



National
Wildlife Refuge
Association

www.refugeassociation.org

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 5, 2013

CONTACT: Desiree Sorenson-Groves, dgroves@refugeassociation.org, (202) 290-5593

National Wildlife Refuges are Economic Engines for Local Communities

New Report Confirms What the Government Shutdown and Data Shows: Conservation is Smart Use Of Taxpayer Dollars

Washington, D.C. The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) commends a new report released today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) which shows that national wildlife refuges are a good investment for American taxpayers and boost to local economies. The *Banking On Nature* study shows that for every \$1 Congress provides in funding to run the National Wildlife Refuge System on average \$4.87 is returned to local communities.

“Conservation conserves more than wildlife, it is conserving our tax dollars; an important value for Americans of all political stripes” said David Houghton, President of the NWRA. “There is nothing more conservative than conservation or more progressive than preserving our natural world for future generations.”

The report, the fifth of its kind released by FWS with the last report released in 2007, shows a remarkable trend of increased visitation to refuges and increased economic contribution to local communities – all during the height of the greatest economic recession since the Great Depression. From 2006 to 2011, refuge visitation increased by 30 percent increase and overall economic output from refuges increased by 20 percent, resulting in an annual \$2.4 billion returned to local economies.

“National wildlife refuges are essential to the American economy; they create jobs, support communities and generate tax revenue,” said Houghton. “This was noticeable during the government shutdown, as local businesses that depend on their refuge, suffered huge losses. Refuges are economic engines, providing substantial bang for our buck, something that as we emerge from the Great Recession, is more important than ever.”

FWS anticipates the upward trend in Refuge visits and local economic stimulus will continue. However, NWRA and over 230 volunteer, local refuge “Friends” groups are concerned that with recent dramatic budget cuts and more on the horizon, this trend is at risk as refuges are closed to visitors because of lack of staff and resources.

“The Refuge System is facing the loss of more than 450 staff positions by the end of next year should Congress continue slashing their budget,” said Houghton. “Refuges will be forced to eliminate popular hunting and wildlife watching programs, end volunteer efforts due to lack of staff to provide oversight and many will close their doors entirely. These short sighted budget cuts will ultimately hurt not only wildlife, but local economies that depend on these unique federal lands.”

Highlights from Banking On Nature Report

The National Wildlife Refuge System:

- Generates \$2.4 billion in sales and economic output, a 20% increase (from 2006);
- Welcomes 46.5 million visitors annually, a 30% increase (from 2006);
- Returns on average \$4.87 to a local economy for every \$1.00 Congress provides in funding, a 22% increase (from 2006);
- Creates 35,000 jobs annually, a 23% increase (from 2006);
- Produces \$792.7 million in job income for local communities;
- Generates \$342.9 million in local, county, state and federal tax revenue;
- Brings tourists from around the nation and world - 77 percent of refuge spending was done by visitors from *outside* the local area;
- Provides a combined economic benefit to communities nationwide that is almost five times the amount appropriated to run the System.

###

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.