



September 13, 2018

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chair, Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Ranking Member, Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

As members of the National Wildlife Refuge System Friends community, we thank you for your leadership in introducing and championing H.R. 6510, the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act. Our 70 groups stand in strong support of this effort to address the critical maintenance backlog on national wildlife refuges.

We do, however, recommend and request an increase in the percentage of funds that would be allocated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the National Wildlife Refuge System through this bill. Currently listed at 10%, we ask that you support inclusion in the Manager's Amendment in the Full House Natural Resources Committee markup that would raise that percentage to 15%.

Friends groups are independent non-profit organizations that are formed to support their local wildlife refuge. Volunteers from over 200 Friends groups across the country work tirelessly to assist with biology projects, environmental education programs, leading tours, operating gift shops, and advocating on behalf of their refuge. They are vital link between the community and their refuge.

The National Wildlife Refuge System stands alone as the only federal land and water conservation system with a mission that prioritizes wildlife and habitat conservation alongside wildlife-dependent recreation for the benefit of the American people. However, chronic underfunding of the System has led to a large backlog to accumulate: \$1.4 billion as of today for the USFWS.

Over the past seven years, the Refuge System has worked to reduce that backlog. In FY2010, the operations and maintenance 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 15% of the fund you would create, the remaining backlog could be eliminated.

Found in every U.S. state and territory, national wildlife refuges conserve a diversity of America's environmentally sensitive and economically vital ecosystems, including wetlands, coasts, forests, prairie, tundra, deserts, and oceans, and provide Americans with an opportunity to recreate in and visit these areas, specifically for the priority public uses called the Big Six, hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, photography, environmental education and interpretation.

We appreciate your consideration of this change, and look forward to working with you and your staff to advance this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Washington, D.C.

National Wildlife Refuge Association

Alaska

Friends of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges

Alabama

Friends of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

Arizona

Friends of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge

California

Friends of Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge

Colorado

Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges

Connecticut

Friends of Outer Island supporting Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge

Delaware

Friends of Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge

Florida

Friends of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuges

Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR

Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society

Pelican Island Preservation Society

Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Friends of the Carr Refuge

Georgia

Friends of the Savannah Coastal Refuges

Hawaii

Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Iowa

Friends of Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge

Indiana

Big Oaks Conservation Society

Louisiana

Friends of Black Bayou NWR, Inc.

Massachusetts

Friends of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

Maryland

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp
Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge

Maine

The Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge

Michigan

Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Alliance
Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy Assoc., Inc.

Minnesota

Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Refuge Headwaters
Friends of Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge

North Dakota

Friends of Sullys Hill National Wildlife Refuge

New Hampshire

Friends of Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge (Silvio Conte NFWR)

New Jersey

Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Friends of the Shawangunk National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge

New Mexico

Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge

New York

Friends of Wertheim NWR
Friends of the Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge

Ohio

Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge

Oklahoma

Friends of the Wichitas

Oregon

Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Friends of Haystack Rock

Pennsylvania

Friends of Heinz Refuge

Friends of Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Rhode Island

Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island

South Carolina

Friends of Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge

South Dakota

Friends of Maga Ta Hohpi Environmental Learning Center

Tennessee

Friends of Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge

Texas

Friends of Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuge

Friends High Plains Refuge Complex

Friends of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge

Utah

Friends of Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

Virginia

Virginia Master Naturalist Historic Southside Chapter

Friends Of Back Bay

Vermont

Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

Washington

Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards

Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge

Wisconsin

Friends of Necedah National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge