

2022 Annual Report



National
Wildlife Refuge
Association

refugeassociation.org

National wildlife refuges provide sanctuary not just for wildlife, but for people too.

All across our country Americans are seeking out refuge in nature. People are looking for a connection to nature through wildlife watching, hiking, hunting, fishing, and schools are looking for ways to bring nature to children in the classroom.



The National Wildlife Refuge System is absolutely the best system of public lands in the country for connecting people with nature.

Within 30 minutes of nearly every major city in the United States there is a national wildlife refuge waiting to be discovered and explored. National wildlife refuges not only provide the opportunity for people to connect with nature closer to their homes but, in so doing, have them become an integral part of their local community

Yet these national wildlife refuges are in jeopardy.

- Many people do not know what a national wildlife refuge is! That's why we must **promote** national wildlife refuges to the public.



- Our national wildlife refuges are severely underfunded and understaffed. We must **protect** them from losing their ability to manage wildlife and habitat.
- Our efforts to **enhance** our National Wildlife Refuge System target increasing the effectiveness of existing refuges and expanding refuge oversight to include lands and waters that will intensify success in meeting their mission.

Building strong stewardship for national wildlife refuges will ensure effective advocacy for the wildlife and habitat we hold dear.

Our Urban Wildlife Refuge Program and our partnerships with Refuge Friends groups highlight our commitment to reach out and strengthen current and future stewards of our country's natural heritage.

With your help we are creating a community of national wildlife refuge supporters that will battle threats to our National Wildlife Refuge System.

We are so thankful for your support, not only of the National Wildlife Refuge System, but also of the National Wildlife Refuge Association whose sole mission is to protect, promote and enhance it.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey L. Haskett, President
Michael J. Baldwin, Board Chair

Who We Are

A non-profit conservation organization founded in 1975 by retired U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service refuge managers, the National Wildlife Refuge Association is solely dedicated to protecting, promoting, and enhancing the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest system of lands and waters set aside for wildlife conservation. The Refuge Association works in partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Refuge Friends organizations, sportsmen and women, farmers and ranchers, students, urban constituencies, and other conservation organizations.



Our mission is to conserve America's wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, promote, and enhance the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.





Mallard at Seaside NWR, WY | Tom Koerner/USFWS

Protecting

THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Increased Funding For The National Wildlife Refuge System

Our major advocacy goal is to increase funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System, which has been critically underfunded for well over a decade. We were very excited to see that the President's Budget Request in each of the last three years has been higher — a step in the right direction, although not nearly enough. The Administration is now requesting nearly \$600 million in funding for the Refuge System, about a 13% increase over current enacted funding. We are advocating for an even higher number when the next budget is released in Spring 2023.

The Refuge Association, Refuge Friends Groups, and partner conservation organizations have launched a campaign for Congress to fund the Refuge System at least at \$712 million in FY2023. Refuges have lost nearly 1,000 staff in the last decade (a 20% drop), and almost all refuges are “complexed” in groups with 2-6 other refuges — a strategy implemented to deal with impossibly low budgets. In those complexes, often only one refuge is staffed and the rest see minimal support. We are working to increase funding to a more sustainable level.

CLIMATE CHANGE

All of us are seeing climate changing in real time. From the melting permafrost in Alaska, to the seawater incursions along our coasts, to the increased zoonotic diseases impacting wildlife, it is becoming increasingly clear that the National Wildlife Refuge System must adapt to these changing conditions in order to provide safe havens and migration corridors for animals.

Since many national wildlife refuges are scattered in isolated pockets, we are focused on increasing wildlife corridors for

land-based animal movement and on the acquisition of refuge lands in areas that could expand the viability of current habitat and provide future habitat as wildlife populations shift north to cooler climates. The National Wildlife Refuge System has a large role to play in the survival of wildlife species as ecosystems shift and people and animals respond by moving to more hospitable landscapes. We are working with Congress and the Administration to facilitate the Refuge System's ability to adapt.

Taking A Stand On Toxic Lead Ammunition & Tackle

The National Wildlife Refuge Association raised awareness and organized public comments in support of the phase out of lead ammunition and fishing tackle on certain national wildlife refuge lands in the Northeast as well as a phase out of lead on new lands of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Stopping A Road Through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge

We continue to participate in a lawsuit to protect Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska from installation of a roadway through sensitive wetlands between villages on either side of the isthmus. We are also involved in conversations with the Department of the Interior advocating for the continued protection of this vital wilderness that is essential to the migration of birds from all over the world.

PROTECTING OKEFENOCKE SWAMP FROM A MINING OPERATION

The open pit titanium mine proposed for land immediately adjacent to Okefenokee NWR in Georgia and Florida has been held off for now thanks to the work of the Refuge Association and many other partners in the Okefenokee Protection Alliance. Our principal concern is damage to the aquifer, lowering the water level in the Okefenokee Swamp and fundamentally altering its ecology. Although no work has yet begun on this mine, the battle is far from over. Legal arguments are underway to establish the extent of wetlands at the mining site. In the meantime, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was tasked with evaluating the impacts of the mine and assuring consultation with Native American tribes. This case has the potential to greatly reduce protections for our country's wetlands. We will remain watchful to assure that such an ill-considered project never comes to pass.

For more information see: protectokefenokee.org.



Promoting

THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Refuge Friends

In partnership with the Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates, (CORFA) the National Wildlife Refuge Association delivered twelve webinars for Refuge Friends groups. Topics ranged from quarterly advocacy updates and other advocacy related topics, insurance for Refuge Friends groups, website accessibility, land acquisition, and President

Biden's FY2023 Budget Request. We strive to connect Refuge Friends with each other, help them be better advocates for their refuge and the Refuge System as a whole, and provide valuable information to grow their Friends Group. If you would like to receive information about our monthly webinars, please go to: www.refugeassociation.org/refuge-friends-mailing-list.

URBAN WILDLIFE REFUGE PROGRAM



Since 2021, the Urban Program has expanded beyond Southern California to include Florida and New Jersey, and benefited thousands of people through webinars, events, and workforce development. In Southern California, a major schoolyard habitat project moved into the design phase. When completed it will provide an outdoor classroom and laboratory for generations for students. Through a new partnership with the Conservation Corps of Long Beach, five young adults were recruited to be the first ever crew to work at Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge.

In 2022, the program added Liz Figueroa to the team as the South Florida Regional Partnership Specialist working with Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge to bring conservation education and programs to greater Miami and Palm Beach County. The Urban team recently hired a new partnership specialist, Lucy Crespo, to work in Elizabeth, NJ and expand the efforts of the Lenape National Wildlife Refuge Complex. We look forward to adding more specialists in more locations around the country to facilitate better community connections with urban national wildlife refuges in 2023.

YOUNG AMBASSADORS

The National Wildlife Refuge System needs ambassadors of all ages, backgrounds, and interests. Our Young Ambassadors (YA) Program builds on the enthusiasm and energy that young people already have for the environment and shows them how the Refuge System offers a wide variety of wildlife and habitat and how they can learn more and help spread the word.

We collaborate with Refuge Friends groups, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge staff, volunteers, and wildlife enthusiasts to host live events to create short refuge-specific videos to post on social media to showcase national wildlife refuges. Over the past year, the YA Program connected with more than 50,000 young people through Instagram and TikTok! Through these events and resulting videos, fans of wildlife learn about the importance of national wildlife refuges to the species that call them home, and about the availability of recreational opportunities on refuges throughout the United States.



National
Wildlife Refuge
Association

Young Ambassadors

Interpretative Signs For A Popular National Wildlife Refuge In Rhode Island

The National Wildlife Refuge Association developed interpretative panels for Block Island Refuge in Rhode Island to highlight the essential habitat provided for piping plovers and other migrating birds.

Social Justice Committee

The National Wildlife Refuge Association believes that the Refuge System belongs to every American. Everyone is entitled to feel safe everywhere in this country, without fear of being harmed because of the color of their skin. Racism, bigotry, and hatred have no place within our organization or culture.

This year we continued important work through our Social Justice Committee mostly focusing on internal measures we could take. This included National Wildlife Refuge Association board and staff training on diversity, equity, and inclusion principles and revising organizational policies that had inadvertently limited participation and caused barriers.



Moose calf at Seedskadee NWR, WI. Tom Koerner/USFWS



Enhancing

THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Panthers And Sparrows In Florida

The National Wildlife Refuge Association has been active on the ground in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and Southwest Florida for many years, directly benefiting several national wildlife refuges and the landscapes surrounding and connecting them. Our work in outreach, conservation science and land protection has achieved significant conservation gains including increased conservation funding and the permanent protection of thousands of additional acres. To secure funding for this vital landscape, we develop the science to identify the most important lands and we work with landowners to protect the most ecologically significant landscapes in southern Florida.

Our efforts over the past 4 years on the 6200-acre Corrigan Ranch have come to fruition. We have facilitated a state and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service funding partnership to permanently protect this high-quality property. Bordering on the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, Corrigan Ranch contains both upland and wetland habitat, including some of the last remaining unprotected Florida dry prairie habitat. Our work also resulted in the discovery of the largest remaining population of the Florida grasshopper sparrow, the most endangered bird species in the continental United States. This property will now be managed for Florida grasshopper sparrows and other wildlife along with compatible recreational opportunities.

Working with our partners at University of Florida Center for Landscape Conservation Planning (UF), we are developing a number of analyses and initiatives essential for achieving our Florida wildlife and water conservation goals through the protection of important wildlife habitat and

water resources. We recently completed a Southwest Florida Landscape Conservation Design through collaboration between UF, Florida Conservation Group and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This project includes the watersheds important for protecting and restoring the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary as well as the “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Matlacha National Wildlife Refuge, and Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge. The analysis has also identified areas most important for restoring a Florida panther population in south-central and southwest Florida north of the Caloosahatchee River.



Grasshopper Sparrow | RobGraham

Sea Turtles In Puerto Rico

The National Wildlife Refuge Association's Puerto Rico sea turtle project has made major advances in restoration activities by reducing threats in the most important nesting beaches.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association continued to strengthen the collaboration and effective communication with local conservation partners and sea turtle community groups on light pollution mitigation. An important outcome was the lighting retrofit to the Pine Grove condominium, which included design of the plan, purchase of lights, arranging for shipping and delivery, and ongoing installation, which was achieved through collaboration with multiple stakeholders including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Puerto Rico's Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, the Homeowner Association of the Condominium, and Chelonia Inc. Another important outcome was the demonstration of the capacity of the project's greenhouse to supply enough material for reforestation projects in nesting beaches by producing more than 1,000 plants annually.

We completed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between local sea turtle community groups, Chelonia, and the Municipality of San Juan — an important step towards the development of restoration projects on nesting beaches in the capital city. Through this MOU, the Municipality of San Juan commits to supporting and assisting our project on mitigation actions conducted for reducing threats at San Juan's nesting beaches. In addition, we accomplished the restoration of nesting habitat in Playa Lucia (municipality of Yabucoa) through the construction of 260 feet of barricade, reforestation, and inclusion of all properties in the ongoing lighting retrofit program.



RED WOLVES IN NORTH CAROLINA

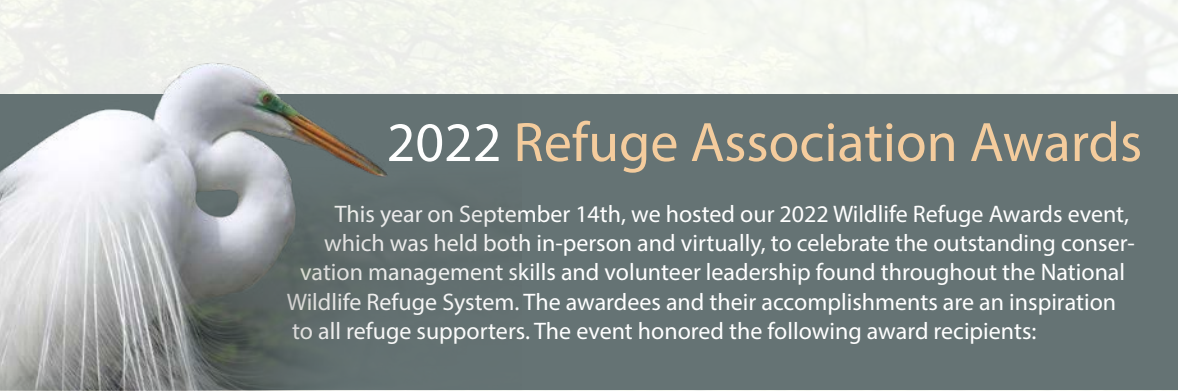
With a grant from the National Wildlife Refuge Association, Wildlands Network continued to bolster the red wolf recovery efforts on and around Alligator River and Pocosin Lakes national wildlife refuges in eastern North Carolina through advocacy focused on local and statewide awareness to increase community tolerance and reduce road mortality of this endangered species.

Our work with Catawba College in eastern North Carolina continued this year with the development of project proposals for prospective internships working at North Carolina national wildlife refuges. Two potential projects at Pocosin Lakes NWR are 1) helping with management and monitoring of over 37,000 acres of restored pocosin wetlands and/or 2) monitoring small game and neotropical migratory bird population changes in hundreds of



acres of firebreaks that the refuge is reclaiming for fire management purposes. Both projects are critical to meeting the mission and purpose of Pocosin Lakes refuge.

Restored pocosin wetlands provide habitat for a diverse array of wildlife including black bear, deer, otter, mink, many species of reptiles and amphibians, raptors, and neotropical migratory birds, and even wild turkey. Restoration includes rewetting peat soils, which helps prevent the frequency and intensity of wildfires and sequesters vast amounts of carbon that helps reduce the impact of climate change. The refuge is reclaiming firebreaks by removing rank, woody growth to create a fire "defensible space" as well as early successional habitat for the small game prey base for endangered red wolves.



2022 Refuge Association Awards

This year on September 14th, we hosted our 2022 Wildlife Refuge Awards event, which was held both in-person and virtually, to celebrate the outstanding conservation management skills and volunteer leadership found throughout the National Wildlife Refuge System. The awardees and their accomplishments are an inspiration to all refuge supporters. The event honored the following award recipients:



MICHAEL JOHNSON

Paul Kroegel – Refuge Manager of the Year

Clarks River and Green River National Wildlife Refuges, Kentucky



FRIENDS OF SEAL BEACH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Molly Krival – Refuge Friends Group of the Year

Southern California



RODNEY "ROD" COLVIN

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and Ash Meadows Fish Conservation Facility, Nevada



DAVID RASKIN

Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges



FEDERAL WILDLIFE OFFICER ROBERT PELOQUIN

Refuge Employee of the Year
Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Nevada

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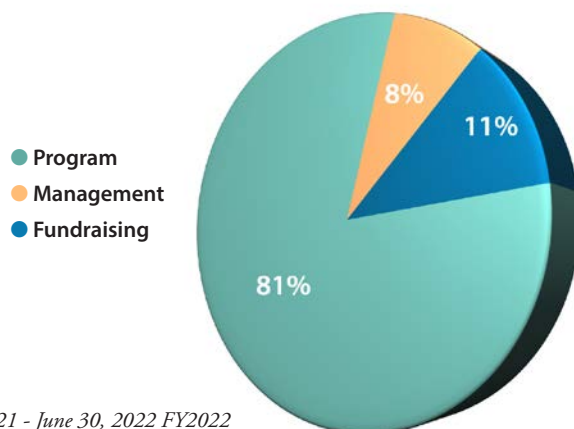


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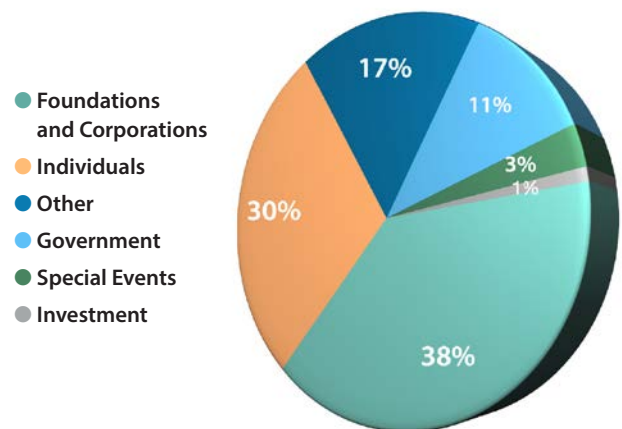
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NWRA FY2022*

Expenses: \$2,106,966



Revenue: \$2,341,683



July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022 FY2022

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2022 Annual Report

For 47 years the National Wildlife Refuge Association has been the voice of the wildlife and habitat that depend on the National Wildlife Refuge System.