Thank you Dan (Dan Pedrotti, founder of the Texas Bighorn Society.) I want to extend my gratitude to both Ramona Bass and Dan Pedrotti for championing the cause of wildlife conservation. I am honored to be joined today by one of our nation's leading conservationists, Secretary Gale Norton (Interior Secretary Gale Norton.) Welcome to Texas, and the wonderful Fort Worth Zoo.

As someone who grew up in rural Texas, and who developed a deep love for the outdoors, I believe strongly that we must do everything we can to preserve the land and protect our many species of wildlife by providing well-managed refuges across Texas. Our 20 wildlife refuges, along with many private landowners and conservation groups, play an important role in conserving the natural diversity of the various Texas ecosystems, including the many unique species and the habitat upon which they depend. In Texas, conservation depends heavily on the initiative and effort of concerned private citizens because 97 percent of Texas land is privately-owned. Private landowners like Harry and Rose Cullen are to be commended for their efforts to preserve habitat, as is a dedicated Texan like Steve Thompson, who managed the Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge.

Wildlife conservation begins with awareness. When we educate our children about the unique qualities and ecological needs of Texas wildlife, we go a long way toward developing a new generation of conservationists who will value and protect the great variety of species that inhabit Texas. The Fort Worth Zoo is doing its part to build awareness about wildlife conservation with exhibits like Texas Wild that help thousands of Texans develop a respect and appreciation for wildlife that is native to our state. The people of Fort Worth can also be proud that the zoo has spearheaded more than a dozen conservation projects across the globe in recent years, and has more than a dozen staff members who are actively engaged in conservation research projects.

This state is home to more than 21 million people, but it is also home to a great many species of wildlife, God's creatures with whom we must peacefully co-exist. It is one of our most important missions to conserve our natural resources and the habitat upon which so many forms of life depend.

Therefore, by the powers vested in me as Governor of Texas, I am proud to declare the week of October 19th thru the 25th “Texas National Wildlife Refuge Week.” Please join me in welcoming a member of President Bush's Cabinet, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton.