



NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACTS: Desiree Sorenson-Groves, NWRA, (202) 290-5593, dgroves@refugeassociation.org

Kathy Westra, (301) 754-0711 or westrake@rcn.com

Note to Media: For interview requests, contact Kathy Westra. Additional materials, including state fact sheets, photos, and a link to the full report are at www.FundRefuges.org/CARE.html

BUDGET CUTS THREATEN RHODE ISLAND'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON THEM *Coalition Calls on Congress to Provide Adequate Funding*

Wakefield, RI—According to a [new report](#) released at a Wakefield news conference today by the [Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement](#) (CARE), Rhode Island's five national wildlife refuges will be in grave jeopardy if proposed congressional budget cuts to the [National Wildlife Refuge System](#) are enacted. Rhode Island's refuges protect diverse habitats such as salt marshes, uplands, kettle ponds, and maritime shrublands, and support a variety of wildlife including great egrets, herons, river otters, red-backed salamanders, and federally threatened and endangered species such as the piping plover and American burying beetle. In 2010 more than 426,000 visitors enjoyed wildlife-related recreation at Rhode Island refuges, including hunting, angling, and bird- and wildlife-watching. At Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge alone, every dollar appropriated to the refuge budget generated \$6.25 for the local economy.

“With five refuges in Rhode Island, and four of them in my District, I understand that these areas are not only national treasures for their beauty, environmental importance and recreational value, but also because of the economic benefit they create,” said Rep. Jim Langevin (D-RI-2nd District) in a written statement. “Visitors generate revenue for businesses and represent a broad range of constituencies, as demonstrated by the array of organizations that have come together to produce this report. I will continue to work to see that Congress does the best we can to support the values of refuges.”

Yet, if budget cuts to the National Wildlife Refuge System supported by some members of Congress are enacted, national wildlife refuges in Rhode Island may not be able to continue protecting wildlife, offering world-class recreation, and ultimately enhancing their local economies. Rhode Island's refuges already are saddled with a backlog of approximately \$2 million in deferred maintenance and another \$2 million in mission-critical operations needs. The refuges need at least 22 additional staff, including wildlife management, visitor services and maintenance positions. Without sufficient funding, Rhode Island refuges will fall even farther behind in their mission to conserve wildlife for the benefit of the American public.

“National wildlife refuges 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](#) and Chair of the CARE coalition. “This is no time to cripple a critical federal program that provides so much benefit to Rhode Island's communities.”

Phil Owen, owner of the Birdwatchers Nature View retail store in Wakefield, who hosted today's news conference, says the refuges located on Rhode Island's coast are the perfect way to turn ordinary backyard birdwatchers into serious birders. That's good for his business, which sells spotting scopes, binoculars, field guides, and other nature-related gear. “Most of my customers are people who are only familiar with cardinals, chickadees, bluejays—the kinds of birds that come to their feeders at home. Then they buy their first field guide in the store and ask where they can go to see some cool birds. I send them to the refuges. My store is a gateway and a portal to the refuges and all that they offer,” Owen says.

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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 that 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 national 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.

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