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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS TOP RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 24, 2015 - National wildlife refuges not only provide a haven for wildlife, they are also where millions of Americans go to enjoy outdoor recreation. A new report by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement shows that with more than 47 million visitors each year, the National Wildlife Refuge System also provides a boost to local economies providing a 388% return on investment: for every \$1 appropriated, \$4.87 is returned.

America's National Wildlife Refuges: Good for Wildlife and for Business highlights the wildlife conservation benefits of the refuge system and the "Big Six" wildlife-dependent recreational uses offered on most refuges:

- Environmental Education;
- Interpretation;
- Photography;
- Wildlife Observation;
- Hunting; and
- Fishing.

The report notes that according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2011 approximately 72 million people participated in wildlife watching, spending nearly \$55 billion on hotels, food, equipment and related expenses. Likewise, nearly 47 million hunters and anglers spent a combined \$75 billion on similar expenditures that year. Wildlife refuges are some of the best locations for these activities.

"America's wildlife refuges are incredible resources for local communities, driving tourism and stimulating economic activity," said David Houghton, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, which leads the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE). "More than \$2.4 billion is generated by the 'Big Six' recreational endeavors on wildlife refuges."

The CARE coalition is comprised of 23 wildlife, sporting and conservation organizations that span the political spectrum, representing 16 million Americans who value outdoor recreation and wildlife conservation.

CARE estimates that the refuge system needs at least \$900 million each year in operations and maintenance (O&M) funding to properly care for the 468 million acres of lands and waters it is responsible to manage. At its highest funding level in FY 2010, the system received little more than half the needed amount—\$503 million.

Since then, congressional appropriations have not only failed to account for rising costs, but have actually been backsliding. To reduce costs, refuges have had to cut over 500 staff positions and sacrifice vital habitat management, visitor services, and maintenance activities.

Because of the decreased budget:

- Hunting and fishing are down by 5 and 7 percent;
- Prescribed burns are down by 44 percent; and
- Volunteer numbers have dropped by 15 percent since FY11.

To begin to bridge the gap between refuge funding needs and actual refuge budgets, CARE is calling on Congress to provide \$508.2 million in FY 2016 for the refuge system's O&M accounts.

The National Wildlife Refuge System has a total of 562 refuge units. Of those:

- 65% are open to hunting;
- 54% are open to fishing;
- All 38 wetland management districts are open to both hunting and fishing;
- 82% are open to photographers;
- 70% have environmental education programs for the public.

In a nutshell, these are places where Americans go to connect with the outdoors.

The refuge system is also critical for wildlife - in fact its primary mission is the conservation of the nation's wildlife:

- 98% of all wildlife refuges are home to at least one threatened or endangered species;
- 59 wildlife refuges were established specifically to protect endangered species; and
- More than 200 wildlife refuges were created specifically for migratory birds.

For CARE's full report and additional information, please visit www.FundRefuges.org.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) is a national coalition of 23 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations representing a constituency numbering more than 16 million Americans. CARE has been working since 1995 to educate Congress, the Administration, and the public about America's magnificent National Wildlife Refuge.

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