



National Wildlife Refuge System

Fast Facts

Refuge System Overview

- President Theodore Roosevelt created the nation's first wildlife refuge on Florida's Pelican Island in 1903.
- The Refuge System now includes 553 refuges and approximately 150 million acres of some of the most visually stunning and biologically rich lands and waters in North America.
- Refuges can be found in all 50 states and within an hour's drive of most major U.S. cities.
- Refuges provide habitat for more than 700 bird species, 220 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, and more than 1,000 species of fish; they also protect more than 280 of the nation's endangered and threatened species.
- Refuges provide outstanding recreational opportunities for sportsmen, wildlife watchers, photographers, and students. Hunting is offered on 322 refuges and fishing is offered on 272 refuges.

Economic Benefits

- Refuges attracted approximately 45 million visitors in FY 2010, an increase of more than 7 million since FY 2005.
- In FY 2006, recreational expenditures by refuge visitors generated approximately \$1.7 billion for local communities alone, creating almost 27,000 U.S. jobs and \$543 million in employment income.
- Every federal dollar invested in the Refuge System returns an average of \$4 to local economies, and in many cases the return is significantly higher.

Funding Needs

- Over the long term, CARE recommends reaching \$900 million in annual funding for the Refuge System. For FY 2012, CARE recommends funding the Refuge System at \$511 million, the absolute minimum amount needed to maintain management capabilities.
- Based on FY 2010 appropriations, the Refuge System had an average of only \$3.36 to manage each of its 150 million acres.
- The total operations and maintenance backlog for the Refuge System exceeds \$3.3 billion; that includes more than \$2.7 billion for deferred maintenance projects and a backlog of almost \$677 million for operations.
- Many refuges across the country have fallen even further behind since the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, as more than 500 of the Refuge System's approximately 3,700 employees were involved in responding to the disaster. Together, these workers spent more than 150,000 hours (or 3,800 work weeks) away from their normal duties to deal with the spill.
- Drug production and smuggling, wildlife poaching, illegal border activity, assaults, natural resource violations, and other crimes are on the rise in the Refuge System, yet only 213 full-time law enforcement officers are available to patrol the System's 150 million acres. Additional funding of \$31.4 million per year is needed to bring the size of the force up to just half of the recommended 845 full-time officers.
- More than 2.5 million acres of refuge lands are overrun with non-native invasive plants, while nearly 4,000 invasive animal populations ravage millions more acres. To treat just one-third of its infested plant acreage and begin even minimal control of harmful invasive animals, the System needs at least \$25 million per year.
- Meeting the Refuge System's "mission-critical" operations needs (including personnel and projects related to habitat management, visitor services, and law enforcement) costs nearly \$359 million a year.
- With the recent designation of four marine monuments in the Pacific Ocean, the Refuge System grew by more than 50 million acres, with a negligible increase in funding to manage it. Equipment, personnel, planning, and management for the new monuments will cost between \$18 and \$35.5 million per year. Further, the recent tsunami that devastated Japan also wreaked havoc on Pacific refuges, with damage estimated to be at least \$55 million.

For more information, see the full report: Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges 2011.