



For Immediate Release  
December 19, 2007

Contact: Desiree Sorenson-Groves  
dgroves@refugeassociation.org  
(202) 333-9075

## **NWRA applauds FY08 Omnibus Appropriations bill for Restoring Critical Refuge System Funding**

**Washington, DC-** The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauds Congress's approval of an FY08 budget that makes national wildlife refuges a leading conservation priority. At a time when key refuge wildlife conservation and public use programs are being slashed across the country, this bill takes a bold stance to reverse funding declines of recent years. The NWRA expresses special appreciation to Representative Norm Dicks (D-WA), Chairman of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, for leading efforts to make refuges a priority in next year's budget.

Last night, the Senate joined with the House and passed an omnibus-spending package for FY08, rolling eleven spending bills into one, including Interior. The package includes a critically-needed increase for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) with proposed funding at \$434 million, \$39 million more than last year. "This increase is a shot of adrenaline for an ailing Refuge System," said Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. "Chairman Dicks and members of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee gave the Refuge System a holiday gift that will keep on giving."

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) which the NWRA chairs, requested \$451.5 million; the amount appropriated during the 2003 Refuge System Centennial adjusted for inflation. Over the past four years, refuges have had flat or declining budgets, forcing each Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Region to implement strategic downsizing plans calling for a 20% reduction of the workforce nationwide, equating to 565 jobs. The Refuge System needs at least \$15 million annually to keep up with the rising costs of inflation and, without it, refuges have been forced to close, while visitor programs such as environmental education have been sharply reduced. CARE estimates the NWRS would need at least \$765 annually to meet fundamental wildlife conservation and public use mandates.

The House will vote on final approval later today before being sent to the President. If enacted at the proposed level, this could stave off a second round of refuge downsizing.

To find out more about the funding crisis in the Refuge System, visit [www.refugenet.org](http://www.refugenet.org) and click on CARE.

*The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, America's premier network of lands and waters set aside to conserve our diverse wildlife heritage.*

###