



CELEBRATING A  
**CENTURY**  
of CONSERVATION

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# The Centennial Trail:

## *Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge*



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It all began with one man and one boat, protecting pelicans on a small five and a half-acre island in Florida. On March 14, 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established our nation's first national wildlife refuge at Pelican Island and sparked a conservation movement. From that humble beginning arose America's National Wildlife Refuge System, which today encompasses over 95 million acres on over 540 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas. The refuge system is the world's largest and most diverse network of lands dedicated to the protection and management of wildlife.

Despite its historical significance and uniqueness as the first national wildlife refuge, the refuge has never been able to provide the public an opportunity to see Pelican Island, until this year. To give the public the chance to see this special place, The Centennial Trail was constructed at the refuge, marking the Centennial of Pelican Island and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The trail was the focal point of the National Centennial Celebration at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge on March 14, 2003. On that day, the trail was dedicated and opened by the Secretary of Interior, Gale Norton, the Assistant Secretary, Craig Manson; the Fish and Wildlife Service Director, Steve Williams, Pat Donahoe of the United States Postal Service; and Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge Manager, Paul Tritaik. Special guests included descendents of Paul Kroegel - the first refuge manager at Pelican Island; Joe Michael, former President of the Indian River Area Preservation League who helped save the refuge from development threats in the 1960's; and our current partners and sponsors who made these facilities possible.

The trail consists of a footpath leading to a boardwalk and an observation tower and is the focal point of the refuges new public facilities.



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### The Centennial Trail Boardwalk and Observation Tower

- Meanders for 3/4 mile through restored wetlands, tidal mangroves, and hydric hammocks.

- Incorporates over 540 engraved planks – one for each refuge in the system established between 1903 and 2003 – spaced throughout the length of the boardwalk.

Each engraved plank includes the refuge name, its state or territory and establishment year.

The planks are placed in successive order of establishment, beginning with the most current and counting backwards towards the first refuge – Pelican Island – at the observation tower.

- Includes interpretive panels on the significant accomplishments of the refuge system for wildlife conservation in America, and the people who made it happen.

- Incorporates gently inclining slopes and eight-foot wide paths allowing universal accessibility.

- Features an eighteen-foot tall observation tower, located amongst the mangrove and cabbage palm fringe of the Indian River Lagoon, which provides the closest land-based opportunity to view Pelican Island.

The tower includes two mounted spotting scopes for viewing the Pelican Island rookery.

- Constructed through a partnership with Indian River County, St. Johns Water Management District, Florida Inland Navigation District, Florida Power and Light, ConocoPhillips, Wild Birds Unlimited, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and many others.

These facilities are only part of a larger conceptual plan for refuge public facilities in partnership with Indian River County. Additional boardwalks, a covered overlook and a wildlife drive are planned. Annual visitation to the refuge could reach many thousands once the public facilities are complete; due to the refuge's location just 15 miles east of the heavily traveled I-95 corridor; its proximity to a number of attractions with high tourist visitation; and its uniqueness as a national attraction for the refuge system.

For more information, contact: Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, 1339 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Vero Beach, FL 32960, phone: 772/562 3909, email: pelicanisland@fws.gov



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