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House Approves Record Funding for Refuge System

Washington, DC- The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauds the House of Representatives for including a \$40 million increase to the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) budget for next year with the passage of their 2010 Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill. The bill exceeded President Obama's budget request by \$20 million, and its enactment would bring the operating budget for the NWRS to \$503 million, building upon significant increases in FY08 and FY09.

“At a time of extraordinary need, the House of Representatives has approved record funding for our National Wildlife Refuge System,” said Evan Hirsche, President of the NWRA. “Increased funding will better equip refuges to address challenges stemming from climate change, invasive species and competition for clean and plentiful water.” If enacted, the House funding level will surpass the inflationary adjusted amount appropriated in FY04 – the previous high water mark for refuge funding.

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 had no staff at all. Refuges need at least \$15 million annually just to keep pace with inflation putting the 2003-adjusted number at \$481.5m for FY10. The House passed Interior Appropriations bill would finally surpasses that number although it is still falls short of the estimated System's annual need of \$808 million.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) estimates the NWRS would need at least \$808 annually to meet fundamental wildlife conservation and public use mandates and is urging the Obama Administration and Congress to meet that goal with incremental increases by 2013. This \$40 million increase puts refuges on the path to reach that goal.

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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