



*Op. Mt. News - 17 March 1983*  
**Wildlife Week set for March 20-26**

Next week from March 20-26, the National Wildlife Federation and its state affiliates will be sponsoring the 46th observance of National Wildlife Week. This year's theme is entitled "This Is Your Land — Public Lands Belong To All Of Us." Loretta Lynn has been chosen chairperson for the wildlife week.

Since 1938, the first week of spring has been set aside as National Wildlife Week. In this year the officers of the newly formed National Wildlife Federation approached President Franklin D. Roosevelt with the idea of setting aside one week each year to help people become aware of the needs of wildlife and wildlife habitat. President Roosevelt thought it was a great idea and from that time naturalists, sportsmen and other concerned citizens have utilized this week to increase citizen awareness of our country to different aspects of conservation education.

What are public lands and what are they good for? As American citizens, each of us is a part owner of about 740 million acres of public lands. These beautiful lands are scattered across the whole United States. They contain the northwestern coniferous forests found in Sawtooth National Forest, Idaho; the prairies of Thunder Basin, Wyoming; tropical and subtropical areas such as Everglades National Park and Hawaii Volcanoes National Park; and the deserts of Saguaro National Monument in Arizona and Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico.

The Wildlife which inhabits these areas ranges from the grizzly bear of the high Rocky Mountains, the american alligator of the Everglades, to

the Desert Pupfish. Some of the wildlife is holding its own but many species are on the threatened or endangered species list. Our national symbol, the bald eagle, is one of the endangered species and depends on these lands for survival.

Our public lands contain abundant natural resources, from oil fields, stretches of forests, minerals, and open range for grazing. Each year millions of Americans enjoy our public lands for backpacking, camping, hunting, fishing, rafting, nature study and skiing.

Public lands originated when our original 13 colonies became states. Several states gave their western land claims to the federal government. The United States acquired other public lands from other countries such as the Louisiana Purchase or from land treaties. Some land was purchased with money from sportsman's fees. President Theodore Roosevelt recognized the importance of public lands and reserved about 230 million acres while he was president.

Today, our country has expanded from shore to shore and the demand on our limited natural resources has greatly increased. The wise management and use of our lands is critical. The American conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote in 1948, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

So next week become involved in National Wildlife Week. Learn more about our public lands so that you can enjoy their benefits and help make decisions in their wise management. It is after all — your land.