

Our National Wildlife Refuge System Turns 100

by Lorrie Beck

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photos by Mike Blair



President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Executive Order on March 14, 1903, establishing Pelican Island as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds. He was attempting to prevent the slaughter of herons, egrets, and pelicans for their feathers. Did he realize the legacy he was bestowing on the American public? Did he envision the vast system of lands – the National Wildlife Refuge

System – that would grow from this simple proclamation?

A century later, the legacy lives on. From a single, 3-acre refuge at Pelican Island, the National Wildlife Refuge System has grown to nearly 540 national wildlife refuges nationwide. There is a national wildlife refuge within an hour's drive of every major city in the U.S. and one in every state and many U.S. Territories. These refuges total 94

million acres and come in various sizes, ranging from the 1/2-acre Mille Lacs National Wildlife Refuge (Minnesota) to the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Alaska) at nearly 20 million acres. Large and small refuges alike are each unique and protect a diversity of habitats which support more than 700 bird species, 220 mammal species, 250 reptile and amphibian species and 200 species of fish.

National wildlife refuges are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a living heritage, conserving wildlife and habitat for people today and future generations. To the nearly 35 million people who visit national wildlife refuges each year, they are a mosaic of special places to hunt, fish, photograph, and enjoy wildlife. Refuges also provide learning opportunities through environmental education and interpretation.

Four national wildlife refuges are located in Kansas. Kirwin, Quivira, Flint Hills and Marais des Cygnes are truly unique and spectacular wildlife refuges. All harbor diverse species and welcome thousands of visitors each year. These areas encompass nearly 67,000 acres of grasslands, wooded riparian areas, open water, wetlands, and croplands that provide nesting cover, food, and shelter for songbirds, waterfowl, upland game birds and mammals. Recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography and hiking can be enjoyed on all Kansas national wildlife refuges.

To commemorate the Centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System, each is planning special events and festivities for visitors of all ages in March. The public is invited to investigate, explore and marvel in the wildlife legacy begun by President Teddy Roosevelt in 1903. 🦶



A snowy egret perches on a post near one of the wetland pools at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County.

For information on specific Centennial events that will take place at Kansas refuges, contact the following:

Flint Hills NWR
 PO Box 128
 Hartford, KS 66854
 (620) 392-5553
flinthills.fws.gov

Great Plains Nature Center
 6232 E. 29th St. N
 Wichita, KS 67220
 (316) 683-5499
www.gpnc.org

Kirwin NWR
 RR 3, Box 48A
 Kirwin, KS 67644
 (785) 543-6673
kirwin.fws.gov

Marais des Cygnes NWR
 24141 KS Hwy 52
 Pleasanton, KS 66075
 (913) 352-8956
maraisdescygn.es.fws.gov

Quivira NWR
 Rt. 3, Box 48A
 Stafford, KS 67578
 (620) 486-2393
quivira.fws.gov