

Breton National Wildlife Refuge

1904-2004
Refuge Facts



photo: Theodore Roosevelt Collection
Harvard College Library

Breton Anniversary

Breton National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established 100 years ago, on October 4, 1904, by an executive order of President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt established this second national wildlife refuge at the urging of the National Audubon Society.

Theodore Roosevelt's visit

Breton NWR is the only refuge that President Roosevelt is known to have visited. Roosevelt journeyed to the island in June, 1915 with friend John Parker (elected Governor of Louisiana in 1920) and William Sprinkle, Audubon Society Warden. Roosevelt chronicled the adventure in an autobiography, "A Book Lover's Holidays in the Open." During his visit to this chain of islands that is one of America's great wild places, Roosevelt tramped the shorelines and bird rookeries of Breton refuge, watched a flight of black skimmers, and contemplated the world as he approached the final four years of his life.

Breton today

Although the geology of Breton NWR is constantly changing due to turbulent storms and shifting coastal sands, the islands look much like they did when Roosevelt visited 89 years ago. These islands also provide the same critical functions – protecting Louisiana's coast and providing wildlife habitat.

Restoring Breton

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with many partners to restore and maintain Breton NWR to maximize wildlife habitat. Activities include marsh grass planting, dredged soil placement, and sand fence construction.

Significant Fish and Wildlife Resources

Breton NWR includes 5,000 acres of barrier islands in the Chandeleur chain off the east coast of Louisiana. Breton NWR's resources include estuarine marshes, mangroves, barrier island beaches and dunes, and saltwater mudflats supporting abundant wildlife populations including colonial nesting seabirds, wintering waterfowl, small mammals, saltwater fisheries, and endangered species.

National Wildlife Refuge System Story

Breton NWR is the second-oldest refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System, which now includes 542 refuges throughout the United States. Louisiana's 23 refuges protect over 540,000 acres, including 340,000 acres of wetland habitat on 12 coastal zone refuges.

Endangered Species

Breton NWR contains the largest nesting colonies in the Eastern United States of the endangered Eastern Brown Pelican, the Louisiana state bird. The refuge is critical to the recovery and survival of this species.

The First Line of Defense

Breton NWR protects important barrier islands that are a first line of defense against storm surge. This makes Breton NWR invaluable protection for Louisiana's coastal wetlands and for the city of New Orleans.

Wilderness

Breton is a component of a national system of designated wilderness lands first established by the Wilderness Act of 1964. 2004 marks the 40th anniversary of this important conservation milestone. Breton NWR was the first (est. 1975) of Louisiana's three Wilderness Areas, and is the only Wilderness Area in Louisiana's coastal zone.

Fisheries Resources

The waters surrounding Breton NWR provide some of Louisiana's best commercial and recreational fishing.



photo: USFWS