



*Celebrating a
Century
of Conservation!*

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

America's National Wildlife Refuge System

Recreation and Education

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's most unique network of lands and waters set aside specifically for conservation of fish, wildlife and plants. President Theodore Roosevelt established the first refuge, 3-acre Pelican Island Bird Reservation in Florida's Indian River Lagoon, in 1903. Roosevelt went on to create 55 more refuges before he left office in 1909; today the refuge system encompasses more than 500 units spread over nearly 94 million acres.

For nearly a century, national wildlife refuges have been great places to get away from it all and experience the great outdoors. As the National Wildlife Refuge System prepares to mark its centennial in 2003, the system has refined its mission to put wildlife conservation first while providing recreation and education opportunities for a growing number of visitors—more than 35 million last year alone.

The origin of the National Wildlife Refuge System is steeped in a tradition of protecting migratory birds, so many refuges have been established along the four major bird migration routes, or flyways (Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific). Excellent bird-watching opportunities abound on those refuges.

But refuges aren't just for bird watching! More than 35 million people visit national wildlife refuges each year to hunt, fish, and observe and photograph all types of wildlife, and to learn more about the natural world at some of the nation's wildest places. Partnerships with conservation and sporting groups help the refuge system increase opportunities for recreation.

When it passed the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act—the refuge system's first “organic”

legislation—Congress established hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation as “priority public uses” where compatible with the mission and purpose of an individual refuge. Refuge managers use sound professional judgement in determining compatible public uses, and the Refuge System Improvement Act established a formal process for determining what is a compatible use on a refuge.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

More than 16 million visitors came to national wildlife refuges in 1999 to watch birds, mammals and fish. Among the activities they enjoyed:

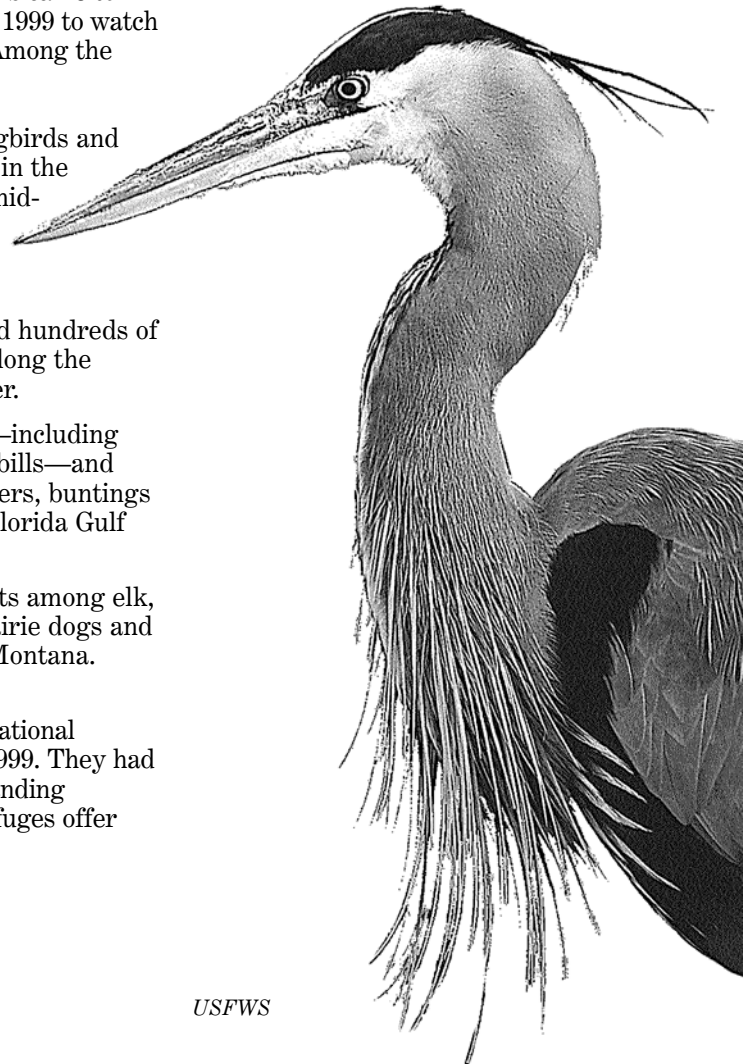
- Watching migrating songbirds and mating horseshoe crabs in the summertime along the mid-Atlantic coast.
- Observing twenty different duck species, 10,000 tundra swans, and hundreds of bald eagles take flight along the California-Oregon border.
- Admiring wading birds—including egrets, ibises and spoonbills—and songbirds such as warblers, buntings and cuckoos along the Florida Gulf coast.
- Watching brilliant sunsets among elk, pronghorn antelope, prairie dogs and black-footed ferrets in Montana.

Recreational Fishing

Six million people visited national wildlife refuges to fish in 1999. They had plenty of choices for outstanding angling: more than 260 refuges offer fishing opportunities.

Among the experiences anglers may enjoy on national wildlife refuges:

- Reeling in trophy northern pike and bluegill in Nebraska.
- Seeking bass, bream and crappie amidst bottomland hardwoods in the Southeast.
- Finding magnificent trophy king salmon in Alaska.



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Hunting

About 2 million hunters come to national wildlife refuges each year. Nearly 300 refuges offer hunting—from big game to waterfowl—so no matter where you live, if you're looking for hunting you're sure to find opportunity close to home.

A few examples of excellent hunting programs on national wildlife refuges include:

- Hunting for moose, black and brown bear, and barren-ground caribou at Alaska's interior refuges.
- Snipe, pheasant and quail hunting in Oregon.
- Pursuing white-tailed deer, squirrel, racoon and rabbit hunting in Alabama.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

Students by the busload and adults by the millions visit refuges each year—on their own or as part of school or tour groups—to learn more about the environment. Many national wildlife refuges have environmental education programs ranging from interpretive nature walks for local school children to full-scale teacher-training programs. Many refuges also have environmental education centers.

Environmental education opportunities at refuges include:

- Outdoor classroom activities and education about the importance of saltmarsh habitat to migratory birds near San Francisco.
- A Midwestern prairie learning center with exhibits on prairie management and restoration, simulation of an underground insect burrow and other interactive experiences.
- A visitor center near the nation's capital that offers wildlife management demonstrations and year-round outdoor education sites for local schools.

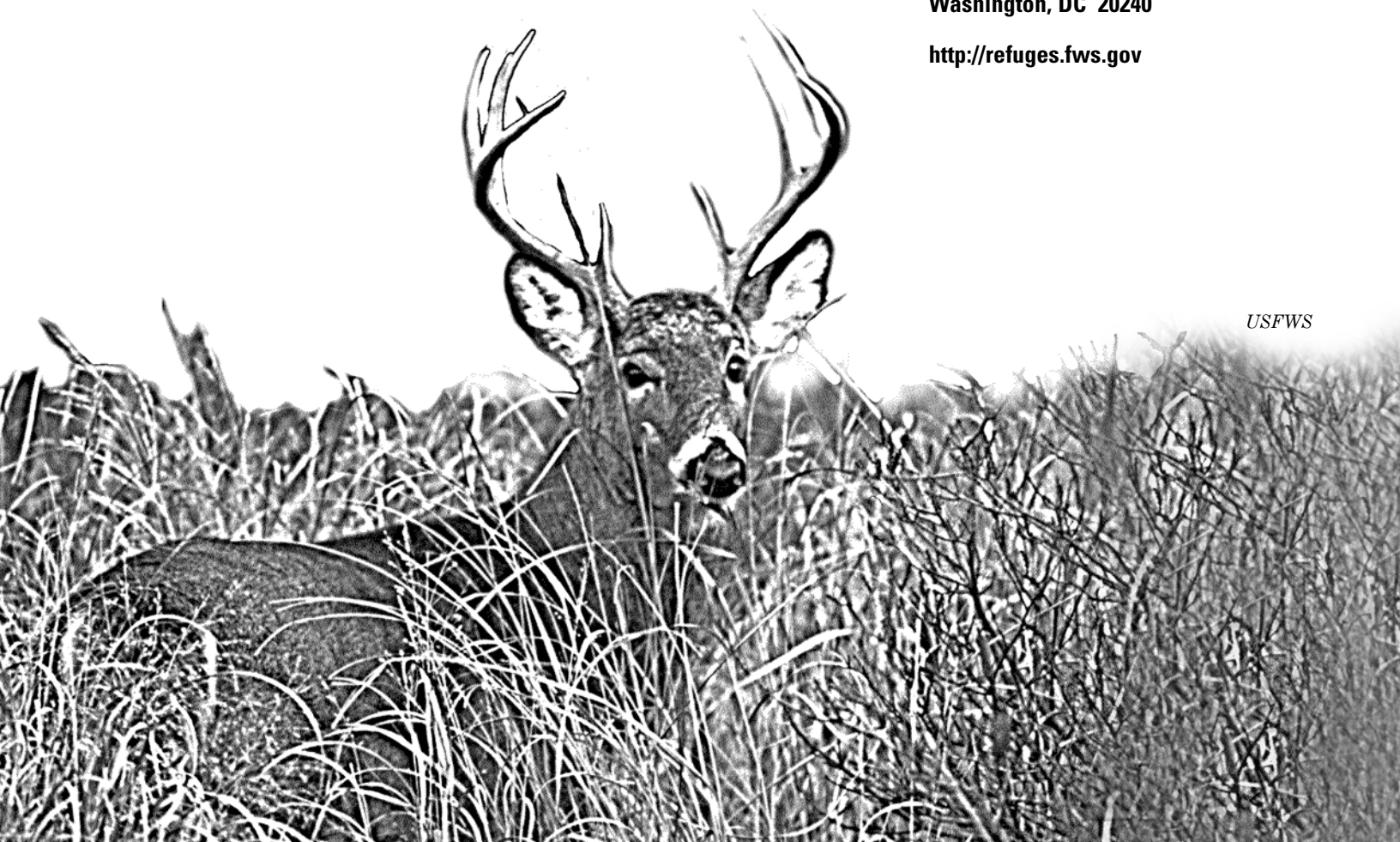
Cooperation Increases Recreational Opportunities

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has entered into a number of partnerships with conservation, recreation and sportsmens organizations to promote recreation on national wildlife refuges. For example:

- A partnership with the National Wild Turkey Federation expanded cooperation in the protection, conservation and management of habitat for wild turkeys on national wildlife refuges. Some 450,000 hunters pursue turkeys and other upland game on national wildlife refuges each year.
- In 1997, the Service inked an agreement with the North American Nature Photography Association to promote wildlife and nature photography on national wildlife refuges.
- The Service and Safari Club International cooperatively promote conservation, education, public service and wise stewardship of public lands.

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