbean. Ranging in size from 1/2 acre to more than 19 million acres, refuges can be found within a short drive of virtually every major metropolitan area.

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Spectacular fall colors and one of the largest bird migrations in recent years will highlight celebrations at the following refuges, which will feature tours, exhibits, films, environmental education programs, and other activities:

- o Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, Florida, in the Intracoastal Waterway near Sebastian (pelicans, herons, ibises, egrets, frigatebirds).
- o Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, Mayville, Wisconsin, 1 hour from Madison and Milwaukee (200,000 Canada geese, 60,000 ducks, hundreds of wading birds).
- o San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Newark, California, adjacent to San Jose and 40 miles south of San Francisco (1 million birds on the bay).
- o Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Soldotna, Alaska (wintering chickadees, woodpeckers, raptors, waterfowl, moose).
- o Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, Socorro, New Mexico, 1.5 hours from Albuquerque and 3 hours from El Paso, Texas (mule deer, wild turkey, coyotes, and early-arriving greater sandhill cranes, bald eagles, snow geese, ducks).
- o Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Brigham City, Utah, 75 miles north of Salt Lake City (tundra swans, avocets, herons, ibises, egrets, stilts, eagles).
- o J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel, Florida, 1/2 hour from Ft. Myers; also celebrating the birthday of cartoonist "Ding" Darling, father of the refuge system, with a presentation by Neal Anderson, winner of this year's Duck Stamp contest, a conservation cartoon contest for kids, and special, tours, exhibits, and films.