

[From Spring 2002]

Centennial Commission Established

Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton recently announced the appointment of a 19-member Centennial Commission who will join her in celebrating the 100th birthday of the National Wildlife Refuge System in 2003, and mapping out a plan to ensure that some of this country's greatest natural treasures can be enjoyed by all Americans for the next 100 years.

"Like President Theodore Roosevelt who created the National Wildlife Refuge System nearly 100 years ago, President Bush is committed to protecting our valuable wildlife heritage now and for future generations," said Secretary Norton. "As we celebrate a century of conservation, I know that each commission member will work hard to strengthen the National Wildlife Refuge System for the next hundred years. The President joins me in thanking them for their commitment to this important endeavor."

Commission members include:

- Ramona Seeligson Bass, Board of Directors, Fort Worth Zoo, and Director of the Texas Wild Campaign
- Michael Bean, Wildlife Program Chair, Environmental Defense
- Peter Coors, Vice Chairman and CEO, Coors Brewing Company
- Lynn Greenwalt, former Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Jack Hama, host of television's "Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures"
- William P. Horn, Counsel, Sportsmen's Alliance, and former Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife and Parks
- Karl Malone, twelve-time NBA All-Star, Utah Jazz, and Olympic Gold Medalist
- John L. Morris, CEO, Bass Pro and former Chairman of the Board, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Kym Murphy, Corporate Vice President of Environmental Policy, Walt Disney Company
- Daniel Pedrotti, former President, Boone and Crockett Club.

"We are also fortunate to have eight distinguished Members of Congress on this Centennial Commission who have already shown their leadership through their work on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission and important committees that oversee the National Wildlife Refuge System," added Norton. "I know we can count on them to join with our other commissioners to make our Centennial celebration a success."

Commission members from Congress are:

- Senator James Jeffords (I-VT), Chairman, Committee on Environment and Public Works
- Senator Robert C. Smith (R-NH), Committee on Environment and Public Works
- Rep. James V. Hansen (R-UT), Chairman, Committee on Resources
- Rep. Nick J. Rahall II (D-WV), Committee on Resources
- Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), Migratory Bird Conservation Commission
- Senator John Breaux (D-LA), Migratory Bird Conservation Commission
- Representative John O. Dingell (D-MI), Migratory Bird Conservation Commission
- Representative Curt Weldon (R-PA), Migratory Bird Conservation Commission

The Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also serves as an ex-officio member of the Centennial Commission.

The Centennial Commission was established under the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act of 2000. Intended to strengthen and highlight the National Wildlife Refuge System for its upcoming 100th birthday, the act charged the Secretary of the Interior with naming a commission of distinguished citizens to rally public support for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The act requests that the President proclaim 2003 the "Year of the Wildlife Refuge" and requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a long-term plan to meet the priority operation, maintenance, and construction needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The National Wildlife Refuge System, the only system of federal land devoted specifically to wildlife, is a network of diverse and strategically located habitats, teeming with millions of migratory birds, serving as safe haven for hundreds of endangered species and hosting an enormous variety of other plants and animals.

When President Theodore Roosevelt made Florida's tiny Pelican Island a refuge for birds in 1903, he wrote the first chapter of America's greatest conservation success story. A century in the making, this story of safeguarding America's migratory birds, animals, and important fisheries keeps getting better and better.

In the past one hundred years, America's National Wildlife Refuge System has protected hundreds of wild species, including our national symbol, the bald eagle. As the National Wildlife Refuge System enters its second century, it comprises nearly 100 million acres, protected within more than 535 refuges and thousands of small prairie wetlands.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants, and their habitats, for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 535 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.