

[From Fall 1995]

## **Wildlife Refuge Week October 8-14**

"National Wildlife Refuge Week is a time for all Americans to learn about and celebrate this magnificent collection of lands we as a people have set aside for wildlife," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie. She invited everyone to join her in observing the week as "...a reminder and renewal of America's spirited commitment to wildlife conservation."

President Roosevelt established the first National Wildlife Refuge in 1903 (Pelican Island, Florida) to protect herons, egrets, and other colonial nesting birds from slaughter by market hunters. He established 50 more refuges during his presidency, nearly all to protect species threatened with extinction, such as the bison.

Today, that legacy has grown to more than 500 refuges, covering 92 million acres in all 50 states and several territories. They range in size from a half acre to 20 million acres and include every kind of ecosystem in the country, from deserts and mountains to swamps and remote islands. It is the only system of its kind in the world, dedicated to wildlife and to conserving wildlife habitat.

The second week in October will be observed annually as National Wildlife Refuge Week. Looking towards the system's 100th anniversary in 2003, Director Beattie said, "By that time we hope to make all Americans aware of National Wildlife Refuges as places to enjoy wildlife, to hunt, to fish, to watch, and to learn about our natural heritage."