



For Immediate Release
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Contact: [Caroline Brouwer](#)
(202) 417-3803

Significant Proposed Increase for Refuge System - Other Core Programs Slashed

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 14, 2019) – The National Wildlife Refuge Association applauds a desperately needed, \$21.5 million increase for the National Wildlife Refuge System’s Operations and Maintenance (O&M) fund in the President’s Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2020. Released Monday March 11, 2019, the \$509.5 million request is the largest ever for the Refuge System. However, we are concerned at the lack of funding for core wildlife conservation priorities such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and State & Tribal Wildlife Grants and we reject the President’s proposal to eliminate the Refuge Fund, vitally needed dollars to local communities to offset the lack of property taxes.

“We welcome the increase in the appropriations request for the National Wildlife Refuge System,” said Geoffrey Haskett, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “If this level of funding is signed into law, it will be the highest level ever for the System - however, still a drop in the bucket for the overall needs of the System, which are at least \$900 million per year.”

The National Wildlife Refuge System operates on a shoestring of what it truly needs to fully function. The System needs a minimum of \$900 million to meet its obligations to the American people and thus, the Refuge Association urges Congress to appropriate \$586 million for Refuge System O&M for Fiscal Year 2020.

Included in the proposed Refuge System increase:

- \$1 million increase for the Urban Refuge Program, helping connect communities and constituencies proximate to urban refuges. Over the last eight years, the Refuge System has worked to build out its Urban Program, by expanding the number of urban refuges that are included in the program.
- \$5.1 million increase for Refuge Law Enforcement, critical for protecting our nation’s wildlife resource and the visitors who go to refuges to recreate, learn, and explore. Remarkably, 6 states and 4 territories currently have no federal wildlife officers for any of their refuge units, and an additional 10 states have only one federal wildlife officer. Our request of \$586 million includes \$70 million for refuge law enforcement (up from its current \$38 million).

While we applaud the increases included to the Operations and Maintenance fund, it is not enough. By far, the biggest challenge facing the Refuge System today is the completely inadequate budgets that fail to cover the cost of maintaining the incredibly rich and diverse wildlife habitats that make up the Refuge System. The proposed increase outlined today is a welcome start to a climb out of the current financial hole.

Of many programs slashed in the President’s budget request, three are of great concern for wildlife conservation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant programs that were slashed provide critical

funding for financially strapped state agencies, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which was just permanently reauthorized, provides much needed land acquisition dollars, and the Multinational Species Fund helps internationally recognized imperiled iconic species.

Proposed decreases include:

- \$32.285 million decrease for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, which fund state fish and wildlife agencies for developing and implementing programs that benefit wildlife and their habitats. This request cuts this program in half, from its current funding of \$63.57 million.
- \$49.3 million decrease for land acquisition through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. A mere \$4.5 million would be left in the fund to provide funding for inholdings, refuge expansion, and new refuges.
- \$5 million decrease for the Multinational Species Fund, which provide grants to projects benefiting elephants, rhinos, great apes and marine turtles in their natural habitats. Current FY2019 funding is \$11 million.

We thank the Administration for the Refuge System O&M request, and urge Congress to further this increase by appropriating \$586 million for this budget line item. We also urge Congress to reject the cuts to these important USFWS grant programs and the Refuge Fund.

[Read a copy of the Refuge Association's FY2020 testimony to the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee.](#)

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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