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Contact: [Desiree Sorenson-Groves](mailto:Desiree.Sorenson-Groves@refugeassociation.org)  
(202) 290-5593

## House Committee Moves Important Refuge System Bills

### *Measures Would Provide Much Needed Funding To Address Maintenance Needs of Refuge System and Reauthorize Critically Important Land Acquisition Program*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 13, 2018) – Today, the House Natural Resources Committee advanced two vitally important bills for the conservation and preservation of public lands, including the National Wildlife Refuge System.

H.R. 6510, the Restore Our National Parks and Public Lands Act, and H.R. 502, to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), today passed out of the full Committee and will advance to the House floor, or be added to other moving legislation.

“Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva have shown all Americans that the maintenance of our public lands, including the National Wildlife Refuge System, is a non-partisan issue of national importance,” said Geoffrey Haskett, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “Further, their actions today to advance the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund shows the importance of this program to the advancement of conservation priorities for the American people.”

The Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act seeks to address the backlog of maintenance needs of our public lands. The bill would create a fund from revenue generated from oil, gas, coal, or alternative or renewable energy development on Federal land and water to address the maintenance backlogs of the National Park Service, National Wildlife Refuge System, Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. As written, it would generate as much as \$130 million annually, or 10% of the overall fund, for the Refuge System each year for five years.

Over the past seven years, the Refuge System has worked diligently to reduce their operations and maintenance backlog, even with reduced annual appropriations. In FY2010, this backlog stood at \$3.5 billion. Yet through diligent application of available federal funds, a targeted prioritization to reduce the backlog, and a thorough examination of listed projects, the Refuge System has been able to reduce the maintenance backlog to \$1.4 billion. By providing the Refuge System 10% of the fund created through H.R. 6510, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be able to dramatically reduce or even eliminate the remaining backlog.

This bill is supported by over [seventy refuge Friends organizations](#), representing tens of thousands of volunteers and millions of refuge supporters nationwide.

The LWCF has been instrumental in conserving critical habitat across the nation, including the National Wildlife Refuge System. The program uses proceeds from offshore oil and gas drilling to

acquire and conserve land or water from willing sellers, and is responsible for some of the most successful efforts to conserve critical wildlife habitat and recreation lands across the nation.

“From the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Utah, to the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area in Florida, to the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia, the LWCF provides access to sportsmen, birders, educators and anyone who values wild places,” said Haskett. “We urge Congress to build upon the bipartisan efforts of Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Senate champions like Senators Burr and Cantwell to reauthorize and fully fund the LWCF before the program expires on September 31, 2018.”

On October 1st, unless Congress acts, the LWCF will no longer be authorized, which could very well lead to defunding and loss of key refuge acquisitions that could substantially improve the wildlife habitat value of the Refuge System.

We strongly support both H.R. 6510 and H.R. 502 and encourage Congress to pass these pieces of legislation and their Senate companions as soon as possible.

*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.*

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