

## Refuge Association FY18 Request:

The National Wildlife Refuge Association requests \$586 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System's operations and maintenance budget for FY18, in line with the goal of fully funding this account at \$900 million by the end of FY21.

**A**t nearly a half a billion acres, the National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest system of lands and waters devoted to wildlife conservation, yet inadequate budgets force the Service to manage these units at less than \$1 per acre. The Refuge System cannot fulfill its obligation to the American public, our wildlife, and 48 million annual visitors without increases in maintenance and operation funds.

The Refuge System needs at least \$900 million in annual operations and maintenance funding to meet conservation targets, including wildlife management and habitat restoration and opportunities for the public to recreate. The Refuge System is currently funded at \$481 million, and this inadequate funding threatens the System's ability to carry out its mission, mandated by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.



Sage grouse | USFWS

## Feeling the Cuts

From a funding high of \$502 million in Fiscal Year 2010, the Refuge System is operating in FY17 at an enormous deficit (-20%), while at the same time, management responsibilities have grown by hundreds of millions of acres and the public wants more and more of what the Refuge System has to offer. For instance from FY10 – FY15:

- Visitation has increased by 9%;
- Photography participants have increased by 52%;
- Interpretation participants involved in programs has increased by 55%;
- Auto tour visits has increased by 14%.

But the lack of funding means the Service cannot meet the public's growing needs. In the past five years, the Service has lost over 500 positions, forcing a reduction in public programs and hours of operation. Without staff, here are the results, between FY10-FY15:

- Hunting and fishing visits are mostly flat;
- Prescribed burns are down by 44%;
- Volunteer numbers have dropped by 14% and volunteer hours have dropped by 2% — some volunteers are simply

turned away when they are needed the most;

- Open water acres restored declined by 63%;
- Wetland acres restored declined by 70%;
- Control of invasive animal populations decreased by 55%;
- Acres treated for invasive plants decreased by 34% resulting in a 58% drop in acreage where invasive plant control was achieved.

The final FY16 appropriations bill included an increase of \$500,000 for visitor services, however visitor services funding has remained flat in FY17.

FY16 included a small increase in overall O&M funding, yet FY17 saw no change in funding levels. These small increases, are not keeping pace with inflation, and the Refuge System continues to make cuts to programs and staff because of the lack of steady funding.

We respectfully request that Congress fund the Refuge System at \$586 million in FY18, which would allow the Service to restore many of these public use programs and do vitally needed restoration work.

---

## Wildlife Refuges are Economic Engines

The investment in wildlife refuges yields an impressive return:

- Every dollar appropriated to the Refuge System returns an average of **\$4.87** to local economies [i];
- Wildlife refuges generate approximately **35,000 jobs** and **\$2.4 billion in economic output each year**;
- 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 [ii].

Local communities benefit from more than recreation. Numerous studies have shown that property values are higher near parks, wildlife refuges and open space.[iii] For example:

- A 2009 study revealed that homes close to Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Massachusetts were valued nearly \$1,000 higher than those just 100 meters away.[iv]
- National wildlife refuges included in a 2012 study were found to boost local property values by an estimated \$122 million in the Service's Southeast Region; \$95 million in the Northeast Region, and \$83 million in the California/Nevada Region.[v]



Baby monk seal | HM Sullivan

---

## Protecting At-Risk Species

National wildlife refuges protect at least **700 bird species, 220 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, 1,000 species of fish, and countless invertebrates and plants** — some 293 of which are threatened or endangered. Wildlife refuges also play a critical role in keeping at-risk species, such as greater sage-grouse and gopher tortoise, from being listed under the Endangered Species Act, preventing the need to regulate private land. In recent years, the Refuge System has undertaken strategic efforts to conserve iconic landscapes through innovative collaborative partnerships in expansive landscapes that range from Kansas, the Dakotas and Montana to Florida's

Northern Everglades and the Gulf Coast. At the same time, the Refuge System is making investments in expanding visitor services and public outreach at our nation's urban wildlife refuges in Oregon, Minnesota, Colorado, Nevada, California, Maryland, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania.

We urge Congress to fund the Refuge System at \$586 million in FY18 — to bridge the growing gap between what the Refuge System needs and what it receives, enabling wildlife refuges to meet their obligation to conserve wildlife for the future.

---

## Endnotes

[i] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Banking on Nature 2012 – Preliminary Results: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation.

[ii] U.S. Department of the Interior. 2012. The Department of the Interior's Economic Contributions, FY 2011.

[iii] Trust for Public Land. 2009. Conservation: An Investment that Pays.

[iv] Neumann, Bradley C., Kevin J. Boyle, and Kathleen P. Bell. 2009. Property price effects of a national wildlife refuge: Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Massachusetts. Land Use Policy Trust 26:1011-1019.

[v] Taylor, Laura O., Xiangping Liu, and Timothy Hamilton. 2012. Amenity Values of Proximity to National Wildlife Refuges. Final Report to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.