



President Signs the ‘Keep America’s Refuges Operational Act’ into Law

April 24, 2018

Washington, D.C. H.R.3979, the Keep America’s Refuges Operational Act (KARO) of 2017, was signed into law by President Trump yesterday evening, after being passed by the Senate on April 9th and the House in December. Both chambers of Congress passed this bill by voice vote, meaning it passed without opposition. The bill reauthorizes the Volunteer and Community Partnership Act, allowing continued access to the public for recreational and volunteering opportunities on wildlife refuges through 2022.

Through increase of public awareness in their communities, volunteers and friends group provide the support refuges need to thrive. Spanning all age groups and coming from different walks of life, refuge volunteers display the energy, skills, and diversity of our country and provide our refuges with many unique resources. In 2016, more than 40,000 volunteers contributed over 1.3 million hours of work on national wildlife refuges. 20% of the total service work on refuges can be attributed to the dedication of volunteers. Most people you come into contact with at refuges are, in fact, volunteers.

Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA) introduced this legislation in the House, and we congratulate them on the success of this bill. Senators John Barrasso (WY) and Tom Carper (DE) spearheaded the legislation in the Senate. We appreciate all of their hard work, and the hard work of their staff, in getting this legislation signed into law. KARO received universal bipartisan support in both chambers, thanks to their efforts. The Trump Administration also supported this legislation, and we thank them for their work to help this bill become law.

In November 2017, the House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on H.R. 3979, with Caroline Brouwer, NWRA’s Director of Government Affairs, testifying on behalf of refuge volunteers. During the hearing, NWRA also presented a letter from over 50 Refuge Friends Groups in support of the KARO act. Many other conservation groups also supported this effort, and lent their voices to the chorus of advocated asking for passage.

“We are thrilled that the Volunteer and Community Partnership Act has been reauthorized through passage of KARO. Volunteers are an integral part of the Refuge System, and their contributions to our wildlife resources are irreplaceable,” said Geoffrey L. Haskett, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “We thank Representatives Jeffries and Wittman and Senators Barrasso and Carper on their hard work to pass this important legislation.”



We also would like to thank the Friends Groups and other Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) organizations that stood beside us to support KARO. We continue to acknowledge that although the work of volunteers is impressive, nothing can replace the collaborative effort that exists between refuge staff and volunteers working together. Low funding for the Refuge System remains an enormous problem. Volunteers help to fill the gap created by inefficient numbers of refuge staff, dollars for conservation efforts and more, but we need to work harder to ensure that refuges remain strong, with robust funding to fill both wildlife and recreational needs.

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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 [Caroline Brouwer](#), Director of Government Affairs, National Wildlife Refuge Association.