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NWRA Applauds Record Funding Level for National Wildlife Refuge System

Washington, DC- The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauds Congress for including a \$40 million increase to the National Wildlife Refuge System's (NWRS) operations and maintenance budgets for next year with the passage of the 2010 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. This builds upon strong increases over the past two years and brings Refuge System funding to an all time high of \$503 million, surpassing the amount appropriated during the System's Centennial in 2003. The bill also doubles the amount of land acquisition funding for refuges through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to \$86 million.

"Just a few short years ago the Refuge System was forced to close refuges, curtail popular recreational programs and eliminate 20% of their workforce due to devastating funding shortfalls," said Evan Hirsche, President of the NWRA. "With this increase, Congress has made conserving our diverse wildlife heritage a priority, while providing outstanding recreational and educational opportunities for the American public."

Backing Congress' decision to make refuges and wildlife a priority are 250 local refuge Friends groups, 38,000 refuge volunteers and over 20 national conservation and recreation groups with a combined membership of more than 14 million Americans. Along with the NWRA, these groups and individuals support annual Refuge System funding of at least \$808 million. The impacts of global climate change, invasive species, and habitat loss pose serious threats to wildlife - from polar bears, to whooping cranes, to manatees - and funding our national wildlife refuges will help to ensure the survival of these species for future generations while providing ecosystem services such as clean air and water and storm protection.

Congress' doubling of Refuge System land conservation dollars will also meet critical inholding acquisition and refuge completion needs, simplifying management, and reducing cost. In addition, funds will underwrite creation of new wildlife refuges that will help achieve vital species conservation objectives.

"The Refuge System was started over 100 years ago by President Theodore Roosevelt during turbulent economic times; it is gratifying to see Congress and the American people continue to uphold these same values in our own challenging economic times," said Hirsche. "We look forward to working with the President and leaders of the House and Senate to fully fund the Refuge System at \$808 million by the end of President Obama's first term, and maximize the System's capacity to conserve America's rich diversity of wildlife."

More details on Refuge System funding in FY10 can be viewed at:
http://refugeassociation.org/New-issues/FY10_Fundingpriorities.html

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to conserve America's wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries that secure its ecological integrity.

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