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### **NWRA Commends Senate Refuge Funding Increase but Urges Adoption of Record House Level**

**Washington, DC-** The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauds the Senate for including a \$26 million increase to the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) budget for next year with the passage of their FY 2010 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill. The bill exceeds President Obama's budget request, yet is not as strong as the record funding increase for refuges passed by the House of Representatives earlier this summer, a \$40 million increase.

"This funding increase approved by the Senate comes at a critical time for our National Wildlife Refuge System," said Evan Hirsche, President of the NWRA. "As refuges grapple with how to address challenges stemming from climate change, invasive species and competition for clean and plentiful water, adequate funding is a necessity – not a luxury."

The Senate bill would fund the Refuge System at \$489 million for next year, however, refuges need at least \$808 million annually to meet fundamental wildlife conservation and public use mandates. Unfortunately, the Senate level, while a notable increase, still only funds the System at 60% of its total need. Further, the Senate bill does not fully allow the Refuge System to cover inflationary costs, which are *at least* \$15 million annually. The House passed bill would fund the System at \$503 million and would provide enough for fixed costs.

"Refuges are the most significant system of lands and waters in the world where wildlife comes first, yet they lack funding for the most basic of needs," said Hirsche. "Simple inventory and monitoring does not occur at many refuges and lack of funding is the culprit."

The high point in refuge funding came in 2003 when Congress appropriated \$391.5 million in celebration of the Refuge Centennial. Following that increase, funding levels deteriorated to the point where 20% of staff positions were to be eliminated and many refuges still have no staff at all. Refuges need at least \$15 million annually just to keep pace with inflation putting the 2003-adjusted number at \$481.5 m for FY10. The Senate passed Interior Appropriations bill would finally surpasses that number although it falls far short of the System's annual need of \$808 million, and is less than the House approved level of \$503 million.

NWRA encourages the Conferees to adopt the House-passed \$40 million increase for the NWRS as they work out the differences between the two chambers.

*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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