



The Importance of Providing Sanctuary on National Wildlife Refuges in the Southeast Region

National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) are unique among public lands in their mission to provide sanctuary habitat for wildlife, and many were established specifically as inviolate sanctuaries for migratory birds.

Sanctuaries were established to provide resting and foraging areas for waterfowl and/or other migratory birds, help support their populations, and provide public hunting and viewing opportunities by dispersing birds throughout the landscape.



credit: Michelle Horath

Although only limited research has been conducted on the effects of sanctuary on NWRs for waterfowl, benefits may include:

- Increasing local abundance and sport harvest opportunities of waterfowl
- Decreasing regional energetic carrying capacity needs by increasing foraging efficiency through reduced disturbance
- Increasing reproductive success through improved body condition of individuals prior to spring migration and subsequent breeding periods



credit: Heath Hagy

Managed sanctuaries on NWRs are important during periods when habitat may be limited on the landscape, such as:

- during early fall migration prior to most natural flooding events
- during droughts or natural disasters (e.g., Deepwater Horizon oil spill)
- after many privately managed wetlands have been drained following conclusion of hunting season in late winter

Allowing extensive human disturbance or recreation within or nearby core waterfowl sanctuaries is generally incompatible with providing true sanctuary conditions for waterfowl.

Even infrequent hunting or other forms of human disturbances can reduce waterfowl abundance and reduce the quality of sanctuary conditions.

J. Clark Salyer, Chief of the NWR System for nearly 30 years, remarked “refuges should be considered as reservoirs that assure a sustained annual yield from a renewable resource.”

Sanctuaries on NWRs support waterfowl harvest opportunities which results in a positive economic impact to many communities nearby NWRs.

For more information, contact

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credit: Bryan Woodward