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Review: The National Wildlife Refuges: Coordinating a Conservation System Through Law

By Robert L. Fischman

Reviewed by [Ryder W. Miller](#)
San Francisco, USA

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Robert L. Fischman. *The National Wildlife Refuges: Coordinating a Conservation System Through Law*. Washington, DC: Island Press: 2003. Printed on recycled acid-free paper. 277 pages.

Robert L. Fischman, a professor at the Indiana University School of Law-Bloomington, details and interprets a vast body of national law concerning the National Wildlife Refuge system. He promotes National Wildlife Refuge law as an international model for sustainable land use, because preservation is not the primary purpose of land management internationally. Other land management systems like the National Park Service and National Wilderness Preservation system focus on preservation and recreational use, rather than sustainable resource extraction. These latter systems “grew out of peculiarly American visions of monumental, pristine, uninhabited nature that are not widely shared by the rest of the world. . . In contrast, the Refuge System’s mandate is founded on more global accepted principles of ecology (biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health criteria) and sustainable development (permit use compatible with the conservation mission). Therefore, the Refuge System deserves special attention and support as a model for international conservation” (p. 210).

Fischman goes into detail concerning the various laws, statutes and mandates that direct the management of the National Wildlife Refuges as well as the history of the influence of hunters on the system, and the system’s later adaptation to the call of growing environmental concern. A major focus of the book is President Clinton’s impact on the Refuge System, The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. Earlier chapters set the stage, explaining the legislative principles, in order for the reader to understand the 1997 Act’s significance. There are also chapters about the major refuges in Alaska (which doubled the system’s holdings when they were formed in the 1980’s), as well as oil and mining concerns. Each refuge has its own history and legal framework, but there has been systemic (or organic) legislation to tie the system together.

The slow-going work is filled with legalese, but is understandable. Fischman manages to interpret National Wildlife Refuge law for the layman.

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Ryder W. Miller <dolphin1965@hotmail.com> is a freelance environmental and science reporter who has been published in *Sierra Magazine*, *California Coast & Ocean*, *California Wild*, and *Hydrosphere*.