



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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News

03-03

For Immediate Release
February 25, 2003

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A 16-day Countdown to the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial

On March 14, 2003, the National Wildlife Refuge System, the only system of federal lands in America dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation, will celebrate its 100th birthday. This event is particularly significant here in Alaska. Although there are refuges in every state in the nation, Alaska's 16 refuges account for more than 80% of the acreage in the entire National Wildlife Refuge System. In order to spread the word about our state's national treasures, and about the Centennial, we've prepared a 16-day countdown to the National Wildlife Refuge System's 100th birthday, with each day of the countdown celebrating something special about one of Alaska's 16 refuges. Images to accompany the following items are available on the web at: <http://alaska.fws.gov/>. (Simply click on "Centennial Countdown" under "Hot Issues," then go to the "Refuge Photo Gallery.")

February 27, 15 days to the Centennial: Just forty years ago, many biologists believed that the Aleutian Canada goose that had long nested on the islands of Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge was extinct. Then, in 1962, Bob "Sea Otter" Jones, manager of the Aleutian National Wildlife Refuge (which would later form a portion of Alaska Maritime NWR) located a remnant population on remote Buldir Island. Thanks to a multi-state recovery program that involved removing non-native foxes from breeding islands and imposing hunting restrictions elsewhere in the birds' range, this population grew from an estimated 200-300 birds to more than 37,000 Aleutian Canada geese when the species was removed from the list of threatened and endangered species in 2001.

February 28, 14 days to the Centennial: The world's largest active volcano, Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge's Mt. Veniaminof, "blew its top" 3,700 years ago in one of the largest volcanic eruptions in history. Veniaminof has erupted nine times during the last 100 years, and showed signs of unrest again as recently as last autumn.

March 1, 13 days to the Centennial: The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge supports 45 species of land and marine mammals, 36 species of fish and more than 180 species of birds. It is the only conservation area in the United States in which all three American bears, black, polar and grizzly, can be found.

March 2, 12 days to the Centennial: Becharof National Wildlife Refuge's 290,000 acre Becharof Lake serves as a nursery for the world's second largest run of sockeye salmon. In fact, Becharof National Wildlife Refuge and the adjacent Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge together produce more than 30 *million* fish every year!

March 3, 11 days to the Centennial: The remote waters of Innoko National Wildlife Refuge are home to some mighty fish. Alaska's long-standing record northern pike, a 38-pound lunker, was caught in the Innoko River by Jack Wagner back in 1991.

March 4, 10 days to the Centennial: The eelgrass-rich waters of Izembek Lagoon on Izembek National Wildlife Refuge host approximately 98% of the world population of Pacific brant. After “refueling” on Izembek, these small sea geese set off on non-stop journeys of as much as 3000 miles, during which they can lose a third of their body weight!

March 5, 9 days to the Centennial: Chinook, chum and coho salmon travel more than 1000 miles up the Yukon River before entering the Koyukuk River system, which runs through the heart of Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge, to spawn. Refuge waters support a number of other game-fish species, including sheefish, grayling and northern pike.

March 6, 8 days to the Centennial: Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was first protected, as Kenai National Moose Range, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt just nine days after Pearl Harbor. Its original mission was “to protect the breeding and feeding ranges of the giant Kenai moose.”

March 7, 7 days to the Centennial: It was largely through the efforts of sportsmen, who feared the loss of the world’s largest brown bears, that Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge was created in 1941. Today approximately 3000 of these magnificent omnivores roam Alaska’s “Emerald Isle.”

March 8, 6 days to the Centennial: Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge’s Nogahabara Sand Dunes are a delicate and surreal “arctic Sahara” of shifting, wind-sculpted sands. This sensitive habitat is home to several rare plant species that are listed as imperiled in Alaska.

March 9, 5 days to the Centennial: The 223-mile segment of the Nowitna River that drains Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge was designated a Wild and Scenic River in 1980. Most of the Nowitna consists of Class I (gentle) water and is popular with rafters and other river travelers. In fact, float trips, to hunt, fish, or simply observe and photograph the refuge’s abundant wildlife, are among the most popular recreations uses of this refuge.

March 10, 4 days to the Centennial: Selawik National Wildlife Refuge takes its name from the Selawik River. The river’s name, in turn, is based on the Inupiat word “siil-vik” which means “the place where sheefish spawn.” These large whitefish (the Alaska state record weighed 53 pounds) are spirited fighters, and popular with both subsistence fishers and adventurous sport anglers.

March 11, 3 days to the Centennial: Trumpeter swans were first seen breeding on Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge 20 years ago. The refuge’s population of these, the world’s largest swans, has increased dramatically, and an autumn drive along the Alaska Highway where it serves as the northern border of the refuge is probably the best opportunity for the public to view these magnificent birds.

March 12, 2 days to the Centennial: Two of America’s most frequently used walrus haulouts are within Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. The walrus’s Latin family name, *Odobenus*, translates as “tooth walker,” in reference to their use of their tusks to drag themselves onto and move across land or ice.

March 13, 1 day to the Centennial: Muskoxen were introduced to Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge’s Nunivak Island in 1935. The population has thrived there, and served as a source for animals later transplanted to Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Seward Peninsula, Cape Thompson, Nelson Island and Russia.

March 14: The Centennial!: When drought impacts their habitat elsewhere, America's canvasback ducks find refuge on the wetlands of Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge. Between 1999 and 2000, the number of breeding canvasbacks on the Alaska/Yukon breeding grounds increases by 110%, while those using the prairie lands of the eastern Dakotas dropped by 44%. Considered by duck hunters to be the "prince of waterfowl," the canvasback's current population is estimated at 600,000 birds.

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 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 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.

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