The Fish and Wildlife Service is working hard to provide universally accessible opportunities to enjoy America’s Best Kept Secret. National wildlife refuges are far more than havens for wildlife. To conservationists, they are the concrete embodiment of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s mission to conserve, protect, and enhance wildlife and its habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. 

Welcome to Your National Wildlife Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) is the largest and most diverse network of lands and waters in the world dedicated to the protection of natural resources and the conservation and restoration of the environment. Established in 1939, the NWRS today protects more than 150 million acres of land, including over 300 National Wildlife Refuges, in 54 states, the territories of Guam and American Samoa, and the District of Columbia. The system is managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

National Wildlife Refuges

For more information on national wildlife refuges, visit the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s website at www.fws.gov.

Why Wildlife Refuges?

The National Wildlife Refuge System protects wildlife habitats and provides opportunities for the public to experience the beauty of nature. Whether you’re a nature lover, a birdwatcher, a hiker, a photographer, or simply someone who enjoys spending time in nature, there’s something for everyone at a national wildlife refuge. 

From the Smallest Beginning... 

The National Wildlife Refuge System was established in 1939 with the creation of the first national wildlife refuge, the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. Since then, the system has grown to include over 300 refuges of varying sizes and shapes, from small wetland sanctuaries to large national wildlife refuges. Each refuge is unique, with its own special features, wildlife, and natural resources. 

National wildlife refuges are far more than havens for wildlife. They are also places where people can connect with nature, learn about the environment, and experience the thrill of watching wildlife in its natural setting.

Caring for Wildlife and Their Surroundings

For visitors, America’s wildlife refuges are a rare opportunity to see and experience a wide variety of wildlife in their natural habitats. Visitors can observe birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians in their natural surroundings. Many refuges also offer opportunities for education and interpretation, allowing visitors to learn about the wildlife and natural resources of the area.

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Note:

Only refuges with recreational and educational visitor facilities are included in this guide. Revisiting, special activities, and seasonal closures may occur. For more information, contact the refuge or check the USFWS website.