



British Columbia Waterfowl Society,
Managers of the George C. Reifel
Migratory Bird Sanctuary since 1963

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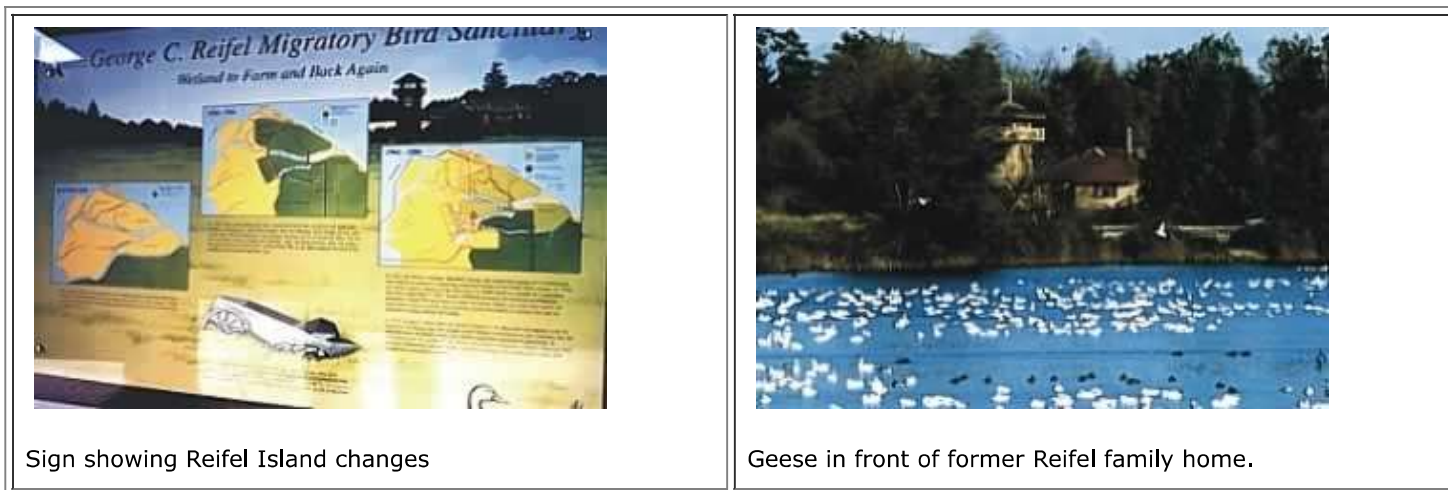
History and Management of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary

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The Sanctuary is located on the outskirts of the Village of Ladner, in Delta, BC. By the turn of the century, protective dykes had been built along the Fraser River to protect Ladner's thriving farming and fishing-based community from the Fraser River and the tidal waters of the Strait of Georgia. Nearby river islands were only partially dyked or left to flood each year naturally, and were often sites of fishing camps which supplied the numerous local salmon canneries. On **Westham Island**, Ewen Slough was the site of one of these camps, named after Alexander Ewen, a Scotsman who owned several local canneries.

When George C. Reifel bought his property in 1927, it consisted of land isolated from the rest of Westham Island by Ewen, Robertson and Fuller Sloughs, natural river channels which dissected the island. Although all equipment and building materials needed to be barged in, by 1929, he had consolidated more land, and created a large recreational family retreat in this idyllic location. Dykes and causeways were constructed to create waterfowl habitats and road access connecting his land ("Reifel Island") to the rest of Westham Island. Although the family ran successful real estate and brewery businesses, Reifel Farm, as it became known, was also very successful, and during WW2 was responsible for over one-third of the sugar beet seed production of Canada.

In the 1960's, his son, George H. Reifel, granted the first lease to the **British Columbia Waterfowl Society** for a Bird Sanctuary to be named after his late father. **Ducks Unlimited Canada** was brought in to assist with the water management of the many wetland habitats on the site, and has continued to be an active partner in the management of the area. The provincial government supplemented this effort by establishing a game reserve on the adjacent intertidal foreshore.



Sign showing Reifel Island changes

Geese in front of former Reifel family home.

By 1972, there was widespread recognition of both the real estate value and the wildlife habitat value of the Reifel homestead, waterways, farm fields, and Sanctuary area. To conserve the entire area, the Reifel family agreed to a combination of land sale and donation to the federal government on the condition that it would continue to be managed for the primary benefit of waterfowl and that the Sanctuary would continue to bear the name of George C. Reifel.

With this change in ownership, the federal government designated the farm site as the **Alaksen National Wildlife Area** and the provincial game reserve and the Sanctuary lease area were designated the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary.



Aerial view of Alaksen NWA buildings 2002.



Visitors at George H. Reifel cairn.

The Reifel family home now serves as the regional headquarters of the [Canadian Wildlife Service](#) (CWS) (part of [Environment Canada](#)). CWS administers these lands, with the Sanctuary managed by the [British Columbia Waterfowl Society](#) under a long-term lease. Under this kind of federal land ownership, activities are regulated through permits, and their wildlife and habitats are protected under the Canada Wildlife Act.

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