



## NEWS RELEASE

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**Note to Media:** For media interviews, please call Kathy Westra. Additional materials, including fact sheets, photos, and a link to the full report are at [www.FundRefuges.org/CARE.html](http://www.FundRefuges.org/CARE.html)

### **BUDGET CUTS THREATEN REFUGES AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON THEM** *Coalition Calls on Congress to Provide Adequate Funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System*

Washington, DC—The [U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System](http://www.refugeassociation.org), which fuels local economies in all 50 states, is under threat from proposed congressional budget-cutting measures. [A report](#) released today by the [Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement](http://www.refugeassociation.org) (CARE) warns that unless Congress provides adequate funding for the Refuge System, the economic benefits refuges provide, along with the lands, waters, wildlife, and recreation and education opportunities that refuges were established to protect, could be in jeopardy. These are assets that belong to all Americans, and must not be squandered, the report cautions.

“The 553 national wildlife refuges that make up the 150-million-acre Refuge System are critical to the health of human communities and to the vitality of local economies,” says Evan Hirsche, President of the [National Wildlife Refuge Association](http://www.refugeassociation.org) and Chair of the CARE coalition. “Every federal dollar invested in the Refuge System returns, on average, \$4 to local communities. This is no time to cripple a critical federal program that provides such an impressive return on investment.”

Found in every U.S. state and territory, and within an hour’s drive of most metropolitan areas, national wildlife refuges:

- Attract approximately 45 million visitors each year, with a range of activities that include wildlife-watching, hunting, fishing, photography, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and environmental education.
- Protect clean air and safe drinking water for nearby communities.
- Generate more than \$1.7 billion for local economies and create nearly 27,000 U.S. jobs annually.

The report, [Restoring America’s Wildlife Refuges 2011: Assets for All Americans](#), notes that the Refuge System has been underfunded since its inception in 1903, and the diversion of personnel to respond to last year’s Deepwater Horizon oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico has made it even harder to keep up. Adequate federal funding is critical to:

- Address a crippling operations and maintenance backlog of more than \$3.3 billion.
- Tackle chronic understaffing, which has left more than 36% of refuges without any on-site staff.
- Address a severe shortage of law enforcement personnel that leaves only 213 officers, when 845 are needed, to patrol the System’s 150 million acres, even as both visitation and crime are increasing.
- Treat more than 2.5 million acres of refuge lands overrun with non-native, invasive plants, and combat nearly 4,000 invasive animal populations that ravage millions more acres—problems that can spread beyond refuge boundaries.

Funding increases for the Refuge System in FY 2008 through FY 2010 allowed for meaningful progress toward addressing these issues. To maintain this progress, CARE has urged Congress to fund the Refuge System’s operations and maintenance budgets at \$511 million in FY 2012. This modest request is the absolute minimum needed to maintain management capabilities at current levels and is essentially flat funding. The \$8 million increase over FY 2010 funding levels will help keep fuel in the trucks, pay for higher utilities and building rent,

and cover other rising fixed costs that threaten to erode existing management capabilities. This budget request represents a significant compromise, since a funding increase of at least \$16 million is the amount truly needed to address these growing costs.

Although some members of Congress have proposed cutting budgets back to FY 2008 levels in order to deal with the nation's current fiscal challenges, doing so "would devastate a system already under stress," the report notes. "No good business leader would allow their company's capital assets to deteriorate. Similarly, Congress should not pursue a budget strategy that would cause the further deterioration of assets that belong to all Americans. Such an approach simply does not make good business sense and will only cost taxpayers more in the future. Protecting our National Wildlife Refuge System with a strong investment today will continue to pay returns to the American people many times over."

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*The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) is a national coalition of 21 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations representing a constituency numbering more than 14 million Americans. 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 ♦ Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ♦ Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation ♦ Defenders of Wildlife ♦ Ducks Unlimited ♦ Izaak Walton League of America ♦ Marine Conservation Institute ♦ National Audubon Society ♦ National Rifle Association of America ♦ National Wildlife Federation ♦ National Wildlife Refuge Association ♦ Safari Club International ♦ The Corps Network ♦ The Wilderness Society ♦ The Wildlife Society ♦ Trout Unlimited ♦ U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance ♦ Wildlife Forever ♦ Wildlife Management Institute