



Refuge Association Applauds Desperately Needed Emergency Funding in Budget Deal

February 13, 2018

Washington, D.C. The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauded Congress in including much needed emergency funding for the [National Wildlife Refuge System](#) to address damages caused by hurricanes and fires in 2017. The final two year budget deal, which lifted mandatory sequestration budget cuts and provided funds to keep government programs running through March 23rd, [also included over \\$210 million to address damages incurred on our national wildlife refuges by recent natural disasters.](#)

“Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria devastated national wildlife refuges in Puerto Rico, Florida and Texas,” said Geoffrey Haskett, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “Without supplemental funding from Congress, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cannot repair broken roads and infrastructure, or at times, adequately ensure the safety of a visiting public.”

The Refuge Association estimates the damages to refuges in 2017 to be \$275 million. But they could have been substantially worse. Coastal refuges provide significant buffers from storms to local communities. And when the Refuge System rebuilds in these sensitive areas, they do so with resiliency in mind, building on high ground and to standards to withstand significant impacts. Unfortunately, even with this infusion to repair damages, the Refuge System will still increase their maintenance backlog.

From FY 2005-2018, the Refuge System sustained more than \$1 billion in damages from federally declared natural disasters. However, even including this \$210 million, Congress appropriated only \$528 million to help the Refuge System recover during the same time, forcing the difference of nearly an equal amount (\$537 million) to be added to the Refuge System maintenance backlog. Additionally, damages from more localized disasters are not eligible for Emergency Supplemental funding, further enlarging the backlog. Visitor experiences, recreational programs, and habitat management all suffer when refuges do not receive the funding necessary to fully respond to and recover from natural disasters that wash away roads and buildings, scorch thousands of acres, and devastate habitat.

The \$210 million included for the Refuge System in the FY 2018 budget deal is enormously important and will help refuges along the Gulf Coast and in Puerto Rico recover from these devastating storms. We thank Congress for providing this essential funding.

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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, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries that secure its ecological integrity. For more information, visit www.refugeassociation.org or contact [Desiree Sorenson-Groves](mailto:Desiree.Sorenson-Groves@refugeassociation.org).