

Refuge System Centennial Celebration continues next Saturday

by Bill Kent

Regular readers of the Refuge Notebook series know that 2003 is the Centennial year of the National Wildlife Refuge System. There have been many events across the country celebrating President Theodore Roosevelt's 1903 Executive Order first establishing the world's only system of lands specifically set aside to protect and manage wildlife and wildlife habitat. We hope you will join us for one last event next Saturday, September 27th.

The Kenai Peninsula State Fairgrounds in Ninilchik was the site for a wonderful celebration in August that drew more than 2,000 people. U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Gale Norton and other dignitaries helped Kenai and Alaska Maritime Refuges commemorate the Refuge Centennial that day. The fantastic turnout and participation of more than twenty of our partners confirmed the importance of these two refuges to the citizens of the Kenai Peninsula.

The next Centennial event on the peninsula is taking place at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 27th. Needless to say, you and your family are invited to participate, just in case you missed the Ninilchik event. The Kenai Refuge will be opening a new hiking trail at Refuge Headquarters, on Ski Hill Road that day. Designated the Centennial Trail, the new route is a new loop off the popular Keen Eye Trail, and is nearly one mile long. This trail will take users through boreal forest, and alongside small lakes and wetland areas that promise new wildlife viewing opportunities at the headquarters area.

As a final celebratory event of the Centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System, there will also

be a short ceremony to commemorate the burial of a time capsule. The capsule will contain mementos from the Refuge staff, which relate their thoughts and remembrances of this memorable year, and in the case of some of us "old timers" the preceding years worked on National Wildlife Refuges. We hope that in 100 years, the staff of Kenai Refuge will unearth the capsule and gain an understanding and appreciation of the first one hundred years.

A large boulder will be placed over the capsule, and will have a bronze plaque mounted on it that recognizes the importance of the Centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge staff has sincere hope that everyone who uses the Centennial Trail will take the time to read the plaque and reflect on what a truly marvelous gift both of the Presidents Roosevelt provided him or her.

Finally, I personally take this opportunity to tell you I am grateful to have worked on National Wildlife Refuges over the past twenty-six years, and that Americans like you have supported and helped protect them. I have witnessed many remarkable wildlife events and truly enjoyed trying to convey to visitors the wonders of a remarkable system of lands and waters. I hope my descendants are able to enjoy Refuges and celebrate a Bi-Centennial in 2103.

Bill is the Kenai Refuge Supervisory Park Ranger and lives in Sterling; his daughter will begin her freshman year at the University of Washington later this month. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters in Soldotna, call (907) 262-7021. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://kenai.fws.gov>.