THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 25, 1996

Warm greetings to everyone gathered in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for the sixty-first North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference.

America has been blessed with the largest and most varied conservation system in the world. Born of President Theodore Roosevelt's vision nearly a century ago, the system has grown to include more than 500 refuges, in every state, covering more than 92 million acres of land.

While a vast majority of refuges were established administratively under authority of our great conservation laws, over 30 have been established directly by acts of Congress. Farsighted conservationists like Silvio Conte, Edwin Forsythe, and John Dingell have nurtured the development of the system, and under the leadership of Congressman Dingell, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, which directed that the diverse refuges across our country should be managed as a unified "National Wildlife Refuge System."

Although we owe much to the vision and leadership of conservationists who have served in the White House and in Congress, our refuge system has grown and flourished because of the dedicated support of the millions of Americans who use and enjoy it each year. Sportsmen and women who fish and hunt; individuals who observe or photograph the variety of wildlife on our public lands; families on camping trips who delight in the beauty and new knowledge they absorb from spending time in wild places -- all these help to maintain, protect, and develop America's National Wildlife Refuge System.

This great national treasure reminds us not only of our blessings as a nation, but also of our responsibilities. To keep faith with all those whose dedicated efforts through the years have preserved America's wild places, I am signing today an executive order that provides direction on the management and use of our National Wildlife Refuge System. It reflects my Administration's conviction that sound fish and wildlife conservation and management are essential to sustaining public use of our refuges, and it will guide the actions and goals of the Department of the Interior for years to come. It is a solemn pledge to all Americans that these special lands -- from the tropical mangroves of Florida's Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge to the majestic peaks of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska -- will be preserved and wisely managed for generations to come.

Bill Clinton

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