In Wonderland, the Mad Hatter advises Alice that to mean what one says is not the same as to say what one means. No doubt the Mad Hatter could explain, then, why our nation’s wildlife refuges are not, in fact, refuges.

Once upon a time, national wildlife refuges were what their names implied—inviolate sanctuaries, oases of relative peace, places where wild animals could escape harassment and pursuit by humans.

Over the years, however, national wildlife refuges have been so degraded and violated that they bear little resemblance to what they were originally intended to be. Our national wildlife refuges are havens, but not for animals. They are havens and wonderlands for hunters and trappers and exploitive industries such as cattle ranching, mining, and logging.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is a cruel hoax.

One might assume a buck like this found on a wildlife refuge would be a target only for the lens of a camera. Unfortunately, such a trophy buck would be highly prized by hunters allowed to range over refuge lands, and he could easily end up hanging in a meat locker (inset).
that stumbled about. I saw them striking the heads of retrieved cripples against fence posts.'”

The original intent of refuges as “inviolate sanctuaries” for wildlife is well-understood by hunters. A report issued in the early 1970s by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife noted that, “The National Wildlife Refuge System mission statement and first refuge objective set forth the inexorable concept of preserving wild creatures in a natural state.’’

The report said that, “It is important to buffer the non-hunting public from the sights and sounds of the hunt,” and ended with a warning: “If public hunting is to survive on national wildlife refuges, we must take whatever steps possible to place our hunting programs on a strong, defensible posture.”

Today, sportsmen’s lobbies are pushing the government administration and Congress harder than ever to open even more of the animals’ “inviolate sanctuaries” to sport hunting and trapping.

**HUNTING MINORITY CALLS THE SHOTS**

The fact that hunting and trapping is permitted on many refuges is all the more outrageous when one considers that:

- The National Wildlife Refuge System comprises only about 90 million acres, or 5 percent, of all lands available to hunters. If a ban on hunting in refuges were enacted tomorrow, hunters would still have more than 200 million acres of state land, 600 million acres of federal land, and more than $1 billion acres of private land on which to hunt.

With so many hunting grounds available, why must the USFWS open up refuges to hunters and trappers?

- More than 93 percent of Americans do not hunt, and at least 97 percent of all visitors to wildlife refuges come only to enjoy nature and view wildlife. Yet to ensure safety, public access to wildlife refuges is often severely restricted during hunting season. On refuges where hunting and trapping is a regular feature, animals become so scarce and so wary that visitors may come and go without ever seeing a wild “game” animal.

- Contrary to what the gun and hunting lobbies would like you to believe, hunters have not bought the “right” to hunt on refuges through their purchase of waterfowl hunting stamps, also known as “duck stamps.” In fact, 100 percent of the funds used to maintain and manage national wildlife refuges come from federal taxes. Only 3.4 percent of all refuge lands have been acquired with funds from the sale of “duck stamps.” In any case, the sale of such stamps does not convey the “right” to kill animals on the only lands this nation has set aside to protect wildlife.

**KILLING FIELDS**

Perhaps the ultimate violation of wildlife refuges, however, is the USFWS’s practice of killing predator species—often to provide more waterfowl and other animals for hunters to shoot.

The USFWS calls this “wildlife management” and “predator control”; however, these are simply euphemisms for the killing of wildlife.

On at least two dozen refuges, the USFWS kills predator species and species that “interfere” with waterfowl production, including foxes, skunks, raccoons, badgers, certain birds, nutria, beavers, turtles, snakes, weasels, minks, rats, squirrels, muskrats, and rabbits in order to produce waterfowl for hunters to shoot.

In the Valentine (Nebraska) Wildlife Refuge, for example, coyotes, raccoons, bullsnakes, skunks, badgers, weasels, and minks are trapped and destroyed or shot from aircraft so that hunters will not have to compete with these predators for waterfowl and other “game.”

Wildlife managers on the Malheur (Oregon) National Wildlife Refuge kill coyotes, ravens, and raccoons by shooting them from aircraft, poisoning their food or dens, or trapping them. Other methods of predator destruction include the destruction of nests or dens, opportunistic shooting by refuge personnel, and gas poisoning.

**ENVIRONMENTAL HAVOC**

In addition to humane concerns, the violation of the nation’s wildlife refuges is also a major environmental problem. Many endangered and threatened species live on wildlife refuges and are disrupted, displaced, or killed by hunting, trapping, invasive industrial and recreational activities, and the use of pesticides and herbicides. Some endangered species have even been killed on refuges by hunters and trappers.
And although many duck populations are in drastic decline—at nearly their lowest levels ever—hunters are regularly permitted to kill ducks on wildlife refuges.

Hunting and trapping in themselves are antiecological. In a natural environment, species remain strong because weak and sick animals are killed off by disease, predators, and competition for limited food. Given a choice, however, hunters target vital, healthy animals and leave the sick ones to weaken a species's gene pool. Trapping is also a devastating practice since traps cannot discriminate between species and because they also tend to catch active, healthy animals.

In addition, massive recreational killing of wild animals and the "management" of animal populations by killing predator species wreak havoc with the natural balance of the entire refuge habitat.

That such activities occur regularly in forests and woodlands across the country is bad enough; that they should also occur in wildlife's only "inviolable sanctuaries" is madness.

In addition, The HSUS has, over the years, filed several lawsuits to stop the killing of animals on refuges in Florida, New Jersey, and elsewhere.

Last year, we successfully sued the USFWS to stop the hunting of deer with guns in Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia. This year, we filed suit to prevent the extermination of predators at Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge in California; the case is still pending.

The HSUS will soon focus on a new plan being developed by the USFWS for the future management of the nation's refuges. A USFWS refuge-management plan proposed over a year ago was so inadequate that it was withdrawn. The new proposal is expected to be released in 1991. It is vital that the USFWS hear from the public on this matter.

With your help, we can finally put an end to the miserable mismanagement of the National Wildlife Refuge System and return the refuges to the animals.

WHAT THE HSUS IS DOING

Along with the Conservation Endowment Fund, The HSUS has formed and is a member of the Wildlife Refuge Reform Coalition, an organization of more than 30 animal-protection groups working intensively to reform the refuge system through legislation, education, and administrative changes.

Above: Outraged activists protest hunts permitted at the Great Swamp Refuge in New Jersey. Wildlife needs the safety of "inviolable sanctuaries."