

Wilderness at 50: A Remarkable Concept

from the USFWS Newswire

By Peggy Romfh

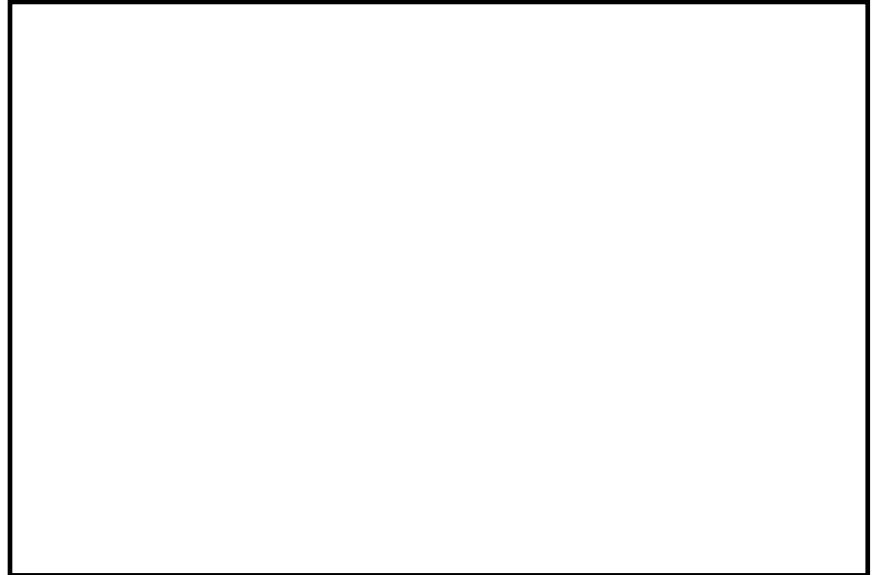
2014 is the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The law was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on Sept. 3, 1964.

The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System, which today comprises about 109.5 million acres in 44 states and Puerto Rico.

USFWS manages more than 20 million acres of wilderness in the Refuge System (about 20% of the total). There are 75 wilderness areas on 63 refuges in 25 states.

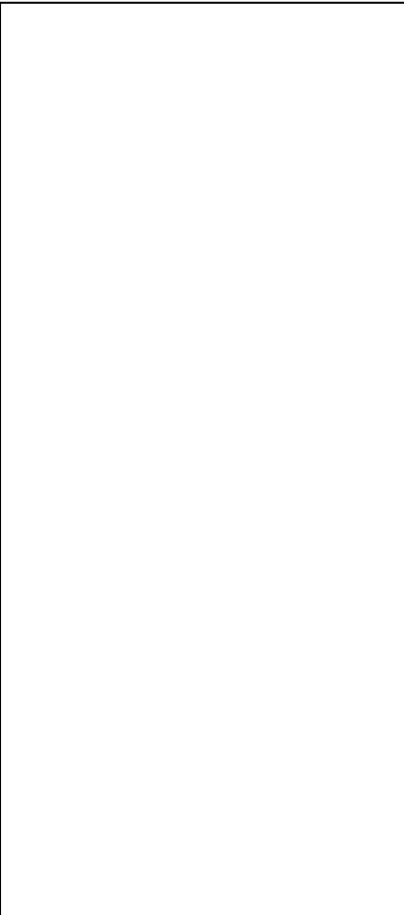
The Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service manage the remaining wilderness areas.

When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Wilderness Act, he made the following statement: "If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."



Otto Unit, San Bernard NWR. Photo by Pete Romfh

Other Stories from the USFWS Newswire



Increase in Forest Fires Cause a Re-look at Targeted Burn Strategies

In the Southeast, firefighters on forested wetlands have faced several large wildfires in recent years – including two each at Virginia’s Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and Georgia’s Okefenokee Refuge, and one each at Pocosin Lakes Refuge and Alligator River Refuge in North Carolina. These fires produced sustained smoke and embers smoldering as deep as eight feet into organic peat soils.

To address the challenges, the USFWS gathered experts to study the problem.

One solution identified was the addition of water control structures at wildlife refuges to reduce saltwater intrusion into wetlands and to move in fresh water during drought conditions. That keeps peat from drying out and becoming flammable.

Additionally, as sea-level rise increases salinity in soil, forested wetlands are dying and being replaced by salt-tolerant shrubs and then marsh. During this transition, standing or fallen dead trees increase fuel for wildfires.

Managers are focused on soil subsidence and accretion studies to help identify the right frequency and extent to use prescribed fire to stimulate plant productivity and biomass accumulation in peat soils.

Urban Initiative Is Vital to Conservation

Eighty percent of people in the USA now live in urban areas.

Jim Kurth, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System noted, “While our traditional hunting and angling partners remain crucial to conservation, their numbers reflect a smaller percentage of the nation’s overall population. If we want to grow support for wildlife conservation, then we have to go where the people are: We have to go to the cities.”

The good news is the Refuge System is already present in many cities. There are more than 100 national wildlife refuges within 25 miles of cities of more than 250,000 people.

As the Refuge System implements the Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative, further activities will be identified to illustrate the integration of the Refuges into urban environments.

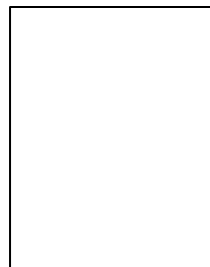


Photo by P. Romfh

Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary

Warblers are migrating through QNBS. Consider volunteering for Spring Fling with GCBO in April!

Cedar Elm, Dance Bayou Unit, San Bernard NWR. Photo by Pete Romfh

April is a great month to volunteer as a Texas Master Naturalist!