When President Theodore Roosevelt made Florida’s tiny Pelican Island a refuge for birds, he began a movement that would eventually make the United States the world’s largest network of wildlife refuges. Today, the nearly 550 refuges across the country, which range from Alaska to Puerto Rico and from Maine to Guam, cover more than 90 million acres and provide important habitat for millions of migratory birds and other wildlife.

Visitors—more than 40 million each year—are welcome on 98 percent of wildlife refuges. The refuges are managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which works with federal, state, territorial and private partners to conserve and restore America’s wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of the nation and future generations. The service also maintains more than 450 National Wildlife Refuges across the country.

The refuges are managed to provide important habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. They offer opportunities for hunting, fishing, bird-watching, boating, hiking, photography and wildlife viewing. Visitors may also receive educational programs and other services, such as boat launches, fishing piers, overlooks and viewing areas.

The refuges receive support from a combination of federal, state and private sources, including a partnership with Congress called the Wildlife Conservation and Wetland Assistance Act, which provides federal matching funds to the states to help them purchase or hold land in refuges. Other funding comes from donations, the Wetland Management District Office (WMD), and the sale of refuge passes and hunting licenses.

The refuges are open to the public in all weather conditions, and visitors are encouraged to explore their offerings. For more information, visitors can visit the website of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at www.fws.gov/refuges.