

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Washington



USFWS

The fight against invasive species is as pitched in Washington as anywhere in the country. Non-native, invasive cordgrass and Scotch broom have taken over areas of **Willapa Refuge**, severely damaging habitat for economically-important fisheries and other wildlife, such as this endangered Marbled murrelet.



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Steigerwald Lake Refuge hopes to restore about 35 acres of native riparian bottomland forest along Gibbons Creek. But that's only after the Creek's understory is cleared of nonnative Himalayan blackberry—a problem as well at **Franz Lake Refuge**. There, the plant has grown into impenetrable thickets up to 15 feet tall. Once the blackberry is cleared, Franz Lake Refuge hopes to restore 75 acres of riparian bottomland.



FWS - Dan Hayes

Dungeness Wildlife Refuge

The National Wildlife Refuge System struggles to meet its wildlife conservation mission

In Washington alone, 152 mission-critical projects remain unfunded

Washington is home to spectacular natural resources including 22 national wildlife refuges. These refuges are national treasures; providing habitat to millions of migratory birds, protecting the last wild river emptying into Puget Sound and some of the largest seabird colonies in North America.

In **2008**, nearly **1 million visitors** enjoy hiking, bird watching, environmental education, hunting and fishing on Washington's refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Washington may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Washington wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$46 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 119 additional positions. Those include 43 wildlife biologists, 22 guides and educators, and 36 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Washington refuges will fall further behind in meeting the demand.

What's the solution? CARE recommends \$514 million for the Refuge System's FY 2010 Operations and Maintenance budget and an increase to at least \$765 million by FY 2013.

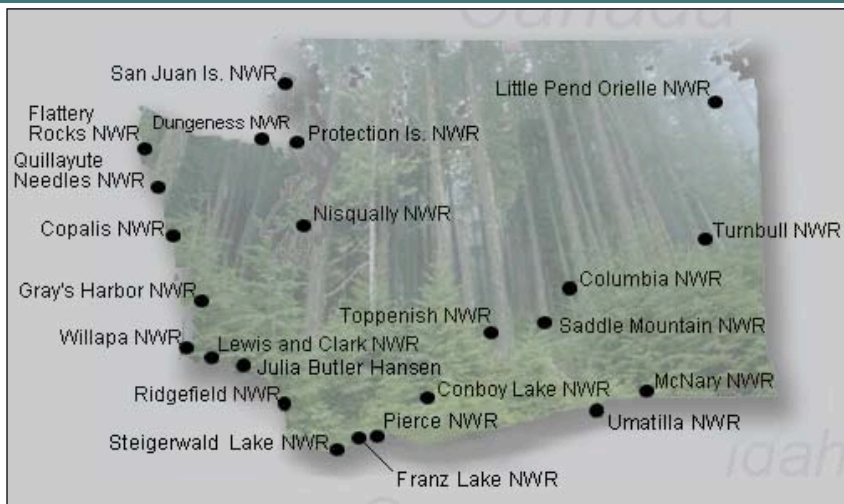
About C.A.R.E.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement is a diverse coalition of 22 conservation, recreation, sporting, and scientific organizations with more than 14 million members across the United States. CARE has been working since 1995 to help the National Wildlife Refuge System fight a serious funding crisis.

American Birding Association
American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Assateague Coastal Trust
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Izaak Walton League of America
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association of America
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Corps Network
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
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[www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/
CareHome.html](http://www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html)



Saddled with declining purchasing power and a \$3.5 billion backlog of deferred operations and maintenance projects, the National Wildlife Refuge System is in a financial vise.

The Refuge System needs an annual increase of \$15 million in its operations budget just to keep pace with inflation and demand. The Refuge System welcomed more than 41.2 million visitors in 2008, up from 33 million in 1998.

National Wildlife Refuges are undeniable economic engines.

According to the *Banking on Nature* report from the FWS:

- Spending by visitors to refuges generated more than \$1.7 billion of sales nationwide, created 27,000 jobs in local communities and added \$543 million in employment income. These economic data do not include Alaska or Pacific island refuges, which together generate millions of annual visitors.

- At **Columbia Refuge** in Washington, for every \$1 spent on the refuge's budget, almost \$8 are generated in expenditures to the local economy. Annually, visitor spending creates more than \$800,000 in tax revenues.

Yet, according to Management Systems International, a respected business consultant, the Refuge System has seen its real purchasing power decline by 11 percent between fiscal years 2003 and 2008.

The Government Accountability Office found that with continuing funding constraints and an expanding list of challenges, it may be difficult to maintain the Refuge System as envisioned in law – “where the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System are maintained; priority visitor services are provided; and the strategic growth of the system is continued.”

There is a solution to safeguard the world's finest network of public lands dedicated to wildlife conservation: \$514 million in FY 2010 for the National Wildlife Refuge System and an increase to at least \$765 million by FY 2013 – steps that will restore operational quality and begin to chip away at the deferred operations and maintenance backlog.