



2015 Conservation Funding Priorities

for America's Wildlife and the National Wildlife Refuge System



National
Wildlife Refuge
Association

1975-2015 | Celebrating 40 Years
of Wildlife Refuge Conservation

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About the National Wildlife Refuge Association

The National Wildlife Refuge Association occupies a special niche as the only non-profit organization focused exclusively on promoting the world's largest wildlife conservation network, the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1975, the Refuge Association has worked hand-in-hand with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to protect, conserve and restore the ecological integrity of the 568 million acres for which the Refuge System is responsible. This incredible network of lands and waters supports 2,170 species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, hosts 47 million visitors each year, and generates \$2.4 billion of economic return for America. In our 40th year, the Refuge Association continues to accomplish our mission and raise the stature of the Refuge System. The Refuge Association engages thousands of supporters as diverse as the System itself — members of Refuge Friends groups, private landowners, hunters and anglers, educators and students, wildlife enthusiasts, hailing from all walks of life: urban, rural, suburban, and international. In addition, the Refuge Association leads a coalition of 23 diverse organizations called the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE). Our combined 16 million members urge the U.S. Congress to provide robust annual funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The National Wildlife Refuge Association is committed to the goals, objectives, and strategies articulated by “Conserving the Future,” the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s vision for the future of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge Association’s role as a non-partisan, incentive based, and transparent organization that works with diverse constituencies in Washington, D.C. and across the country positions us well to advance this ambitious agenda.

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Ruddy duck | J Clark Salyer NWR | Sharon Cummings



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CONSERVATION FUNDING

The National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses 568 million acres of some of the most extraordinary wildlife habitat on the planet. From the Pacific Marine National Monuments to the pristine wilderness of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge the National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest and most diverse collection of lands and waters managed for fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

The Refuge System needs appropriate resources to maintain these valuable assets. Since the additions of the Pacific Marine Monuments by President Bush in 2006 and 2009, and continuing in 2014 under President Obama, no increase in funding levels has occurred to accommodate a four-fold increase of acreage to the Refuge System. The following priority funding programs are essential to ensuring the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its Refuge System have the resources they need to provide the public with quality wildlife dependent recreation and provide habitat for more than 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species and more than 1,000 species of fish. Providing these resources is good business; refuges are economic engines in local communities returning on average nearly \$5 for every \$1 appropriated to run them.



Monk seal at Northwestern Hawaiian Islands NWR | H.M. Sullivan

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to learn about the Refuge Association's Conservation Policy Priorities!



The National Wildlife Refuge Association respectfully requests that Congress:

- 1 Fully fund the National Wildlife Refuge System at \$900 million annually for operations and maintenance beginning with \$508.2 million in FY16;
- 2 Provide \$173.8 million in FY16 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire conservation easements on working lands and to purchase in-holdings and vital habitat to enhance the ecological integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System;
- 3 Appropriate \$60 million to the Refuge Fund to ensure that local communities receive proper compensation in compliance with the Refuge Revenue Sharing program;
- 4 Fully fund the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program at \$75 million in FY16 to assist farmers, ranchers, and timber managers with critical wildlife management actions on private lands. Also, provide \$78 million to Department of Interior bureaus to implement sagebrush steppe habitat conservation and monitoring programs;
- 5 Increase appropriations for the Coastal Grant program to \$14 million in FY16 to better aid in recovery from natural disasters and prevent damage from rising sea levels;
- 6 Appropriate \$70 million for State Wildlife Grants to ensure that states have appropriate funding to protect and preserve many critical wildlife species;
- 7 Appropriate \$11 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund to support global partnerships that protect marine turtles, tigers and rhinos, great apes and elephants, and many other iconic species;
- 8 Provide \$5 million in funding to the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to protect bird species that migrate outside of the borders of the Refuge System and the United States;
- 9 Allocate \$50 million in funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund to improve water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat on wetlands;
- 10 Appropriate \$60 million in dedicated funding to the Refuge System's fire program through the Department of the Interior's Hazardous Fuel Reduction program so the Service is able to properly manage fire adapted landscapes.



2015 Conservation Funding Priorities

Kootenai NWR | David E. Kramer

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The National Wildlife Refuge System is responsible for 568 million acres of lands and waters, but currently receives less than \$1 per acre for management costs. The Refuge System cannot fulfill its obligation to the American public, our wildlife, and 47 million annual visitors without adequate funding.

Refuge management requires investments in staff and tools to manage wildlife populations, recover endangered species, control harmful invasive species and adapt management strategies to address changing climates. They also must monitor and measure the effectiveness of their work and report back to Congress to ensure America's taxpayer dollars are being used effectively and efficiently.

The Refuge System also has added responsibilities in the Pacific with monuments created first by President Bush in 2006 and 2008 and expanded by President Obama in 2014, yet the System has received no additional resources to manage nearly 468 million additional acres of responsibility.

At the same time, the Refuge System provides recreational opportunities for the public, educates children, and keeps refuge resources and visitors safe through law enforcement. The System also reaches new audiences with its Urban Refuge Program. The Service does all of this on a shoestring budget and a fraction of what other public land agencies receive per acre.

And yet, the investment in America's national wildlife refuges yields a truly impressive return, generating approximately



Loggerhead sea turtle hatchlings at Back Bay NWR | USFWS

35,000 jobs and \$2.4 billion in economic output each year. Every dollar appropriated to the Refuge System returns on average nearly \$5 to local economies. National wildlife refuges provide the American public with \$33 billion dollars worth of clean water and other environmental benefits such as clean air and a cool climate.

To ensure these benefits are realized, the National Wildlife Refuge Association requests \$508.2 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts for FY16. This request is supported by 23 diverse organizations with 16 million members that make up the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), chaired by the Refuge Association.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is an essential tool for protecting the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Allocated from annual proceeds of oil and gas royalties for the purpose of mitigating resource extraction with resource protection, LWCF is one of the primary sources of funding for land and conservation easement acquisition by the Refuge System.

Increasingly, LWCF is being used to conserve working lands through the acquisition of conservation easements that secure conservation protection while leaving the land in private ownership and on the tax rolls. Conservation easements are powerful tools that foster public-private partnerships with ranchers and timber owners to conserve wildlife, habitat and a way of life that is uniquely American. Innovative landscape-scale initiatives in New England's Connecticut River Watershed, the Flint Hills of Kansas, the Everglades Headwaters, Montana's Crown of the Continent, and the Dakota Grasslands have broad community and state support for the use of conservation easements as a primary conservation tool. These iconic landscapes remain privately managed, generating tax income for local communities, securing our nation's food and fiber, and balancing resource use and resource protection for wildlife.

- The Refuge Association calls on Congress to reauthorize and fully fund the LWCF at \$900 million per year, and to provide \$173.8 million in FY16 LWCF funding for conservation easements and refuge in-holdings, including the following:
- **\$10 million for the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge & Conservation Area (FL)** — for a combination of conservation easements and fee acquisition in the headwaters of the iconic River of Grass.
- **\$3 million for the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge (AR)**— to purchase lands from willing sellers to protect habitat for neotropical migratory songbirds and increase public access for world-class waterfowl hunting.



Silvio O. Conte NFWR | USFWS

- **\$3 million for the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (NH, VT, MA & CT)** — to acquire land and conservation easements in focus areas of the Connecticut River watershed.
- **\$3 million for the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area (KS)**—to acquire conservation easements to protect the largest remaining tallgrass prairie on the continent.
- **\$2 million for the Bear River Watershed Conservation Area (UT, WY, and ID)**— to purchase conservation easements to protect water quality, water quantity and wildlife habitat on ranchlands in the largest freshwater drainage into the Great Salt Lake.
- **\$3.4 million for the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (MD)** — to conserve critical marshlands of the Chesapeake Bay, important habitat for waterfowl, migratory birds and the recently de-listed Delmarva fox squirrel.
- **\$1 million for the Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge (KY)** — for the conservation of bottomland hardwood forests, scrub-shrub and emergent wetlands, and unchanneled river channel habitats in western Kentucky.



NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FUND

Lands owned by the Refuge System are removed from the tax rolls because the U.S. Government — like any other city, state or county government — is exempt from taxation. The Refuge Revenue Sharing Act allows a wildlife refuge to offset these tax losses by annually paying the local unit of government an amount that often equals or exceeds that which would have been collected from taxes if the lands were in private ownership. These revenues are derived from activities like timber sales and grazing leases if they have been determined not to conflict with refuge purposes.

Since 2001, declining revenues and appropriations shortfalls have resulted in the Refuge System unable to pay even 50 percent of its tax-offset obligations. But Congress has the authorization to offset this difference. The fund needs an annual appropriation of approximately \$60 million, yet Congress has on average appropriated just \$13.5 million. Over time, we recommend a policy adjustment to link the Refuge Fund with Payment in Lieu of Taxes programs consistent with other land management agencies.

The Refuge Association urges Congress to appropriate \$60 million for the National Wildlife Refuge Fund in FY16.

CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Partners For Fish And Wildlife

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is one of the Service's most effective tools for building partnerships between public agencies and private landowners to conserve America's expansive working landscapes. Through the program, the Service provides technical and financial support to private landowners to conserve and restore habitat for fish and wildlife. The program consistently leverages federal dollars for conservation, generating nearly \$16 in economic return for every \$1 appropriated for programs. The Partners Program provides a bridge between private and public conservation efforts that has been instrumental in the success of large landscape partnerships from Montana to Florida, and is playing a key role in conserving greater sage-grouse habitat in the intermountain west. To this end, we request an additional \$78 million for the Interior agencies to implement sagebrush steppe habitat conservation and monitoring efforts that will leverage \$300 million in Department of Agriculture investments across the west.

The Refuge Association and landowner-led Partners for Conservation request \$75 million for the Partners Program in FY16, which will result in an additional \$400 million in conservation output; We also request \$78 million for Interior agencies to implement sagebrush steppe conservation plans to benefit greater sage-grouse.



Celebrating 1 million feet of conservation fence in West Virginia | USFWS



Pescadero Breach | Sarah Swenty, USFWS

Coastal Program

The Coastal Program provides nearly \$13 in economic return for every \$1 in program funds. A sister program to Partners for Fish and Wildlife, the Service's Coastal Program provides technical and financial assistance for voluntary efforts to protect and restore high-priority coastal habitats for wildlife. With sea level rise, and an increase of natural disasters, the Coastal Program is becoming even more critical to implementing resiliency and adaptation strategies. From removing marine debris to protecting monk seals and sea turtles on the Hawaiian coasts, to restoring coastal prairies in Texas to help the Attwater's prairie-chicken, Coastal funds have been vital for delivering habitat conservation at a landscape scale.

The Refuge Association asks Congress to fund the Coastal Program at \$14 million for FY16.

State Wildlife Grants

The Service works with states to keep common species common and restore declining species before they warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. State Wildlife Grants provide supplemental funding for specific projects to keep species healthy.

The Refuge Association asks Congress to fund the State Wildlife Grants Program at \$70 million for FY16 to fulfill the shared federal-state responsibility for keeping our nation's wildlife from becoming endangered.



Tiger | Frank Kohn, USFWS

Multinational Species Conservation Fund

Wildlife species know no international boundaries, and therefore conservation must happen on a global scale to ensure populations survive. Many international wildlife agencies look to the National Wildlife Refuge System as the world leader in wildlife and fish conservation. The Service's Wildlife Without Borders Program and Multinational Species Conservation Funds together support global partnerships to protect marine turtles, tigers and rhinos, great apes and elephants and other iconic species. These programs are particularly important as wildlife face a poaching crisis that is leading species such as rhinos to the brink of extinction.

The Refuge Association and student-led Tigers 4 Tigers Coalition request \$11 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund in FY16 and for Congress to pass S. 27, the Wildlife Trafficking Enforcement Act.



Northern pintail | Michael Furtman



Cerulean warbler at Mingo NWR | Jim Burns

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund

Many migratory birds are protected within the boundaries of the National Wildlife Refuge System; however, they need protection along their migration routes outside of the Refuge System. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) authorizes grants that conserve the habitats that neotropical birds use along their migration and in their wintering range throughout the Caribbean, Central, and South America. The NMBCA fortifies investments on national wildlife refuges by conserving “our” birds during critical periods of their lifecycles spent outside of wildlife refuges and often outside the United States. These funds are critical in safeguarding declining migratory birds such as Cerulean, Canada, Kirtland’s, and Swainson’s warblers, wood thrush, and many other declining migratory birds, whether here in the U.S. or with our neighbors to the south.

The Refuge Association requests that Congress provide \$5 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund for FY16.



Prescribed burn at St. Vincent NWR | Jennifer Hinckley, USFWS

North American Wetlands Conservation Fund

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) authorizes grants that support habitat restoration, water quality improvements, and carbon sequestration. These projects, developed by landowners and organizations at the community level, benefit continental mallards, northern pintail, other waterfowl, and declining migratory bird species. Thus far, NAWCA projects have been approved for funding representing \$1 billion for the protection of wetland habitat. These matching grants also promote positive relationships between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, landowners, and conservation organizations. The wetlands and associated upland habitats that are protected or restored are vital to the production and survival of waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and songbirds and, in turn, to the millions of Americans who depend on these species for hunting, birding, and other outdoor pursuits.

The Refuge Association requests \$50 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund for FY16.

Fire

Fire is one of the Service's most important tools for managing wildlife habitat. Unfortunately, due to catastrophic western wildfires made worse by climate change and fuel loading, funds for refuge fire management have been consistently diverted to fighting wildfires and protecting the forest-urban interface. Funding for this important work is dropping as well. Since 2009, hazardous fuels reduction funds have plummeted 38 percent. While fighting wildfires is extremely important, resources are needed to allow wildlife refuges to manage dangerous fuel loads in fire-dependent systems — some of which are seeing record droughts. Additionally, refuges must be able to use fire management to improve habitat for many threatened and endangered species such as red-cockaded woodpecker, at-risk species such as gopher tortoise, and important game birds such as wild turkey and bobwhite quail.

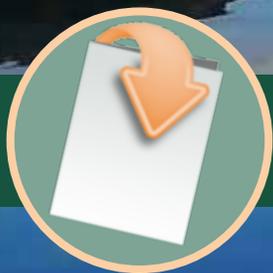
The Refuge Association urges Congress to provide \$60 million in dedicated funding to the Refuge System's fire program through the Department of the Interior's Hazardous Fuel Reduction program.

CONCLUSION — 2015 CONSERVATION FUNDING PRIORITIES

The Refuge Association believes that with sound conservation policy, adequate funding, and the power of more than 40,000 dedicated volunteers, the Refuge System can fulfill its mission to provide wildlife dependent recreation for Americans and protect the habitat for more than 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 reptile and amphibian species and more than 1,000 species of fish. We look forward to working with Congress in 2015 to accomplish this goal.

For more information about our priorities, please contact our Vice President of Government Affairs, Desiree Sorenson-Groves, at dgroves@refugeassociation.org.





Flip book over to read about our Conservation **Policy** Priorities!