



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 31, 2003

I send greetings to those gathered for the Centennial Refuge Friends Conference, sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Congratulations to the refuge volunteers as you are honored for your extraordinary accomplishments.

For 100 years, America's wildlife refuges have played a vital role in conserving and recovering our country's wildlife and vibrant natural resources. Since a volunteer named Paul Kroegel inspired President Theodore Roosevelt to establish the National Wildlife Refuge System in 1903, the System has grown into a national network including 95 million acres of conservation lands and waters. To maintain and improve our wildlife refuges, more than 34,000 volunteers generously donate more than 1.3 million service hours every year.

I commend the NWRA and volunteers for your commitment to conserving, enhancing, and expanding the lands and waters that protect our country's diverse wildlife heritage. I also applaud your important efforts to help ensure that countless individuals will continue to enjoy wildlife refuges for generations to come.

Laura joins me in sending our best wishes for a memorable event.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George W. Bush". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "W".