

Celebrating Kenai Refuge's 75th birthday in 75 ways

by Matt Conner



75 Things to Do at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in its 75th Year



2016 is the 75th birthday of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. For fun or as a challenge, complete the checklist of 75 things to do on the refuge this year.

I've started a new tradition in our home for 2016. Every Friday night we write down something special that happened to us during the week and place it in a jar that sits on top of the refrigerator. On New Year's Eve, we will take out all those pieces of paper and read what we wrote as special and significant events for 2016.

Last Friday was our first entry and I realized I needed to set some "sideboards" as my 10 year old daughter's entry read, "I am thankful the apocalypse is not yet upon us." Knowing her sense of humor I asked for clarification if this was referencing zombie apocalypses or regular ones. She said it was an all-inclusive apocalyptic reference. Regardless of this little setback,

I am confident they will catch on and record some special memories for this year. I have little doubt that we will experience dozens of apocalypse-free experiences as living on the Kenai Peninsula presents endless opportunities for exploration!

This year is a special time for all of us to explore and learn more about what makes the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge such an amazing place. 2016 marks a very special year—it's the Refuge's 75th Birthday!

Established as the Kenai Moose Range on December 16, 1941, just 9 days after Pearl Harbor and America's entry in the WW II, President Franklin Roosevelt had a long range vision for our nation that included an ongoing conservation heritage as well as the defense

of our nation from foreign foes. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act changed our name to Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and expanded our purposes to include conservation of the natural diversity of fish and wildlife populations and habitats on almost 2 million acres of boreal ecosystems. Congress also designated two-thirds of Kenai Refuge as Wilderness to protect the naturalness and wilderness character of this wonderful place.

National Wildlife Refuges provide both important wildlife habitats and opportunities for appropriate wildlife-dependent recreation. This year, our staff has challenged our visitors to experience what makes Kenai Refuge special. We have developed a checklist of 75 ways to enjoy the 75th anniversary. Participants record their activities on the checklist to track their progress throughout the year. The activities and challenges developed for this list are designed to enhance our visitors' experiences while learning more about the significance of Wilderness, the Refuge, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

It is our hope that the 75 on the 75th list graces the front of refrigerators throughout many Alaskan homes this year. Perhaps we will explore new areas of the Refuge, discover new species, and learn new outdoor skills or hobbies that we will continue for many years to come. Visitors can obtain a checklist by downloading it from our website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>, our facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge/>, or pick up a copy at the Refuge headquarters or visitor center.

On the Refuge's birthday, December 16th, 2016, we will invite all who participated to attend our celebration and to share their experiences at the Refuge visitor

center on Ski Hill Road. Participants who complete 25 or more of the 75 items on the checklist will receive a special gift to remind them of their adventures on the Refuge during this special time! Our top three participants with the highest number of completed tasks will receive additional keepsakes linked to their refuge experiences.

The list provides new ideas and challenges that many of us might not have thought to try on our own. Some of the "75 items" include spend a night in a refuge cabin, learn to identify 5 native plants, attend a guided refuge photo safari, take an inexperienced angler fishing on the refuge, and prepare wild game, fish or berries within the Refuge and share your recipe! My personal favorite is "visit a ranger at the Kenai River Festival and practice fly fishing with them." This is sure to be a great time for visitors as well as Refuge staff! These ideas are just a handful of opportunities that are to be experienced as visitors check off their accomplishments throughout the year.

I am certain that as I sit around the fireplace on New Year's Eve this year, a great deal of our special family memories for 2016 will have come from the 75-on-the-75th list. As an employee of the Refuge I am excited to share this list of experiences with our visitors. As a father, I am ready to get started on our year of exploration with checklist in hand as we celebrate the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge during our new adventures (hopefully none of which will include a zombie apocalypse)!

Matt Conner is the Visitor Services Manager at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Like the refuge at <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.