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House Interior Appropriations Bill Keeps Refuge System Funding Flat for Fiscal Year 2018

(Washington, D.C.) – The House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee yesterday marked up its FY 2018 Appropriations Bill, which would fund the operations and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System and many other wildlife programs starting October 1st. While bill’s proposed funding for refuges ignores the \$14 million cut included in the President’s FY18 budget and instead remains level with current funding at \$484 million, the National Wildlife Refuge Association is growing increasingly concerned that failure to keep up with inflation and increased staffing needs, plus other programmatic cuts, will simply escalate an ongoing loss of capacity for the Refuge System.

We thank Chairman Ken Calvert (CA) and Ranking Member Betty McCollum (MN) for their hard work in crafting this legislation, but recognize that until the subcommittee is given adequate 302(b) allocations, our nation’s wildlife heritage, habitats, and populations will continue to decline.

Neither current funding nor this proposed FY 2018 funding level for the operations and maintenance of the Refuge System is adequate to properly manage refuge lands and waters from Guam to Alaska to Maine to Puerto Rico. Accounting for inflation from the FY 2010 funding high watermark, Refuge System funding currently should be \$569 million. Instead, current funding is an insufficient \$484 million. When the Refuge System is responsible for 850 million acres of land and water, this amount of 57¢ an acre is simply inadequate. Visitors are at an all time high, and staffing has been reduced to 1970s levels. This cannot continue.

The Refuge Association is also concerned about the drastic cuts to the Land and Water Conservation Fund. LWCF has been a keystone conservation program since the 1960s, and USFWS funding was slashed in this bill from \$50 million to \$40 million. This 20 percent reduction will leave willing sellers holding lands which could and should be included in the Refuge System, whether to fill inholdings within current refuges, to become conservation easements in important landscapes, or to expand refuges to create additional habitat for endangered or critical species.

The Refuge System is the largest network of public lands and waters dedicated to wildlife conservation in the world and is facing numerous challenges including habitat encroachment, loss of species, and climate change. Many refuges have high management needs and costs due to their proximity to urban and rural development. Even the Refuge System’s remote Pacific Marine National Monuments accrue significant expenses as a result of clean up costs associated

with marine debris. This FY 2018 House bill maintains current funding, which we understand was not an easy decision to come to in this fiscal climate. However, we encourage the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee to take a hard look at the real, on-the-ground needs of the Refuge System and adequately fund the System at \$569 million.

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The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to conserve America's wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect and enhance the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.