

Summary Article: **wildlife refuge**

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haven or sanctuary for animals; an area of land or of land and water set aside and maintained, usually by government or private organization, for the preservation and protection of one or more species of wildlife.

Types of Refuges

The U.S. Wildlife Refuge System in 1997 comprised more than 520 different areas in all the states, covering over 93 million acres (37.7 million hectares). The system is administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Dept. of the Interior. The service was established in 1940 by consolidation of the Bureau of Biological Survey (est. 1885 in the Dept. of Agriculture) and the Bureau of Fisheries (est. 1871 as an independent office). The work of the service includes biological research, the administration and enforcement of relevant federal legislation, and numerous related projects.

Refuges have been established for big game (e.g., bison, bighorn sheep, and elk), small resident game, waterfowl, and colonial nongame birds (e.g., pelicans, terns, and gulls). By far the most numerous are the waterfowl refuges, which variously supply breeding areas, wintering areas, and resting and feeding areas along major flyways during migration. Although the main purpose of the refuge system is to ensure survival of wildlife by providing suitable cover, food, and protection from humans, many refuges permit hunting and fishing in season and other recreational activities such as hiking, boating, and swimming. Some refuges have been designated wilderness areas.

Refuges have been established by private individuals and societies (the Nature Conservancy and the National Audubon Society are notable for their pioneering conservation work) and by all levels of government. The first state refuge was established by California in 1870; the first federal refuge was Pelican Island in Florida (1903). Other countries throughout the world also maintain parks, refuges, and game preserves. One of the oldest is the vast Kruger National Park (est. 1898) for the preservation of big game in South Africa. In more recent years, nations have established largely or entirely aquatic marine parks, reserves, and other protected areas to help ensure the survival of sea life.

History

In the United States limited game laws were passed in various states in the late 17th cent., but it was not until after the mid-19th cent. that legislation dealt with the depletion of wildlife. By that time, the populations of many birds and mammals had been alarmingly reduced, and some species had become extinct, chiefly because of the indiscriminate slaughter of animals for feathers and hides, for food, for sport, and also because of the destruction of habitat by the draining of swamps and leveling of forests for farming and human settlement. Modern wildlife conservation policy began with a conference of state governors and other officials called by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 to inventory the nation's natural resources; its immediate outcome was the appointment of a national conservation commission, followed shortly by the establishment of similar commissions in most of the states (see conservation of natural resources).

Milestones in early legislation designed to preserve wildlife in the United States were the Lacey Act (1900), regulating imports of and interstate commerce in birds and mammals, and a similar

supplementary act for black bass (1926); the establishment (1916) of the National Park Service, which forbids hunting within its parks; international treaties for the protection of migratory birds made by the United States with Canada (1918) and with Mexico (1937); the Norbeck-Andresen Migratory-Bird Conservation Act (1929), which provided for the development of a system of refuges; and an act (1934) requiring hunters of migratory fowl to purchase a stamp and a similar act (1937) establishing a tax on arms and ammunition, the funds raised in both cases to be used for wildlife preservation programs. More recent legislation to protect wildlife has included the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970, other antipollution legislation, and the Endangered Species Acts of 1966, 1969, 1973, 1978, 1982, and 1988 (see endangered species).

In 1948 an international conference established the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The first international organization devoted solely to wildlife conservation and environmental protection, the union by 1999 had a membership of 146 countries. The group was instrumental in convening the 1973 meeting in Washington, D.C., that drafted the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. In connection with the convention more than 350 biosphere reserves have been established in more than 80 countries.

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