

National Wildlife Refuge System

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a Federal agency whose mission, working with others, is to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Under the management of fish and wildlife professionals, the National Wildlife Refuge System has become the world's premier network of wildlife habitats.

National Elk Refuge / USFWS John and Karen Hollingsworth

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
National Wildlife Refuge System
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Arlington, VA 22203

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<http://www.fws.gov>

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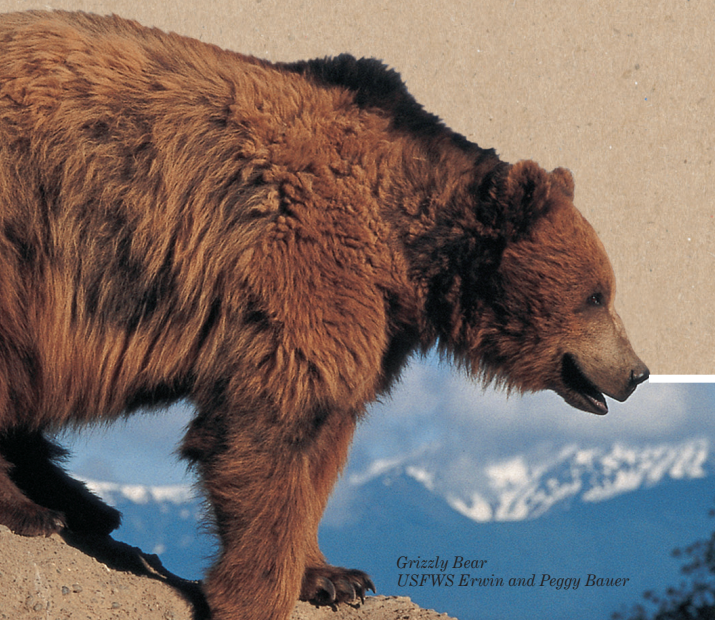
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America's Best Kept Secret

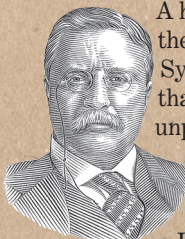
National wildlife refuges are not just for wild plants and animals. In fact, visitors—nearly 40 million each year—are welcome on 98 percent of wildlife refuge land. Visitors join in a variety of outdoor activities, especially photography, fishing, wildlife watching, hunting, interpretation, and environmental education.

Wildlife refuges host recreational hunters at more than 300 locations and welcome anglers at more than 260—a testament to the abundant wildlife resulting from successful conservation and management programs. Birdwatchers from around the globe visit wildlife refuges to be awed by amazing congregations of our feathered friends, numbering in the tens of thousands at peak migration in many locations. And there is no better place than a wildlife refuge for children and adults alike to learn about the natural world. More than 230 wildlife refuges attract visitors with innovative educational programs showing how we manage refuges to ensure the future generations can experience America's wilderness. Still, the discovery opportunities don't end with wildlife. Wildlife refuges also protect important historic sites, from Native American campsites to World War II artifacts, preserving interesting facets of the American culture.



*Grizzly Bear
USFWS Erwin and Peggy Bauer*

A Century of Conservation



A hundred years in the making, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of habitats that benefit wildlife, provide unparalleled outdoor experiences for all Americans, and 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 540 wildlife refuges and more than 3,000 small waterfowl breeding and nesting areas. Refuges are special places where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners restore, protect, and manage habitat for America's wildlife. Today, there is at least one wildlife refuge in each of the 50 states, and one within an hour's drive of most major U.S. cities.

*“When up with the birds.”
Arrive in the early
morning (or late afternoon)
when wildlife is most active.*

*Wildlife watching, Alaska Maritime
National Wildlife Refuge
USFWS John and Karen Hollingsworth*



*American Bald Eagle, Rocky Mountain
Aresnal National Wildlife Refuge
USFWS John and Karen Hollingsworth*



From the Smallest Beginning...

President Theodore Roosevelt established the first wildlife refuge in 1903, Florida's 3-acre Pelican Island, to protect egrets, herons, and other birds from market hunters who killed these birds by the thousands to satisfy turn-of-the-century fashion demands. From this humble beginning, Americans have embraced the concept of providing unique places for wildlife to flourish, while also allowing for many forms of wildlife-dependent recreation. Through cooperative efforts with a growing number of partners and committed citizens, the National Wildlife Refuge System has become a model of stewardship where all Americans and international visitors can enjoy our precious natural resources.



Watch wildlife from a distance.

When you approach a wild animal, it may defend itself or flee, but from a distance you can see its normal behavior.

*Black-tailed Prairie Dog / Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge
USFWS John and Karen Hollingsworth*

Why Wildlife Refuges?



*Rock Sandpiper
USFWS David Menke*

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of federal land dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation. Home to more than 700 species of birds, 220 different mammals, 250 reptiles, and more than 200 kinds of fish, the amazing variety of wildlife found on refuges reflects America's bountiful natural heritage. Many wildlife refuges were created to protect and enhance the resting and feeding grounds of migratory birds, creating a chain of stepping stones along major migration routes. Others were established to conserve the natural home of our rarest wild species, including bald eagles, bison, and whooping cranes.



Contact the wildlife refuge before you visit for up-to-date information on access, special activities, weather conditions, and more.

*Environmental education
USFWS John and Karen Hollingsworth*



*Indigo Bunting
USFWS Steve Maslowski*



