

RESTORING AMERICA'S Wildlife Refuges 2009

A Plan to Solve the Refuge System Funding Crisis



CARE is a national coalition of 22 wildlife, sporting, conservation and scientific organizations that represent a national constituency numbering more than 14 million Americans. Working together and with the support of more than 200 refuge Friends groups, CARE educates Congress, the Administration and the public about America's magnificent National Wildlife Refuge System. CARE also works closely with the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus, a diverse group of more than 132 members (from 40 states representing 205 NWRs) in the U.S. House of Representatives that recognize the intrinsic and economic importance of refuges and works to secure strong investments to protect, conserve and pass down these irreplaceable treasured landscapes.

For a copy of this report, please visit
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Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE)

American Birding Association
American Fisheries Society
American Sportsfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
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Marine Conservation Biology Institute
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Corps Network
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute

Executive Summary



Unique among federal land systems, the National Wildlife Refuge System was created with the recognition that certain special areas should be reserved for wildlife — for its own sake but also to provide enjoyment for all Americans. From humble beginnings at Florida’s Pelican Island, today more than 550 wildlife refuges and monuments and thousands of prairie wetlands, all totaling 150 million acres, have been established across all U.S. states and territories. They provide essential habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, a safe haven for endangered species, local economic benefit to the tune of \$1.7 billion annually, and compatible recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife watching and environmental education for more than 41 million annual visitors. Make no mistake, the Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), is the nation’s premier system dedicated to wildlife management and land and ocean conservation. But unfortunately, all is not well on our wildlife refuges.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement urges Congress to increase National Wildlife Refuge System funding to \$514 million in fiscal year 2010.

Following a period of budget stagnation, Congress in recent years has demonstrated a powerful commitment to funding our national wildlife refuges. These increases allowed for the suspension of workforce downsizing plans that outlined an eventual 20% reduction in overall staffing levels. However, with more than 10% of staff already eliminated since 2004, additional funding increases that build upon the last two years are essential if this valued system of conservation lands is to rebound to its full potential. With the goal of fulfilling the progressive conservation vision that President Theodore Roosevelt first espoused more than a century ago, *CARE recommends that Congress increase Refuge System funding to \$514 million in fiscal year 2010.*

At a time when both wildlife conservation and job security are more important than ever, budget shortfalls are continuing to force drastic cuts in professional staffing — more than 10% of the entire Refuge System workforce has been eliminated over the past five years.

A severe lack of refuge law enforcement officers is leading to increased instances of drug production and trafficking, wildlife poaching, illegal border activity, violations of conservation easements and assaults.

Busloads of children are being turned away from environmental education opportunities due to inadequate staffing and classroom space.

Thousands of facilities, including visitor’s centers, trails and boardwalks, and refuge roads have fallen into disrepair, creating unwelcoming and sometimes unsafe visitor conditions.

Over 2.3 million acres of refuge lands are overrun with invasive plants and animals. More than 4,400 invasive animal populations are thriving on refuges, including dangerous Burmese pythons and non-native rats that threaten the continued existence of many native wildlife species.

A precipitous decline in planning and land acquisition funding in recent years has left the Refuge System woefully unprepared to respond to rapidly changing conditions caused by climate change.

We must fund these national treasures at levels commensurate with their disproportionately beneficial imprint upon the landscape and our communities. America must act quickly to safeguard our natural resources for the benefit of wildlife and create a legacy of stewardship for millions of present and future Americans. *CARE recently assessed the Refuge System’s budget and staffing needs and determined the annual need to be \$808 million per year by fiscal year 2013.* This funding is critically needed to properly patrol and enforce laws on 150 million acres, provide nature programs to the public, maintain high water quality, complete habitat restoration projects, address scores of mothballed mission-critical projects, respond to the impacts of climate change and more.



BOSQUE DEL APACHE NWR, NM | AMY LEIST

Refuge System Funding Needs

This report presents CARE's funding recommendations for fiscal years 2010 through 2013. For a number of years following the Refuge System's centennial in 2003, budget cuts shrank the workforce and stalled the effort to improve habitat and bolster wildlife populations. Now is the time to reverse this trend by continuing to build upon the recent increases provided by Congress in fiscal year 2008 and 2009, and by continuing to invest in these special places at a level commensurate with their importance to a diverse array of Americans, including wildlife watchers, hunters, anglers, photographers and schoolchildren.

Based on a thorough analysis of the needs, opportunities and challenges facing the Refuge System, CARE believes that sizable increases in annual funding are necessary. Incremental increases over the next four years will enable the Refuge System to fulfill its mission of protecting wildlife and providing wildlife-dependent recreation. *CARE recommends reaching the following annual funding level for the Refuge System by fiscal year 2013:*

Operations	\$ 428 million
Maintenance	\$ 380 million
Total	\$ 808 million annually by FY 2013

These increases are urgently needed for many reasons:

(Note: the following bullets do not sum to \$808 million due

to overlap among some of the identified needs. Also, a needed annual inflationary increase of at least \$15 million is not included in the \$808 million calculation)

To comply with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, refuges are tasked with additional, important responsibilities. These include increased biological monitoring, public use and comprehensive conservation planning, all of which add financial burden on the Refuge System.

Simply put, the Refuge System cannot fulfill its conservation mission unless certain essential projects are completed. Funding projects and hiring refuge professionals identified as 'Mission Critical' in the Refuge Operations Needs System (RONS) database will cost more than \$355 million annually.

For many years prior to fiscal year 2008, appropriations failed to even cover inflation for fixed costs, which led to a serious erosion of purchasing power. To simply keep fuel in the trucks, pay for rising utilities and building rent, allow for salary adjustments and other fixed costs, the Refuge System needs at least a \$15 million annual increase specifically for refuge Operations and Maintenance funding.

A 2005 analysis by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) detailed the urgent need for more law enforcement (LE) officers to respond to drug production and smuggling, wildlife poaching, illegal border activity, assaults and a variety of natural resource violations. Even before 50 million acres were added to the Refuge System in early 2009, IACP recommended that 845 full-time LE officers were necessary to protect visitors and natural resources (only 205 officers are now on patrol). CARE is conservatively recommending funding for approximately half of IACP's recommended positions, a level that would provide at least adequate coverage and improve officer safety. A 2008 detailed FWS staffing model revealed the urgent need for an additional 241 law enforcement officers at annual cost of \$36.1 million.

The Refuge System has been understaffed for decades, and since 2004, more than 10% of the professional workforce has been eliminated. In response to funding shortfalls, the Refuge System created a detailed staffing model that quantifies the need for more administrative, IT, realty, planning and maintenance employees, as well as refuge managers, wildlife

biologists and communications professionals. **This 2008 model identified the need for 2,740 additional Mission-Critical, non-law enforcement positions at a cost of \$246.5 million.**

An appropriate response to the adverse impacts of climate change will require refuges to conduct climate-smart monitoring, planning and management. Refuge employees are already feeling the challenge of helping wildlife and ecosystems cope with climate change, and now many refuges are incurring great expenses to protect infrastructure as well. Additional funding will be necessary to address longer and more intense wildfire seasons and to participate in vital carbon sequestration projects. **An initial response to prevent higher future costs entails annual expenditures of at least \$12 million just for equipment and personnel.**

Since 2003, when a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report shined the light on the inability of FWS to effectively manage oil and gas activities on 155 of its wildlife refuges, there has been a dramatic increase in oil and gas exploration and drilling. The Refuge



SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA REFUGES COMPLEX, LA | SAMI GRAY, FWS

Intense drought, catastrophic wildfire, rapidly rising seas, increased threat from invasive species, ocean acidification and many other effects caused by climate change are stressing wildlife and ecosystems. These changes are complex and serious; the FWS cannot help wildlife cope without additional resources and professionals to strategically plan for, monitor and manage these changes in a climate-smart manner.

System urgently needs funds to implement the GAO recommendations, which include increased staffing and more training and oversight of drilling activities. **To adequately manage oil and gas activities on wildlife refuges, including cleanup of degraded sites, \$15 million per year is needed.**

Industry experts recommend that businesses invest 2-6% of a facility's total value in annual maintenance. The Refuge System maintains approximately \$20 billion in property assets and is only able to invest a woefully inadequate 0.67% in annual maintenance. **If the Refuge System invested 1.6% annually, it would require \$380 million for facilities maintenance.**

Approximately 2.3 million acres of refuge lands are now overrun with non-native, invasive plants, while more than 4,400 invasive animal populations run amok on millions more acres. Of the total 2.3 million plant-infested acres, the Refuge System was able to treat only 14.6% in 2008. **To treat only**

one-third of its infested plant acreage and to begin merely low-level control of harmful invasive animal populations, the Refuge System needs at least \$25 million per year.

Since 2000, Congress has approved the establishment of almost 30 new refuges, the majority of which were established without additional appropriations. **The backlog of Mission-Critical annual operations and maintenance costs for these new refuges is approximately \$23.8 million.**

With the recent designation of three vast marine monuments in the Pacific Ocean, the Refuge System has been tasked with management, restoration and law enforcement on lands and waters larger than the size of California. **Addressing threats, such as shipwrecks that are harming pristine coral reefs, purchasing needed patrol and research vessels, and creating plans and staff positions to oversee the monuments will cost approximately \$8 million annually.**

Of the national wildlife refuges established since 2000, seven are former military sites. Along with acquiring such sites comes an enormous cost for **demolition, management and public safety. The current backlog of maintenance and demolition cost for projects on former military land is \$80.7 million.**

The Refuge System is required to complete a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for each of its more than 550 units by 2012. As of February 2009, 332 CCPs had been completed, 159 were underway and 73 remained to be started. Each CCP costs an average of \$220,000, which does not even include the salaries of the staff that research and write each CCP. **At this rate, the Refuge System needs approximately \$13 million per year to complete the CCP process on time.**



BADGER IN SNOW | MALHEUR NWR, OR | RAY FOSTER



America's National Wildlife Refuge System

KODIAK BROWN BEAR | KODIAK NWR, AK | MARTHA DALRYMPLE • RED FOX KITS | BLACKWATER NWR, MD | MARY KONCHAR • PINTAIL DUCKS | EDWIN B. FORSYTHE NWR, NJ | STEVE GREER

In 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt chose to protect the pelicans, herons and egrets on Florida's Pelican Island from the wanton destruction of these magnificent birds for the fashion industry, he set aside the first national wildlife refuge and America began its lasting commitment to wildlife protection. The National Wildlife Refuge System has matured into one of the world's premier land conservation networks, boasting more than 550 wildlife refuges and hosting more than 41 million visitors annually. On 150 million acres, these visitors are treated to the most visually stunning and biologically rich lands and waters in North America. Recently, the Refuge System was named as a co-managing trustee of the 89 million acre Northwestern Hawaiian Island's Papahânaumokuâkea Marine National Monument, the world's second largest marine protected area.

Refuges are undeniably unique. They protect wildlife, water quality and land on parcels ranging from the half-acre Mille Lacs Refuge in Minnesota to the 19 million-acre Yukon Delta Refuge in Alaska. National wildlife refuges encompass a vast array of ecosystems from Arctic tundra and boreal forest to prairie grasslands and wetlands, arid desert, tropical lagoons and pristine coral reefs. Refuge lands include 21 million acres of designated wilderness, located in rural locales such as Cabeza Prieta Refuge in Arizona and Charles M. Russell Refuge in Montana. But wildlife refuges are also found in highly urban areas, including Don Edwards San Francisco Bay

Refuge and Philadelphia's John Heinz Refuge, which provide unparalleled opportunity for people to learn about the wonder, beauty and complexity of nature. The Refuge System also manages a network of approximately 3,000 waterfowl production areas, found mostly in the Dakotas, which span 3.1 million acres and protect increasingly scarce but vital wetlands and prairie grasslands. Finally, the recent addition of vast marine monuments in the Pacific Ocean added an area larger than California to the Refuge System. These welcomed additions include pristine reefs, waters teeming with wildlife, and unique geologic features such as the Marianas Trench, which is the Earth's deepest point at more than 36,000 feet below sea level.

Conserving America's Land, Water, and Wildlife

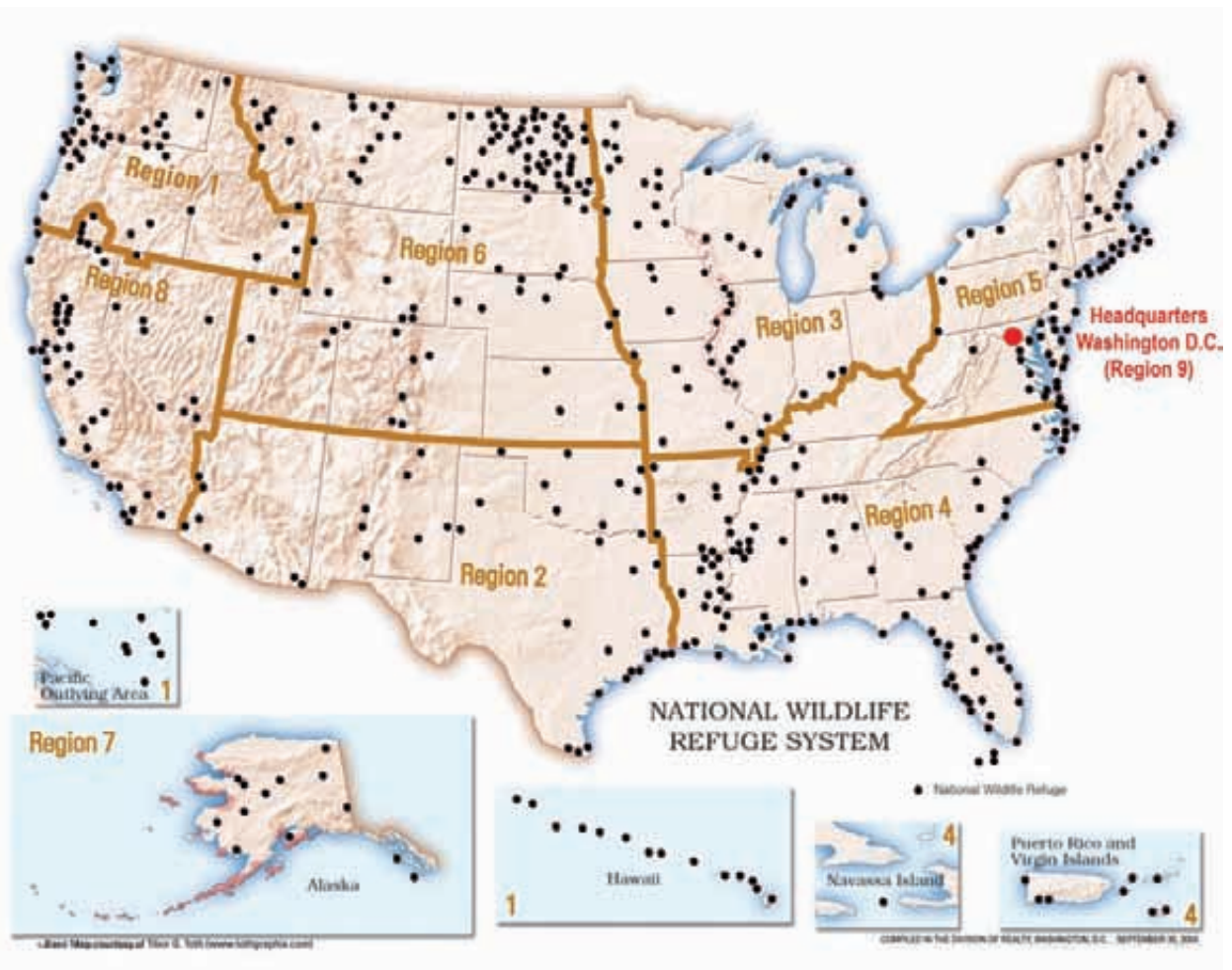
The diversity of landscapes and wildlife species within the Refuge System is stunning. National wildlife refuges are the only public lands and waters established explicitly to safeguard wildlife and their habitat. National wildlife refuges provide habitat for more than 700 bird species, 220 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, more than 1,000 fish and a bewildering variety of invertebrate and plant species. And while the new marine monuments harbor untold numbers of species, the most biologically diverse refuge for which inventories have been at-

tempted, the Hawaiian Islands Refuge, is home to 7,000 species alone.

Since its inception, the Refuge System has held the conservation of migratory birds among its top priorities. Today, most refuges are situated along important migratory flyways, along rivers and coasts, and provide important habitat for birds on breeding, stopover and wintering grounds. The Refuge System has historically catered to waterfowl and the effectiveness of this landscape-level, partner-based strategy has been clear: the vast majority of waterfowl species have increased dramatically in the last half-century. However, most other birds and their habitats are in serious decline as reported by government wildlife agencies and conservation groups in *"The State of the Birds: United States of America 2009."* Serving as modern-day "canaries in the coalmine," birds are excellent indicators of the overall health of the environment upon which we all depend. The fact that birds are declining even in the face of countless conservation initiatives to save

them is a sobering revelation. It is imperative we re-double conservation efforts now and recognize the central role that refuges have in providing what birds and other wildlife species need amid natural landscapes that are rapidly being lost to agriculture, sprawl and energy development.

Wildlife refuges offer protection for 260 endangered or threatened species, and are often directly responsible for their continued existence or recovery. In fact, over 60 wildlife refuges have been specifically established to protect 124 endangered or threatened species. Whooping cranes are recovering from the brink of extinction due to conservation efforts at Necedah Refuge in Wisconsin, Chassahowitzka Refuge in Florida, and Aransas Refuge in Texas. San Joaquin River Refuge in California protects the endangered Blunt-nosed leopard lizard and San Joaquin kit fox. And refuges outside Las Vegas, whose development is rapidly depleting critical water supplies, are home to endemic species found nowhere else. In South Carolina, threatened and





ST. MARKS NWR, FL | LOU KELLENBERGER

endangered species, including Red-cockaded woodpeckers and Pine Barrens tree frogs, find sanctuary at Carolina Sandhills Refuge. Each year, up to 20,000 sea turtles rely on undisturbed beaches of Archie Carr Refuge in Florida to produce the next generation. The remote Pacific Islands refuges protect some of the last remaining untouched coral reef ecosystems in the world, which are now threatened with ocean acidification due to greenhouse gas pollution.

Of course, America's wildlife refuges also provide innumerable environmental benefits beyond just those felt by wildlife species. For example, wildlife refuges filter groundwater and rainwater before they run downstream to municipal water supplies, and in many areas, reduce flooding by capturing excess rainwater and attenuating coastal storm surges. The native vegetation on many of America's wildlife refuges helps absorb pollution and greenhouse gases from the air, while natural filtration and sound water management promotes healthy fisheries within and beyond refuge boundaries.

To ensure that America's unique wildlife would be seen and enjoyed by future generations, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act in 1997. This defining law declares that wildlife protection must be the primary focus on national wildlife refuges and requires that refuges everywhere be managed as an interrelated system. The Refuge Improvement Act requires FWS

to maintain adequate water quantity and quality to achieve its wildlife management goals, to emphasize "biological integrity, diversity and environmental health" over narrower, single-species management, and to continue expanding the Refuge System in a manner that best conserves America's diverse and irreplaceable ecosystems. The Act also recognizes the importance of wildlife refuges for outdoor recreation and mandated that wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, environmental education and interpretation, and wildlife observation and photography, receive priority consideration over all other possible activities.

Enhancing Recreation for Outdoor Enthusiasts

Wildlife refuges not only play a vital role in protecting lands and waters for rare plant communities, migratory birds, fish and other wildlife, but also offer an impressive variety of recreational and educational opportunities. For instance, in keeping with America's centuries old sporting traditions, over 270 wildlife refuges are open to anglers, while waterfowl, big game, and other hunters enjoy access to more than 315 refuges and 3,000 waterfowl production areas. Other outdoor enthusiasts visit refuges to see new species of birds and butterflies, take photos and learn about plants and wildlife, or simply to en-



BAYOU SAUVAGE NWR, LA | STEVE HILLEBRAND, FWS



LAGUNA ATASCOSA NWR, TX | STEVE HILLEBRAND, FWS

Refuges offer unparalleled opportunities for the public to hike, canoe, hunt, fish, watch birds and other wildlife, and volunteer. But these opportunities are being curtailed due to staffing shortages. According to the FWS' 2008 RONS, they need at minimum 50 additional full time staff to oversee recreational and volunteer programs nationwide.

joy the quiet solitude of these increasingly scarce natural places.

Visitor education programs are an important contribution that refuges make to local communities. In fact, high demand for environmental education continues throughout the Refuge System with 780,000 participants in 2007. Despite funding and staff limitations seriously reducing the scope of outreach programs, more than 350 wildlife refuges are still able to maintain wildly popular environmental education programs. By using innovative science-based programs and working in partnership with area schools, wildlife refuges offer education programs that benefit teachers and students. Facilities such as the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center in Minnesota and the environmental education center at Savannah Refuge in Georgia stimulate much-needed interest in wildlife and the natural world.

Visitation trends in recent years show that people are increasingly interested in birding and wildlife watching on refuges. Birding is one of the fastest growing outdoor recreation activities in the country, with 46 million people over the age of 16 involved to varying degrees. In fact, FWS recently launched a national Birding Initiative to highlight and promote the Refuge System's prominent role in birding and conservation. Birding offers year-round opportunities for individuals, families and schools

to better understand and connect to nature through unstructured exploration that often creates a life-long interest in natural history and a commitment to conservation. Unfortunately, limited staffing, the lack of appropriate visitor facilities and inadequate support for crucial local partnerships hinder the Refuge System's ability to respond to America's growing interest in birding and other forms of wildlife-dependant recreation.

Economic Benefits

There is a national wildlife refuge in every state and within an hour's drive of every metropolitan area, which allows people to experience wildlife and wildlife-related recreation without having to travel to distant or remote areas. Not surprisingly, more than 41 million visitors create impressive economic and environmental benefits for many local communities.

According to a recent FWS economic analysis, *Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*, those visitors generated \$1.7 billion of annual sales to local economies, of which 87% was spent by travelers from outside the local area. As this spending flowed through the economy, over 27,000 jobs were created and more than \$543 million in em-

ployment income was generated. While these figures are undeniably significant, it is widely recognized that the Refuge System's potential to stimulate local economies remains largely untapped.

Recovering a System in Budgetary Crisis

In June 2008, the FWS released an objective analysis conducted by Management Systems International (MSI) entitled *"An Independent Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System."* While MSI made strong and specific recommendations for achieving many of the Refuge System's most essential habitat, wildlife and visitor services goals, its overarching conclusion was that due to a dramatic decrease in purchasing power, the Refuge System has been unable to "maintain its level of operational activity from one year to the next," requiring that "services and personnel...be cut back." In September 2008, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) drew similar conclusions with the release of its report, *"Wildlife Refuges: Changes in Funding, Staffing, and Other Factors Create*

The Refuge System needs an annual increase of at least \$15 million to keep its modest budget on pace with inflation.

Concerns about Future Sustainability." GAO detailed the funding situation for the Refuge System from fiscal year 2002-2007 and elucidated trends at the national level (for example, federal funding for strategic land acquisition plummeted more than 80% during this period), while emphasizing that many individual refuges were more heavily impacted than the national trends might suggest.

Despite long overdue increases in fiscal years 2008 and 2009, years of persistent budget shortfalls have been truly devastating to our nation's wildlife refuges. To avoid the unsustainable scenario where a refuge

would be forced to devote the entirety of its budget to employee costs with nothing left over for non-employee expenses such as machinery, office supplies and fuel, the FWS had no choice but

to prepare workforce downsizing plans that called for an eventual 20% reduction in overall staffing levels. With the loss of more than 10% of the workforce since 2004, refuge managers nationwide are being forced to make impossible choices: which school groups to turn away; what non-native invasive species to let spread unchecked; which oil rigs to ignore, though leaks and violations are happening all the time. The people lost were essential employees — refuge managers and supervisors, wildlife biologists



SEARCH AT BIG BRANCH MARSH NWR, LA | STEVE HILLEBRAND, FWS

The MSI Report concluded that declining, inadequate budgets coupled with increasing administrative requirements for field personnel has adversely impacted three important areas: the Refuge System's ability to conduct adequate inventory and monitoring work; the grossly understaffed law enforcement program; and the rate of growth of the Refuge System, which MSI notes has "declined markedly over the last five years." Budget deficiencies are seriously hamstringing the Refuge System's potential to deliver on its conservation and public use goals.



CRYSTAL RIVER NWR, FL | NOAH KAHN



MARSH RESTORATION AT BAYOU SAUVAGE NWR, LA | STEVE HILLEBRAND, FWS

Despite recent increases, prior years of persistent budget shortfalls caused many refuges to literally close their gates. Unfortunately, variations of the sign above are being taped up at refuges around the U.S. Without staff, popular hunting and fishing programs, school field trips, and volunteer opportunities have all been reduced or eliminated outright.

who monitored and recovered endangered species, interpretive rangers who taught our children and essential maintenance personnel who kept each refuge functioning smoothly.

When refuges are short-staffed, it doesn't only affect activities *inside* refuge boundaries. Refuge employees are also unable to devote sufficient attention to threats *beyond* refuge boundaries, such as water rights disputes, upstream contamination, land acquisition or easement opportunities, or encroaching developments. As in recent years, when staff levels are reduced to only one or a few people per refuge (and more than 35% of refuges have no on-site staff), opportunities to partner with other interested stakeholders are lost, which dramatically and adversely affects volunteer involvement and undermines efforts to leverage private sector dollars. For example, consider that the relatively well-staffed San Luis Refuge Complex in central California is often able to *triple* its annual budget through creative partnerships. With this extra income, large-scale tree plantings are restoring wildlife habitat and vacuuming up atmospheric carbon, invasive species are being eradicated, waterfowl hunting programs are thriving, and staff can more closely monitor outside threats, including water quantity and quality. This situation demonstrates how much is possible when a critical mass of staff is able to capitalize

on funding and partnering opportunities, and just how many opportunities are lost at most national wildlife refuges.

The recent increases by Congress have allowed for the temporary suspension of the workforce downsizing plans, but only continued increases will keep the downsizing plans where they belong — gathering dust on the shelf. Only then can FWS return to what it does best: protecting and restoring America's wildlife and habitat, providing a haven for a growing list of threatened and endangered species, and guaranteeing a positive experience for more than 41 million annual visitors, whether hunting, fishing, watching wildlife, or learning from educational programs.

\$1 BILLION OPERATIONS BACKLOG

A FWS database that catalogues the backlog of operational needs, the Refuge Operations Needs System (RONS), identifies the staff and equipment necessary to perform routine and mission-critical activities. RONS is currently being revised to improve its software and update its information, including results from a June 2008 detailed staffing model that used measurable and objective workload drivers to predict the number and location of permanent staffing needs. The first phase of a three-part



BOY SCOUT CAMP RESTROOM, ARKANSAS NWR, TX | STEVE HILLEBRAND, FWS

RONS revision was completed in late 2008, which, for field stations only, identified mission-critical staffing and non-staffing needs. In future years, the latter phases of the RONS revision will be complete and will incorporate the needs of the recently designated national monuments in the south Pacific, including Rose Atoll, Marianas Trench, and Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monuments. Those units have added approximately 50 million welcomed acres and additional responsibilities for the Refuge System.

Although the RONS revisions are not complete at this time, it appears that the total operational backlog will remain at least at \$1 billion. Having

hovered near this level for several years, scores of promising opportunities have been missed and countless challenges unmet.

\$2.6 BILLION MAINTENANCE BACKLOG

The Refuge System's deferred maintenance backlog is tracked in a database called Service Asset and Maintenance Management System (SAMMS). Deferred maintenance projects have been piling up for years and SAMMS now identifies a total maintenance backlog of over \$2.6 billion. This exorbitant backlog has created a veritable logjam of deferred maintenance projects and has greatly limited staff in their dual pursuit to protect wildlife and serve the public. In total, the Refuge System now has more than 11,000 facilities that are in need of some repair and the longer they are allowed to deteriorate, the more repairs will ultimately cost. At a time when the maintenance backlog is soaring (see Figure 1) and refuge roads, hiking trails, observation towers, hunting blinds and heavy equipment are falling into disrepair, our wildlife refuges cannot afford to wait any longer for the attention and funding priority they deserve.

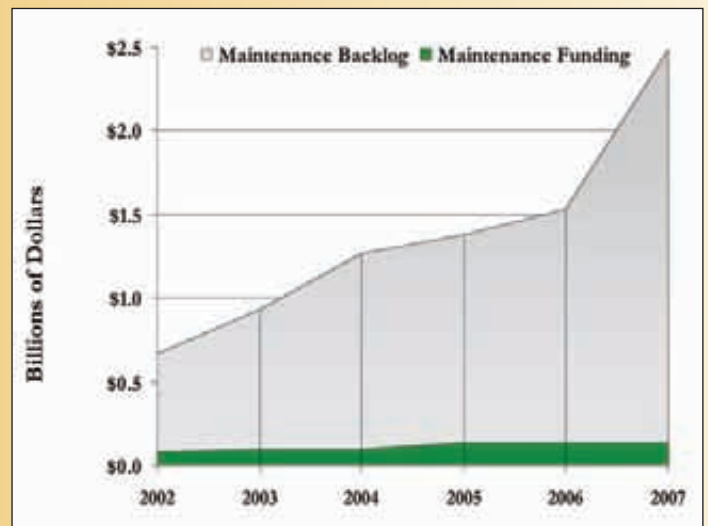


Figure 1. As annual funding for important maintenance projects has remained essentially flat in recent years, the size of the overall maintenance backlog has ballooned to more than \$2.6 billion.

CONCLUSION

The National Wildlife Refuge System stands alone as the *only* land and water system in the world with a mission that prioritizes wildlife conservation over all other activities. For well over a decade, CARE has worked to showcase the needs of the Refuge System and to secure a strong Congressional commitment for America's remarkable oceans, wetlands, deserts, prairie, tundra, and forests.

To protect America's wildlife and move toward achieving the conservation vision that began more than a century ago, *the Refuge System needs \$514 million for operations and maintenance in fiscal year 2010*. Reaching this level is an essential step along the pathway toward an annual budget of \$808 million, which is the baseline funding level that wildlife refuges need to protect water quality and wildlife and ensure a positive experience for all visitors.

Congress's recent funding increases for the Refuge System reflect a passion among Americans for preserving wildlife and wild lands and waters, a passion shared by President Theodore Roosevelt more than a century ago that led him to establish a vision for protecting the nation's wildlife and natural areas for future generations. Roosevelt once said, "our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method." From these ideals, the National Wildlife Refuge System was born and is today leading the effort to conserve and restore America's diverse wildlife heritage. CARE stands ready to work with Congress and the Administration to ensure another 100 years of successful wildlife conservation on America's national wildlife refuges.



BOY WITH CRAYFISH | NATIONAL CONSERVATION TRAINING CENTER, WV | STEVE HILLEBRAND, FWS



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