

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Chairman, Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Conrad Burns
Ranking Member, Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

March 11, 2002

RE: INCREASED FUNDING FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM
O&M

Dear Chairman Byrd and Ranking Member Burns:

As members who share your commitment to the stewardship of America's natural resources, we are writing to urge you to support a \$100 million dollar increase over the FY02 funded level for our National Wildlife Refuge System as it reaches its Centennial anniversary in 2003.

We appreciate the difficult task you face in prioritizing what is a vast universe of critical needs. Nonetheless, we believe that the National Wildlife Refuge System currently has an unprecedented opportunity to realize its potential, and your subcommittee has led the fight over the past four years to meet the refuge system's needs.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is now more than ever, a destination point for people as well as wildlife. People are visiting the National Wildlife Refuge System with their feet, their fishing rods, their duck calls and their cameras in record numbers, infusing more than \$700 million into local economies. Whatever their particular interest, people who visit and enjoy wildlife refuges have one common and enduring interest – the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitat. National Wildlife Refuges provide excellent opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography and natural resource education. As a result, managing these lands to their full potential is critically important. While we have made great progress in meeting the funding challenges facing the Refuge System, largely because of the leadership of you and your colleagues, the National Wildlife Refuge System unfortunately continues to face a significant funding backlog. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that operational needs total over \$1 billion, and the maintenance backlog is more than \$660 million.

Public support for the Refuge System has never been stronger. Such wide support is highlighted by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a coalition of

20 organizations ranging from the National Rifle Association to Defenders of Wildlife. The CARE, which speaks for millions of conservationists, sportsmen and women, and outdoor enthusiasts, presented a plan entitled, "Restoring America's Wildlife Legacy" to highlight the needs of the Refuge System. The CARE plan identified significant unmet needs within the Refuge System, and demonstrated that at the current rate of funding for the Refuge System, these backlogs will never be eliminated.

The Centennial Celebration offers a unique opportunity to showcase the Refuge System's conservation legacy, chronicle a pivotal moment in history, and strengthen the Refuge System as it enters its second century. We urge you to seize this important moment in time by supporting the National Wildlife Refuge System with a \$100 million operations and maintenance increase for the 100th anniversary of the Refuge System. In the Centennial Anniversary, this is a much-needed down payment for the long-term investment that the Refuge System provides our Nation.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter.

Bob Graham

Michael D. Crapo
