U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 2, 2014 14-01

Lori Iverson
307.733.9212, ext. 6

RECORD NUMBER OF VISITORS PARTICIPATE IN REFUGE SLEIGH RIDE PROGRAM

National Elk Refuge sleigh rides proved to be a popular activity over the Christmas holiday, with a record number of participants enjoying the unique wildlife viewing experience. In the week following the Christmas holiday, 4,728 people rode on a sleigh to view wintering elk, with a record ridership of 862 people shuttled onto the Refuge via 55 sleighs on Saturday, December 28.

Sleigh rides are the Refuge's most popular educational program and are an exciting way to observe and photograph wildlife. In addition to elk, passengers routinely see coyotes, bald eagles, trumpeter swans, ravens, and other wildlife. Passengers are reminded that while elk are generally acclimated to the sleighs, they can easily be spooked by loud noises or unexpected movements. Riders are not allowed out of the sleighs near the elk because the recognizable sight of a human on the ground stresses the animals, causing them to bolt from the area. Minimizing human–caused stresses and repeated unnecessary movements are critical to the health and survival of wintering animals.

This winter, Refuge and sleigh ride contractor staffs have noticed an increase in the number of people pulling off Highway 89 onto the shoulder of the road and approaching the fence, which is designed to decrease conflicts between vehicles and animals. The North Highway 89 pathway, located on Refuge land between the highway and fence, is closed from November 1 through April 30 for the protection of wintering animals. A human presence on or near the pathway affects wintering animals at a time when they need to conserve energy. "Though the signs may not be visible to an observer, the distinguishable form of a human triggers physiological responses in animals," explains Refuge Manager Steve Kallin. Those interested in viewing wildlife are required to use pullouts on the highway and remain near their vehicle in the established parking areas.

For an additional opportunity to enjoy the abundant wildlife wintering on the Refuge, winter naturalists offer wildlife viewing excursions five days per week to those interested in a guided tour along the Refuge Road where elk, bighorn sheep, waterfowl, and other animals can frequently be seen close to the roadway. The program, which lasts approximately two hours, is free of charge.

For those that prefer to explore the Refuge Road on their own, a free publication is available at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center and on the maps link of the Refuge's web page. The Refuge Road Wildlife Viewing Guide indicates designated parking areas and outlines safety information regarding both driving and approaching wildlife. "We encourage wildlife watchers and photographers to enjoy the scenery and wildlife, but we want them to do so in a safe manner and one that doesn't disturb the animals," Kallin added.

For more information on National Elk Refuge wildlife viewing programs, please visit the Visitor Activities tab of the Refuge's web page at *http://1.usa.gov/1gscojQ*.

– FWS –

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 16, 2014 14-02

Lori Iverson
307.733.9212, ext. 6

REFUGE ROAD WORK PROPOSED

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today the Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Teton County, is proposing a road project on the National Elk Refuge (Refuge) in Teton County, Wyoming. This project is being funded to address the degradation of the transportation facilities that take place naturally over time. The work will largely encompass adding aggregate surface course material to the majority of the public routes within the Refuge as well as establishing several pullouts to facilitate wildlife viewing and other recreational activities.

The National Elk Refuge is located adjacent to the town of Jackson, Wyoming with access located at the east terminus of Broadway Avenue. The Refuge, approximately 24,777 acres in size, is an integral component of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Refuge is bounded by Grand Teton National Park and the Bridger–Teton National Forest. Visitation reaches a minimum of 300,000 people annually, with peak visitation occurring from June through August. Many Refuge visitors arrive in cars and access the Refuge via the Elk Refuge Road. A substantial number of local residents also access the Refuge on foot and bicycle for routine recreation and exercise. Additionally, the Refuge Road leads to popular recreational areas of the Bridger–Teton National Forest. The proposed pullouts will provide safe wildlife viewing access for all Refuge visitors.

As a part of the environmental review process, the FHWA has responsibilities to comply with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (which has been later revised and recodified but still referred to as Section 4(f)). The intent of the Section 4(f) Statute, 49 U.S.C. Section 303, and the policy of the FHWA is to avoid transportation use of historic sites and publicly owned recreational areas, parks, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges. If the FHWA determines that a transportation use of these types of properties, also known as Section 4(f) properties, results in a *de minimis* impact on that property, an analysis of avoidance alternatives is not required, and the Section 4(f) evaluation process is complete. *De minimis* impacts on publicly owned parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges are defined as those that do not "adversely affect the activities, features and attributes" of the Section 4(f) resource.

The finding of a *de minimis* impact on recreational and wildlife resources can be made when:

1) The transportation use of the Section 4(f) resource, together with any impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation or enhancement measures incorporated into the project, does not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes that qualify the resource for protection under Section 4(f);

2) The public has been afforded an opportunity to review and comment on the effects of the project on the protected activities, features, and attributes of the Section 4(f) resource; and

3) The official(s) with jurisdiction over the property are informed of FHWA's intent to make the *de minimis* impact finding based on their written concurrence that the project will not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes that qualify the property for protection under Section 4(f).

– continued –

During the design phase, every effort was made to minimize the footprint of the project. The work will consist of some minor widening in certain areas and will only involve 0.17 acres of the Refuge. This project will impact a relatively small portion, or 0.0007 percent, of the total Refuge acreage. The land to be impacted was selected in coordination with Refuge staff. Visitors and employees of the Refuge will benefit from the improved access and safety associated with the proposed improvements. The improvements will provide access to wildlife viewing locations and would not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes that make the property eligible for Section 4(f) protection.

The work for this project will occur during the late spring and summer of 2015. During the actual road construction, pedestrian and bicycle travel may be significantly impacted. Vehicles should expect traffic control delays for up to 30 minutes with possible pilot car escorts required. As the construction moves north along the road, traffic delays and congestion will decrease.

Comments and questions regarding the Refuge Road project should be submitted by January 31, 2014. Please address all correspondence to Deputy Refuge Manager Cris Dippel at cris_dippel@fws.gov, or call 307.733.9212 x3. Comments mailed to the National Elk Refuge at PO Box 510, Jackson, WY should be postmarked no later than January 31, 2014.

– FWS –

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 24, 2014 14-03

Lori Iverson
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TWITTER FEEDS TO SHARE REFUGE NEWS

The National Elk Refuge has launched an addition to its social media communication practices. Twitter will be used to share news stories, photos, multimedia presentations, visitor opportunities, emergency notifications, and other information.

Twitter is an online networking service that allows users to send short messages, photos, and Internet links. National Elk Refuge Twitter "feeds" will alert users that new information is available on the Refuge web site or other news sources. Users can follow the @NatlElkRefuge Twitter feed on a smartphone, tablet, or computer.

Twitter users can follow the National Elk Refuge at:
- @NatlElkRefuge in Twitter
- http://twitter.com/natlelkrefuge
- the Twitter icon on the Refuge home page at www.fws.gov/refuge/national_elk_refuge/

The National Elk Refuge's preferred hashtag in Twitter is #ElkRefuge.

Other National Elk Refuge social media and online connections include:
- US Fish and Wildlife Service Mountain-Prairie Region Facebook page: www.facebook.com/USFWSMountainPrairie
- Refuge photo gallery on Flickr: http://bit.ly/1d6kUEp
- multimedia presentations: http://1.usa.gov/1eW9O3M

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 29, 2014 14-04

Lori Iverson
307.733.9212, ext. 6

FORAGE SAMPLING INDICATES SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING CAN BE DELAYED

National Elk Refuge and Wyoming Game & Fish Department biologists have been closely monitoring forage this past month to measure the amount of plant material available to wintering elk and bison. Forage availability is a key factor in the Refuge's winter management program, as well as a consideration in determining if supplemental feeding may be necessary.

A forage survey conducted earlier this week noted most irrigated sites have been heavily consumed by elk or bison and are near levels where supplemental feeding is considered. However, there is very little snow in wet meadow areas and abundant forage remaining in areas west of the Poverty Flats management area. Interagency biologists determined that supplemental feeding will not be initiated this week. An additional survey will be conducted at the end of the week after the current winter storm passes to reassess conditions.

Forage measurements are taken at different times of the year and used for several purposes. In the fall, after the growing season has ended, Refuge staff calculates and records the amount of forage that has been produced on the Refuge in spring and summer. This information can be used to note seasonal environmental conditions, measure the effects of irrigation, and predict possible winter management operations. Consistent methods of gathering the data have been used on the Refuge since 1998, making the information more relevant when comparing numbers from year to year.

This past fall, 62 monitoring sites were sampled, with 33 plants community types included in the sampling. Both irrigated and non–irrigated areas were including in the monitoring locations. Estimated Refuge–wide production for the 2013 growing season put herbaceous (non–woody) forage at 10,885 tons, or 23% below the 15–year average, with total Refuge forage production (both herbaceous and woody plants) estimated to be 13,708 tons, or 21% below the 15–year average.

The relatively low 2013 forage production was attributed to below average precipitation in each month from May through August. Though irrigation of 3,136 acres significantly increased forage production in 2013, it did not completely mitigate for the effects of drought. Estimates indicate the Refuge's irrigation program produced 1,200 tons of additional forage and increased Refuge–wide herbaceous forage production by 12%.

Beginning in December, biologists shift from measuring forage production to monitoring the amount of plant material being consumed, calculating the availability of forage in pounds per acre. Biologists also note snow conditions that may limit an animal's ability to access natural food sources. Deep snow, icing, or crusting can make it difficult for an animal to paw through the ground cover to reach the remaining vegetation. The number of animals on the Refuge affects the rate at which forage is being depleted. This fall, elk and bison activity on the south end of the Refuge was very light due to a late migration and movement of animals off the Refuge by hunters. The lack of foraging activity on the Refuge during the fall conserved available vegetation.

Since 1995, the average date for initiating feeding has been January 28. The start date, ranging from December 31 to February 28, varies widely based on winter severity and available forage. The Refuge's management strategy includes limiting the time elk and bison are on supplemental feed in order to minimize the time they are concentrated and reduce the potential for disease transmission.

Photos of forage production and sampling on the National Elk Refuge can be viewed on the National Elk Refuge photo gallery.

– FWS –

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 3, 2014 14-05

Lori Iverson
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SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING TO BEGIN THIS WEEK

National Elk Refuge and Wyoming Game & Fish Department wildlife managers have determined that available forage on the Refuge has declined to levels where supplemental feeding of elk and bison is necessary. The winter feeding program is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, February 4. Approximately 6,000 elk and 600 bison are currently wintering on the Refuge.

Wildlife managers announced last week that despite low forage production due to drought during the 2013 growing season, enough available grasses and other herbaceous vegetation could delay feeding beyond the nearly 20–year average start date. The Refuge's management strategy attempts to reduce the need for supplemental feeding in order to minimize the time bison and elk are concentrated on the feedlines, thus reducing the potential for disease transmission.

Biologists returned to forage monitoring sites late last week to reassess conditions after the passing of a winter storm that brought both snow and cold temperatures to the area. Most of the evaluated sites were at or approaching an established threshold of 300 pounds of forage per acre. The wet meadows north of Nowlin Creek and west of the Poverty Flats management areas had the most available forage, but heavy elk use in these areas was resulting in declining amounts of natural food sources. The amount of remaining forage is one criteria used to decide when supplemental feeding may be necessary.

The February 4 feeding start date is one week later than the 1995–2013 average, and 11 days later than the 10–year average. The start date, ranging from December 31 to February 28, varies widely based on winter severity and available forage. More information on producing and measuring forage on the National Elk Refuge can be found at http://1.usa.gov/1iPmT4k. Photos of Refuge forage production and sampling are available on the National Elk Refuge photo gallery.

– FWS –

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Elk Refuge News – February 7, 2014

Refuge–Inspired Artwork on Display

Artists Mike Nordell (seated) and Barbara Hayton (standing, right) share their experiences with visitors.

It was a change of pace at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center last month as a temporary exhibit focused less on the biological aspects of wildlife and habitat and more on the inspiration they provide to artists.

An artist himself, Refuge winter naturalist Mike Nordell set up a temporary exhibit featuring the work of four local artists. Hesitantly, he included himself in the line–up. "Our goal was to spotlight the artwork of people that have a special relationship with the Visitor Center and Refuge," he explained. "I saw it as a chance to branch out from a standard interpretive program." He humbly added, "This was the first time I'd ever publicly shared my graphite sketches."

Nordell set up the exhibit in the Visitor Center's small theater, transforming the dark, tight space into a lovely little gallery with wall panels and additional lighting. Tables and walls were covered with photography, ceramics, sketches, and other art pieces. Throughout the first week, winter naturalists took turns staffing the exhibit. The featured artists also stopped in the Visitor Center for a few hours at a time to mingle with guests and share their stories of inspiration.

Guest artists included:

Mike Nordell – Refuge winter naturalist

Nordell's contribution included both photography and illustrations, works that stem from his connection with the area's natural world. Nordell discovered he could take his photographs to

another level when he used them as references for his sketches. Nordell has a great appreciation for wildlife and the difficult lives animals lead, noting how human behavior can profoundly impact their survival.

This winter is Nordell's second winter as a seasonal naturalist for the Refuge. He holds a degree in wildlife biology.

"I enjoy educating others about the importance of conservation and respecting wildlife – the same values as the National Elk Refuge and Refuge System. Their mission is to unselfishly protect land for the sake of wildlife." – Mike Nordell

Barbara Hayton – seasonal Grand Teton Association bookstore clerk at the Visitor Center

A passionate photographer, Hayton had four photos on display including a collage of goslings as they jumped from the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center roof.

Hayton describes the Refuge as an oasis of pure, raw nature and believes in enjoying the Refuge from its periphery in order to maintain the conservation of the habitat and wildlife. As an avid nature photographer, she feels inspired looking out over the marsh, the winding path of Flat Creek, and the buttes. In her role as a store clerk, she loves the sense of giving back she feels when she helps visitors gain an understanding of the purpose and importance of the Refuge.

"Not only do I find inspiration for my photography, but I find a sense of serenity that energizes my soul." – Barbara Hayton

Kathy Erickson – visitor services agent for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce

Erickson enhanced the exhibit with several mediums, including graphite and color sketches, a scratchboard, French dye and silk, a decorated gourd, woodcut prints, and painted leather.

Erickson notes that Refuge guests are inspired and thrilled as they take a winter sleigh ride, learn from the displays in the Visitor Center, explore the ponds and wetlands in the summer, watch birds, and more. She cites many creative ideas and projects stemming from visits and time spent working at the Visitor Center. Whether with her camera, paints or other mediums, she's continually amazed at the beauty and wildlife that is so abundant.

"Having the opportunity to live and work in such a beautiful place has deeply inspired me to seek out and capture the grandeur of the scenes that surround me." – Kathy Erickson

Tenley Thompson – special use permittee on the Refuge as a wildlife tour manager

Thompson provided a few pieces of nature–inspired pottery and ceramics for the exhibit, an interest she pursues in addition to photography. Thompson believes the Refuge is particularly inspirational and sees her artwork as a way to express her biological perspectives through creative processes. Thompson described how she is inspired daily by the landscapes of the area, hoping to help casual visitors fully appreciate the uniqueness and complexities of this ecosystem.

"Our landscape is a land of change and an extraordinary place from which to draw creativity." – Tenley Thompson

In conjunction with the displays provided by the artist, a special exhibit was set up to honor J.N. "Ding" Darling. Darling authored two books and twice won the Pulitzer Prize for cartooning, in 1923 and again in 1942. He used his satirical pen to promote issues of conservation and to bring national attention to environmental concerns. A video entitled "America's Darling: The Story of Jay N. Ding Darling" ran throughout the day, exemplifying the theme of how art can inspire conservation – and conservation can inspire art.

The art exhibit was originally scheduled for the week of January 20 only. However, due to its popularity, the exhibit was extended an additional week. "We were very pleased with how well received the program was," Nordell said. "We look forward to expanding it next year." An estimated 650 people fully explored the exhibit and interacted with a naturalist or artist in the exhibit area.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 12, 2014 14-06

Lori Iverson
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VISITOR CENTER PROGRAM TO PROVIDE A GLIMPSE OF HISTORY

Presidents' Day is now popularly viewed as a day to celebrate all U.S. presidents past and present. In the spirit of history, the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center will be hosting a free event on Monday, February 17 to celebrate an important part of Jackson Hole's past. From 10:00 AM– 4:00 PM, several activities will celebrate the mountain man and trapper heritage that played a key role in the development of the valley. The Visitor Center is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson.

Throughout the day, visitors can participate in a theme–based scavenger hunt inside the Visitor Center. Participants can pick up the list of scavenger hunt items at the front desk and, upon completion of the activity, enter to win a gift bag of items donated by the Grand Teton Association. The prize includes a set of publications on tracks, scat, edible plants, and area history.

Visitors can also learn the etymology of some area place names that can be traced back to prominent people in Jackson Hole's early history, especially those that were influenced by French trappers. An accompanying map will pinpoint the location of the peaks, lakes, and other areas highlighted in the activity.

Younger audiences will enjoy a crafts station where they can make a paper canoe, hat, or mountain man beard. The craft station will be set up from 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM and again from 2:00 – 4:00 PM.

The highlight of the day will be a living history performance from 1:00 – 2:00 PM that will give guests insight into the unique lives of the legendary mountain men or fur trappers who lived and trapped in Jackson Hole in the 1820s and 1830s. Dressed in appropriate attire, Grand Teton National Park Interpretive Specialist Andrew Langford will discuss and demonstrate many of the specialized skills that were required of these brave and industrious individuals. Langford's engaging performance is always enjoyed by people of all ages.

For more information on Monday's event, please call 307.734.9378.

– FWS –

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Elk Refuge News – February 9, 2014

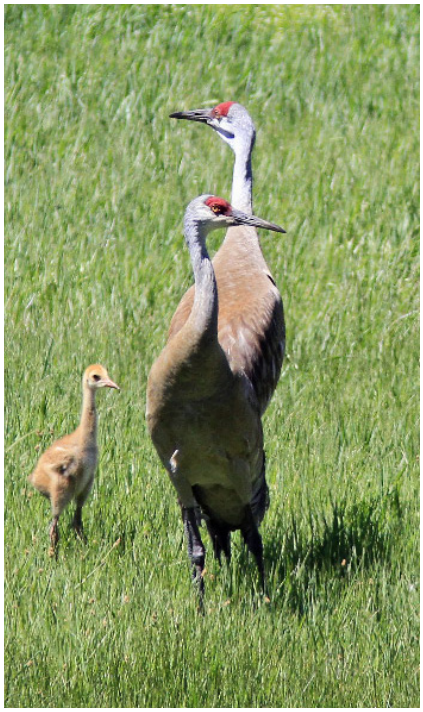
Celebrating Valentine's Week

Humans aren't the only creatures that may choose a mate and remain together for life. Certain animals form bonds that last a lifetime.

To celebrate Valentine's week, the staff at the National Elk Refuge would like to share photos of some of our wildlife that mate for life.

Additional photos of National Elk Refuge wildlife can be found in our web site photo gallery at http://bit.ly/MCAe20. We also regularly share photos via our Twitter account at @NatlElkRefuge.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Bald eagles mate for life. Courting behavior begins in early April and often involves spectacular aerial displays of eagles diving and locking talons. Photo: USFWS / Lori Iverson



Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Although some start breeding at two years of age, Sandhill Cranes may reach the age of seven before breeding. They mate for life—which can mean two decades or more—and stay with their mates year-round. Photo: USFWS / Jim Crabb, National Elk Refuge volunteer

National Geographic: Ravens are believed to mate for life. They build large, stick nests in which females lay three to seven eggs each spring. Both parents care for their young, which remain dependent for several months. Photo: USFWS / Lori Iverson

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Courting Red-tailed Hawks put on a display in which they soar in wide circles at a great height. The male dives steeply, then shoots up again. After several of these swoops he approaches the female from above, extends his legs, and touches her briefly. Sometimes, the pair grab onto one other, clasp talons, and plummet in spirals toward the ground before pulling away. Photo: USFWS / Ann Hough, National Elk Refuge volunteer

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Canada Geese mate for life with very low "divorce rates," and pairs remain together throughout the year. Geese mate "assortatively," larger birds choosing larger mates and smaller ones choosing smaller mates. Photo: USFWS / National Elk Refuge volunteer

USFWS Chesapeake Bay Field Office: Ospreys three years or older usually mate for life and return to the same nest site year after year. Photo: USFWS / BJ Baker, National Elk Refuge volunteer

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Trumpeter Swans form pair bonds when they are three or four years old. The pair stays together throughout the year, moving together in migratory populations. Trumpeters are assumed to mate for life, but some individuals do switch mates over their lifetimes. Some males that lose their mates do not mate again. Photo: USFWS / Mike Nordell, winter naturalist

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Elk Refuge News – February 21, 2014

Kids, Kids, Everywhere!

A group of preschoolers use their sense of touch to enjoy props brought to them by a Refuge naturalist.

While visitation at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center this month continues to climb, the average age of visitors may be lower than normal. Several large elementary school groups have filtered through the building during the past two weeks, using the Refuge as a field trip destination to learn more about wildlife and conservation. Numbers of youngsters in the Center were also bolstered by family visits over the Presidents' Day weekend, and off–site classroom presentations provided additional outreach to children.

Last week, 206 second grade students from Jackson Elementary School made their annual trek to the Refuge as part of their "Animals of Jackson Hole" unit of study. The previous week, Refuge naturalists visited each of the ten classrooms to discuss the purpose of the Refuge and the adaptations necessary for animals to survive winter conditions. The subsequent field trip to the Refuge gave the students an opportunity to see firsthand the concepts presented by the naturalists. "We had pretty sporty winter conditions last week," explained seasonal naturalist Justin St. Onge, now in his second winter with the Refuge. "It helped the students see for themselves the difficult conditions animals endure during the winter."

While other naturalists accommodated the second graders at the Visitor Center, Jessie Stirling slipped away to entertain two groups of preschoolers at the Jackson Hole Children's Museum later that same week. The two– and three–year–olds from the Children's Learning Center incorporated the Refuge's lesson into a classroom project called "Our Town." The students had selected three locations in Jackson to study and replicate in their preschool, including Jackson's renowned Town Square antler arches. The children built a paper version of an arch over their classroom door and used the Refuge presentation as an opportunity to learn more about antlers. Stirling brought many props and photos to share with the children, using the tangible items to appeal to the students' learning style.

Over the weekend, visitation at the Visitor Center flowed at a constant pace while steady rain and wind affected outdoor activities. Anticipating the holiday weekend, naturalists had planned

a series of programs for Monday, focusing on early Jackson Hole history and the influence that trappers and mountain men had in the valley. Though several of the activities were geared toward adult audiences, naturalists included a crafts station in the program line–up, giving children a chance to make paper canoes, hats, and "mountain man mustaches." A living history program featuring Grand Teton National Park interpreter Andrew Langford was popular with visitors of all ages. A total of 2,944 people came to the Visitor Center that day, with many guests participating in the day's special events.

Justin St. Onge makes a classroom visit with one of ten groups of Jackson second graders prior to their Refuge visit the following week.

This week, second graders again filled every nook and cranny in the visitor center as 85 students and 64 adults from Afton, Wyoming visited the Refuge. The students rotated through several learning stations to find out more about the Endangered Species Act.

The National Elk Refuge has only one permanent staff member assigned to the Visitor Center, tasked with overseeing operations, maintenance, and budget. That leaves little time for the extensive scheduling and planning it takes to accommodate requests for school and group presentations. In order to offer educational programming, the Refuge uses non–government funds to hire three seasonal naturalists from December through early April when the demand for programs is high. "We try not to turn anyone away," explains Visitor Center Manager Natalie Fath, "but some days we have every winter naturalist and visitor services volunteer booked. Our interagency partners take care of the drop–in visitors while we accommodate the school children." Fath also serves as the Refuge's volunteer coordinator.

An Afton elementary student offers his undivided attention during a naturalist presentation on Endangered Species at the Visitor Center.

The Refuge public use staff uses the proceeds from the contracted sleigh rides to fund the naturalist

positions. Planning the length of the naturalists' seasons is challenging because the amount of income that will be generated over the winter is unknown, with many factors potentially affecting proceeds. Consequently, the Refuge uses proceeds from sales in the bookstore to cover for any deficit in funds needed to pay the naturalists if sleigh ride revenue doesn't meet salary spending. The Grand Teton Association, the Refuge's nonprofit organization, manages both the non–government accounts used to hire the educational staff. "We're indebted to the Association for their funding," Fath explained. "Without it, we'd be severely limited in providing educational programming."

In addition to school and group requests for programs, the naturalist staff offers a daily program as well as guided wildlife tours five days per week.

Chamber of Commerce employee Mary Walker joins in the fun by donning a mountain man mustache during a Visitor Center event. Walker and other interagency staff covered the information desk while Refuge naturalists held educational programs on Presidents' Day.

Last year, February visitation at the Visitor Center totaled 21,972 for the month, averaging 785 people per day, or 98 people per hour. So far, 2014 seems to be on track. Both December and January saw record numbers of sleigh riders, with 5,959 and 6,262 passengers, respectively. "Winter is very busy at the Visitor Center," Fath described. "We might see in one day what other Refuge visitor centers see in a month or more."

Refuge volunteer Terry Curry staffs a crafts station during a Visitor Center special event.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 7, 2014 14-07

Lori Iverson
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NATIONAL ELK REFUGE TO CELEBRATE THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The National Elk Refuge is pleased to offer an opportunity this month to celebrate several significant dates in the history of the National Wildlife Refuge System. From Friday, March 14 through Sunday, March 23, displays and naturalist presentations at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center will focus on the conservation efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The events listed below will each run daily throughout the ten–day celebration and are free of charge. The Visitor Center is located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson and is open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily.

President Theodore Roosevelt established the nation's first wildlife refuge on March 14, 1903 at Pelican Island National Bird Reservation in Florida. Since then, the National Wildlife Refuge System has grown into a vast network of habitats that benefits wildlife, provides outstanding outdoor experiences, and protects a healthy environment. To show how large the national wildlife refuge system has grown, National Elk Refuge naturalists will display a large U.S. map in the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, showing the location of all the refuges (over 560) throughout the country. Visitors will be asked to place a pin on the national wildlife refuge closest to their home. On March 24, the refuge receiving the most pins will be announced on Facebook (*http://on.fb.me/1e88uhF*) and Twitter (@NatlElkRefuge).

Guests can learn more about the establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge System through two displays set up in the small theater located on the top level of the Visitor Center. The first exhibit will be a time line showing significant dates throughout the history of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with a brief description of each event. The second display will highlight the 80–year history of the Federal Duck Stamp program. President Roosevelt signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, popularly known as the Duck Stamp Act, on March 16, 1934. Originally created as a license required for hunting migratory waterfowl, Duck Stamps have a much larger purpose today. They serve as a vital tool for wetland conservation, with ninety-eight cents out of every dollar generated by the sales going directly to purchase or lease wetland habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System. The sale of stamps is not restricted to hunters; many non–hunters collect the beautiful stamps and purchase them to support wildlife conservation. Refuge naturalists will share images of some of the previous Duck Stamps from throughout the years.

Visitor center staff will run a video entitled "America's Darling: The Story of Jay N. Ding Darling" continuously during the celebration to honor the conservation achievements of the man that designed the first Federal Duck Stamp. In addition to his Duck Stamp art, Darling authored two books and twice won the Pulitzer Prize for cartooning, in 1923 and again in 1942. He used his satirical pen to promote issues of conservation and to bring national attention to environmental concerns. On Sunday, March 16, naturalists will set up a table with art supplies and reference books outside of the theater, allowing children and adults to design their own Duck Stamp.

More information on the National Wildlife Refuge System can be found at *http://www.fws.gov/refuges/about/index.html.* To inquire about the Visitor Center events, please call 307.739.9322.

– FWS –

GREATER YELLOWSTONE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Participating Agencies

US Department of the Interior

National Park Service

Grand Teton National Park

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway

Yellowstone National Park

US Fish & Wildlife Service

National Elk Refuge

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Bureau of Land Management

US Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Bridger-Teton National Forest

Caribou-Targhee National Forest

Custer National Forest

Gallatin National Forest

Shoshone National Forest

Chair

Dan Wenk

Executive Coordinator

Virginia Kelly

Interagency News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELASE—March 6, 2014

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Marna Daley, (406) 587-6703, Custer and Gallatin National Forests
Al Nash, (307) 344-2015, Yellowstone National Park

Public Invited To Help Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee Chart A Path To The Future

The agencies entrusted with managing federal lands within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) are asking the public to help them determine which ecosystem issues should be the focus in the future.

The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC) is a group of eleven federal agencies who work together to manage over 15 million of acres of public land in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

GYCC managers are inviting the public to join them in a conversation in late March in Jackson, Wyo. Rather than hold a discussion about individual agency issues, the managers want the public to share their thoughts on cross-jurisdictional, ecosystem scale issues where they believe GYCC should focus in the coming years. Specifically, the GYCC wishes to explore questions related to cross-agency land and resource management opportunities, GYE-level priorities the GYCC should focus on, and future communication and collaboration with the public and stakeholder groups.

The conversation between the public and GYCC leadership is set for 1:00-5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 24, 2014 at the Teton County Library, 125 Virginian Lane, in Jackson, Wyo. The emphasis of the session will be on interaction and communication between all attendees.

Information gathered during this listening session will help the GYCC develop and strengthen its working relationships with the public and stakeholders as they collaborate to put their resources toward addressing joint challenges and opportunities in managing these shared landscapes.

Those who plan to attend are asked to commit to attending the full four hour session and to RSVP by March 19 to gycc-march24@fs.fed.us.

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ABOUT THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE COORDINATING COMMITTEE: *The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC) includes federal land managers from national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges and Bureau of Land Management's National System of Public Lands across the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA): the largest, essentially intact natural area in the lower 48 states. Together, these agencies manage 15 million acres of federal land. The committee was formed to pursue opportunities of mutual cooperation and coordination in the management of core federal lands within the GYA. Participating federal land managers administer three national parks (Yellowstone, Grand Teton & John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway), two national wildlife refuges (National Elk Refuge, Red Rock Lakes), six national forests (Bridger-Teton, Caribou-Targhee, Shoshone, Custer, Gallatin, and Beaverhead-Deerlodge), and Bureau of Land Management – administered lands in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.*

Information about the GYCC and links to member agency websites are available at: http://www.fedgycc.org/

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 2014 14-09

Lori Iverson
307.733.9212, ext. 6

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM TO BLEND ART AND SCIENCE

The National Elk Refuge is excited to partner with the National Museum of Wildlife Art for the museum's final Wild Wednesday program of the season on Wednesday, March 19 from 5:30 – 9:00 PM. The winter series at the art museum allows guests to indulge in a tapas–inspired menu in the Rising Sage Cafe, explore the galleries, and relax to the piano music of Francis Koerber, Teton Virtuoso.

On March 19, Refuge seasonal naturalist Mike Nordell will pair up with museum docent Bobbi Thomasma to offer a guided gallery tour at 6:00 PM, repeated at 8:00 PM. The duo will share both a naturalist's and artist's perspective on the pieces along the tour, with a special emphasis on two exhibitions: *The Darwin Legacy: The Evolution of Wildlife Art* and *Elegy: The African Photography of Nick Brandt 2001–2008*. "The Darwin exhibit provides a perfect platform to discuss the connections between scientists and artists," explains Becky Kimmel, Director of Programs and Events for the museum. "We look forward to the opportunity to examine the interchange between the two disciplines."

The National Museum of Wildlife Art recommends reservations for those that plan to dine at the cafe that evening. Seating times are available from 5:30 – 8:00 PM and can be reserved by calling (307) 732.5434.

The outreach by the National Elk Refuge staff is one of several activities planned this month in celebration of the 111th birthday of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Refuge staff will offer additional educational programming at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson, from March 14–23. More information on the 10–day celebration of national wildlife refuges can be found on the National Elk Refuge's web page at *http://1.usa.gov/1geRi5W.*

– FWS –

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Elk Refuge News – March 25, 2014

Ten-day Refuge System Celebration Draws to a Close

Above: The Snow King Hill Climb, a popular Jackson event, brought in enough local traffic on the last four days of the celebration to boost the regional number of pins.

Right: Winter naturalist Justin St. Onge watches as a visitor pins her refuge. Refuges in the western United States ended up getting more pins than those east of the Mississippi River.

For ten days this month, the first exhibit greeting guests at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center was a large United States map and a bowl of pins. The map, listing all the units within the National Wildlife Refuge System, went up on March 14 as part of celebration of the 111th birthday of the Refuge System and was a means to show visitors how large the System has grown. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service within the Department of the Interior.

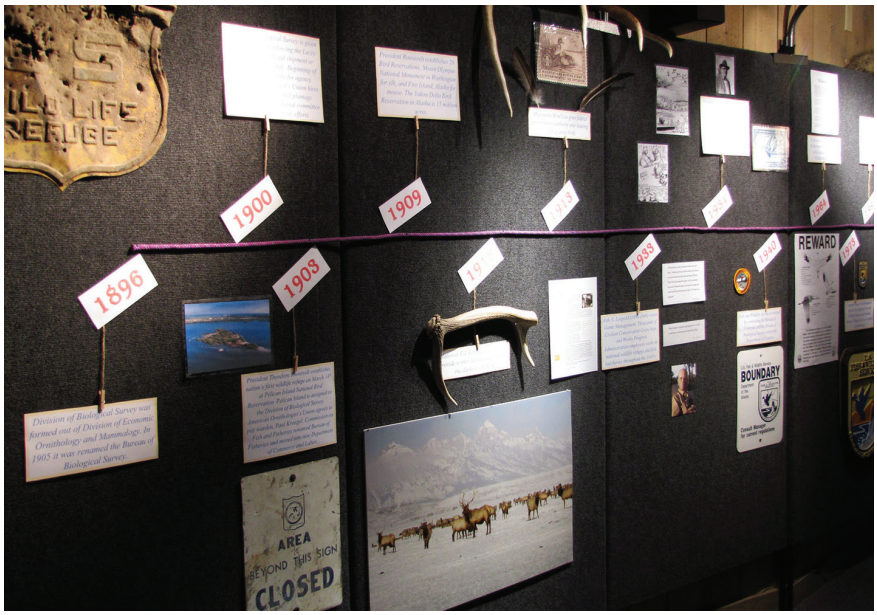
In the spirit of March Madness and friendly competition, people were asked to place a pin on the national wildlife refuge closest to their home while winter naturalists kept an eye on which part of the country, what wildlife refuge, and which states led the challenge.

Though the east coast initially captured and retained the lead for the first few days, the western United States gained momentum and snatched the victory on the final weekend of the ten–day celebration. The victory was fueled by a large regional event held in Jackson March 20 – 23 that brought in many visitors from throughout Wyoming and two of the neighboring states. Final results: refuges in the western United States = 391; refuges east of the Mississippi River = 246. The top five states receiving the most pins included:

- Wyoming – 76
- Texas – 44
- Idaho – 38
- Georgia – 39
- California – 34

Activity organizers were unsure of what the outcome of the

competition would be, but they set and reached their primary objective: to raise awareness of the number of refuges protecting habitat and wildlife throughout the nation. "We had people asking if they should pin the refuge closest to where they live now, where they were born ... we left it entirely up to them," explained Education and Outreach Specialist Lori Iverson, who came up the idea of the map. "Either way, it got them looking at the number and location of wildlife refuges." Staff watched with smiles as one of the first participants pulled out his mobile phone and navigated to Google Maps to ensure he selected the closest of several refuges near his home. "He was fastidious about making sure he was accurate," Iverson added.



A National Wildlife Refuge System time line used a variety of items such as signs, pictures, historical photos and text to interpret significant dates.

The map project was only one of several activities held to celebrate the establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Two temporary displays were set up in the small theater located on the top level of the Visitor Center. The first exhibit was a time line showing significant dates throughout the history of the Refuge System. The second display highlighted the 80–year history of the Federal Duck Stamp program. Duck Stamps serve as a vital tool for wetland conservation, with ninety-eight cents out of every dollar generated by the sales going directly to purchase or lease wetland habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System. Refuge naturalists shared images of some of the previous Duck Stamps from throughout the years and set up a crafts station nearby with art supplies and reference books. Visitors could create their own stamp on a template and hang up their completed work as part of the display.

Both children and adults enjoyed creating their own Duck Stamp. Rick Howe, Director of Visitor Services for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, joined in the fun to create this art work.

An off–site evening program was also offered to guests during the National Wildlife Refuge System celebration. The National Elk Refuge partnered with the National Museum of Wildlife Art for the museum's final "Wild Wednesday" program of the season on March 19. The winter series at the art museum allows guests to indulge in a tapas–inspired menu in the cafe, explore the galleries, and relax to piano music in the lobby.

On March 19, Refuge seasonal naturalist Mike Nordell paired up with museum docent Bobbi Thomasma to offer guided gallery tours at 6:00 and 8:00 PM. The duo shared both a naturalist's and artist's perspective on the pieces along the tour, with a special emphasis on two exhibitions: *The Darwin Legacy: The Evolution of Wildlife Art* and *Elegy: The African Photography of Nick Brandt 2001–2008*. Nordell spoke on a variety of topics during his portion of the gallery walk, including National Elk Refuge history, wildlife conservation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ivory Crush held last November in Denver.

"In general, people were excited to find and learn about refuges closest to their home," said winter naturalist Justin St. Onge, who organized the event. "If our celebration results in raised awareness and more visits to refuges in the future, we accomplished our mission."

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

PO Box 510
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2014 14-10

Lori Iverson
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SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING TO CONCLUDE FOR THE SEASON

Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today that supplemental feeding of elk and bison wintering on the National Elk Refuge will conclude for the season this week. The decision, made in conjunction with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department, was based on relatively warm temperatures and the rate of snow melt at Refuge monitoring sites.

As spring–like conditions move into the area, biologists monitor and record snow depths and signs of green–up. These serve as primary indicators that supplemental feeding can be ended for the year. During the past two weeks, biologists have measured a noticeable reduction in the snow pack at McBride Ridge, one of the Refuge's highest points of elevation, with more bare ground becoming exposed. A snow depth gauge at the Refuge headquarters site recorded 0" of snow cover last week.

Field observers have also noted numbers of both elk and bison moving to the northeast end of the Refuge and, in some cases, migrating off the Refuge. Some of the animals remaining on the Refuge have been staying at higher elevations during the day rather than retreating to lower ground where supplemental feed is provided. When snow–free ground becomes available, the wintering animals will search out new spring growth or residual forage from the previous growing season. Biologists have started seeing spring green–up throughout the Refuge at all elevations.

The end date and total number of days for the supplemental feeding program can vary greatly from year to year. This year's feeding program began on February 4, 11 days later than the 10–year average. Though the average end date for feeding is within the first few days of April, this season's feeding season will total 57 days, or two weeks shorter than the 10–year average of 71 days. Staff providing supplemental feed began reducing the amount of alfalfa pellets distributed daily last week, gradually reducing the amount of feed through Tuesday, April 1.

Horse–drawn rides on the National Elk Refuge are schedule to continue through Saturday, April 5. Wagons are substituted for sleighs when inadequate snow remains, but visitors can still get close to elk remaining in the area. Tickets are sold at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center, located at 532 North Cache Street in Jackson. For further information on the horse–drawn rides, please call 307.733.0277 or 1.800.772.5386.

– FWS –