



America's National Wildlife Refuges

Good for Wildlife and for Business



The National Wildlife Refuge System at a Glance

Dear Members of Congress, the Administration and the American people:

The National Wildlife Refuge System has been protecting our nation's wildlife for more than one hundred years. Today, with 562 national wildlife refuges and 38 wetland management districts located in every U.S. state and territory, the Refuge System is the largest network of lands and waters in the world dedicated first and foremost to wildlife conservation. Yet it also offers impressive additional benefits to the American people by stimulating economic activity, creating jobs, helping provide clean air, water and buffering from storms, and offering quality wildlife dependent recreation.

Unfortunately, a lack of funding has forced the Refuge System to struggle to meet core management goals and objectives. That's why in 1995, a national coalition was formed to advocate for funding for the operations and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Today, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) includes groups as diverse as the National Rifle Association and Defenders of Wildlife, who collectively represent more than 16 million Americans — from hunters and anglers to birdwatchers, photographers and scientists, we share a common interest in ensuring adequate funding for the Refuge System.

On the 20th anniversary of our founding, we remain dedicated to getting the Refuge System the resources it needs to fulfill its promise to the American people. And so, we urge Congress to fund the Refuge System at **\$508.2 million for Fiscal Year 2016**.

Sincerely,

American Birding Association
American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Izaak Walton League of America
Marine Conservation Institute
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association
National Wildlife Federation

National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Corps Network
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute

- 388% return on investment: For every \$1 appropriated, \$4.87 is generated in economic activity to local communities;
- 6,464% return on investment in environmental services — For every \$1, \$65 is generated in ecosystem benefits totaling \$32.3 billion;
- 35,000 private U.S. jobs and \$792.7 million in job income;
- \$342.9 million in local, county, state and federal tax revenue;
- 47 million visitors in 2014.

Management: By the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Mission: To conserve the nation's wildlife and wildlife habitats for present and future Americans.

Size: More than half a billion acres of lands and waters, including:

- 562 refuges, with at least one in every U.S. state and territory;
- 38 wetland management districts that oversee 3.6 million acres of waterfowl production areas;
- With inclusion of the recently-expanded Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, the FWS through its National Wildlife Refuge System is now responsible for 568 million acres of land and water.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Also:

- Protects more than 700 bird, 220 mammal, 250 reptile and amphibian, and 1,000 fish species, in addition to countless invertebrates and plants;
- Offers compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, including The Big Six: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation;
- Provides an opportunity for 36,000 Americans to volunteer their time and expertise;
- Generates \$2.4 billion to local economies, supporting approximately 35,000 U.S. jobs and nearly \$800 million in employment income, and adding more than \$340 million in tax revenue;
- Generates more than \$32.3 billion each year in ecosystem services, such as buffering communities from storms and purifying water supplies.

The 'Big Six'

ON AMERICA'S WILDLIFE REFUGES

Environmental Education and Interpretation

- ✦ In FY 2013, approximately 3.5 million people participated in refuge environmental education and interpretation programs;
- ✦ 394 units of the Refuge System (70%) offer environmental educational programming;
- ✦ There are currently 75 million children under age 18 in the U.S., according to ChildStats.gov

Wildlife refuges are some of America's most important outdoor classrooms, introducing youth to the outdoors and helping visitors understand the things they see in the natural world. In addition to the students who take part in classroom visits, many more young people visit wildlife refuges each year to fish, hunt, watch and photograph wildlife, hike and volunteer.

But with nearly 80 percent of Americans now living in urban or suburban areas, many Americans have limited opportunities to connect with the natural world. The National Wildlife Refuge System's urban wildlife refuges provide venues for a new generation of city dwellers to make that connection and perhaps join the ranks of the 90 million people who already enjoy wildlife related recreation in this country.

Increased funding will expand the opportunities to provide educational programming for millions more children and visitors.

L-R: Tualtin Puddle Stompers | USFWS • Deer Flat NWR | Robert G. Allen • South Toe River | Gary Peebles, USFWS



Photography

- ✦ In FY2014, more than 8.4 million visitors took part in photography across 463 refuges, an increase of over 2.6 million people since FY2010, a 45% increase.
- ✦ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are approximately 150,000 professional photographers in the U.S., and the profession is growing by 4 percent per year;
- ✦ The Consumer Electronics Industry reports that in 2011, digital camera revenue was at \$7 billion, and 84% of American households owned a digital camera.

America's wildlife refuges deliver exceptional opportunities for nature photography. Their landscapes make spectacular backdrops, and their wildlife inhabitants provide an endless supply of subjects. Photo blinds, auto routes, pullouts, trails, and boardwalks offer a range of vantage points for the casual and professional photographer. Many wildlife refuges hold special events for new and experienced photographers alike. For children more familiar with a smartphone or digital camera than a magnifying glass, digital photography is a simple way to make them more comfortable with being outside. In essence, students "plug in" in order to be able to "un-plug."

More operations and maintenance funding will support improved infrastructure to benefit professional and casual photography on wildlife refuges.

L-R: Parker River NWR | Matt Poole, USFWS • Noxubee NWR | Phillip McKibben • Merced NWR | Bill Bouton



Seedskadee NWR | Tom Koerner, USFWS



Wildlife Conservation

“Wild creatures, like men, must have a place to live. As civilization creates cities, builds highways, and drains marshes, it takes away, little by little, the land that is suitable for wildlife. And as their space for living dwindles, the wildlife populations themselves decline. Refuges resist this trend by saving some areas from encroachment, and by preserving in them, or restoring where necessary, the conditions that wild things need in order to live.”

—Rachel Carson

- More than 380 threatened and endangered species depend on national wildlife refuges for the habitat they need. Almost every refuge (98%) provides a home to at least one listed plant or animal;
- A total of 59 wildlife refuges were established specifically to protect one or more endangered species.

Established in 1903, the National Wildlife Refuge System is the world’s largest and most diverse conservation network managed for fish, wildlife and their habitats. Today, with 568 million acres of lands and waters within its responsibility, the Refuge System is home to more than 380 of the nation’s more than 1500 endangered or threatened species.

America’s wildlife refuges are safe havens for endangered and threatened species, offering prime habitat and management expertise to give them the best hope for recovery. They also provide proactive opportunities to conserve habitat for species being considered for future listings.

A robust Refuge System budget supports the wildlife biology and other scientific resources to ensure habitat is managed to help improve conditions for threatened and endangered species as well as the trust species throughout the System.

L-R: Wichita Mountains NWR | Grace Haight • Mallards and pintails at Columbia NWR | David E. Goeke • Sage Grouse | USFWS



Hawaiian Monk Seal at Northwestern Hawaiian Islands NWR | Mark Sullivan



Wildlife Observation and Birding

- ✦ In 2011, wildlife watchers in the U.S. numbered approximately 71.8 million people and spent an estimated \$54.9 billion on hotels, food, equipment and related expenses;
- ✦ Nearly 31 million refuge visitors participated in wildlife watching in FY13—that's 65% of all visits to the Refuge System;
- ✦ Nearly 47 million bird watchers, specifically, spent nearly \$41 billion in 2011, generating \$107 billion in economic output and supporting 666,000 jobs;
- ✦ More than 200 wildlife refuges were created specifically to protect, manage and restore habitat for migratory birds.

To celebrate the incredible wildlife found on America's wildlife refuges, more than 35 birding festivals are hosted at, or in conjunction with, wildlife refuges around the country every year. These events are boons to local communities, where the influx of avid bird-watchers generates significant spending at area businesses.

Increased funding means the Refuge System can expand birding and other ecotourism opportunities, which will further stimulate local economies in every state and U.S. territory.

L-R: Waubay WMD | Laura Hubers, USFWS • Merritt Island NWR | Francine Baer • National Elk Refuge | Lori Iverson, USFWS





Hunting and Fishing

- ✦ A total of 364 refuges are open to hunting and 303 refuges are open to fishing, with all 38 wetland management districts open to both;
- ✦ In 2011, 13.7 million U.S. hunters spent \$33.7 billion on the sport; meanwhile, 33.1 million anglers spent a total of \$41.8 billion on equipment, licenses, trips and other fishing-related items or events;
- ✦ According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, hunting and fishing support approximately 1.6 million jobs nationwide.

The Refuge System offers a large base of lands and waters on which to keep America's sporting heritage thriving. Youth hunting events offered at refuges around the country are empowering a new generation of sportsmen and women to carry on the tradition. Fishing derbies are a popular pastime among families on dozens of wildlife refuges. Virtually every type of sport fishing on the continent can be found within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

With more funding, the Refuge System can improve habitat for game species, and ultimately increase hunting and fishing opportunities on hundreds of refuges.

Duck Stamp

Revenue from the purchase of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (or Duck Stamp) by waterfowl hunters, bird watchers, and stamp collectors is used to acquire and protect vital wildlife habitat. To date, the stamp has generated more than \$800 million, helping add more than 5.5 million acres of waterfowl habitat to the Refuge System; and a recent price increase from \$15 to \$25 advocated by sportsmen, will provide more funding for critical habitat needs of the System. While the hunting and wildlife watching community is responsible for funding the initial protection of these acres, it is up to Congress to provide the funding to adequately maintain them to benefit wildlife and the public.

L-R: Huron WMD | Chuck Pyle, USFWS • Swan Lake | Wade Fredenberg, USFWS • Duck Stamp



CARE's member organizations are available to provide further information about their programs and their ongoing commitment to protecting and funding refuges.

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