

November 15, 2017

National Wildlife Refuge Friends Organizations Support Passage of H.R. 3979

We, the undersigned national wildlife refuge Friends organizations, are united in our support of H.R. 3979, the Keeping Refuges Operational Act of 2017, to reauthorize the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer, Community Partnership, and Education Programs.

Friends groups are independent, nonprofit organizations run by citizens who support the purposes and objectives of national wildlife refuges. Each year, these volunteers donate over a million hours to help keep our country's 566 National Wildlife Refuges open to the public. Many groups are well established and provide extensive assistance to their refuges; others are just beginning, but all provide support to their local National Wildlife Refuge. Our members are passionate about our country's wild places, and want to preserve access to the great outdoors for generations to come.

Our National Wildlife Refuges host more than 47 million visitors each year, generating \$1.7 billion in revenue and creating about 27,000 local jobs. To meet the needs of visitors, refuges rely on the work of volunteers and Friends members, who provide 20 percent of the National Wildlife Refuge System workforce—the equivalent of 649 full-time employees and provide labor valued at \$30.6 million. In Fiscal Year 2016, 40,074 volunteers donated 1,349,558 hours to refuges in every state across the country. Because of their work, refuges offer activities such as wildlife-watching, hunting, fishing, photography, hiking, canoeing, kayaking and environmental education.

The Volunteer, Community Partnership, and Education Program has allowed the refuge system to expand volunteer programs by partnering with non-profit organizations, like Friends, dedicated to protecting, promoting and enhancing the refuges and the services they provide. Without this program, refuges would have to significantly cut back on programs and hours of operation, with some being forced close their doors completely.

Therefore, we strongly support this legislation, and ask you help to ensure its timely passage.

Sincerely,

Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, AK

Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association, AL

Friends of the Bill Williams River and Havasu National Wildlife Refuges, AZ

Friends of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, CA

Friends of Stewart B McKinney, CT

Friends of Outer Island, A Unit of the Stewart B. McKinney, CT

The Friends of the Westbrook Barrier Islands, CT

Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, FL

Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges, FL

Friends of the Carr Refuge, FL
Friends And Volunteers Of Refuges- Florida Keys, FL
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, FL
Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge, FL
Pelican Island Preservation Society, FL
Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge, FL
Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges, GA & SC
Friends of Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, HI
Friends of Camas National Wildlife Refuge, ID
Friends of the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge, IN
Friends of Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, MD
Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, MD
Friends of the Migratory Bird Conservation/Duck Stamp, MD
Friends of Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge, ME
The Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, ME
Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, MS
Friends of Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, MS
Friends of Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge, NH
Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, NJ
Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, NM
Friends of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM
Genesee Valley Audubon Society, NY
Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge, NY
Friends of the Wichitas, OK
Shoreline Education for Awareness, OR
Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, OR
Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, OR
Friends of Haystack Rock, OR
Friends of Heinz Refuge, PA
Friends of Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge, PA
Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island, RI
Friends of the Wildlife Corridor, TX
Friends of Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge, TX
Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, TX
Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, TX
Friends of Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, TX
Friends of NCTC, VA
Friends of Rappahannock River Valley NWR, VA
Friends of Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, VA
Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards, WA
Friends of Mid-Columbia River Wildlife Refuges, WA
Friends of Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, WA
Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR, WA
Friends of Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, WI