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The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement consists of the following organizations:

American Birding Association
American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Assateague Coastal Trust
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
**International Association of Fish and
Wildlife Agencies**
Izaak Walton League of America
**National Association of Service and
Conservation Corps**

National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association of America
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute

TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND
RELATED AGENCIES
CONCERNING U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE FISCAL YEAR 2007
APPROPRIATIONS
April 24, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on the fiscal year 2007 (FY07) Interior Appropriations bill. Over the last several years, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a broad coalition of 21 diverse wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations, has worked cooperatively with Congress and the Administration to highlight the needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System and secure strong investments in this remarkable network of lands and waters. We are grateful for the budget increases that Congress provided the Refuge System leading up to its 100th anniversary, and we again seek your support as Congress considers FY07 and beyond. We urge the Subcommittee to provide \$415 million for the operations and maintenance (O&M) budget of the National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), in the FY07 budget.

CARE, representing a national constituency numbering more than 5 million Americans, recognizes the value of a healthy Refuge System to both the wildlife and habitats refuges were established to protect and the 40 million visitors that frequent these special places each year. The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement was formed in 1995 as a loose coalition of diverse organizations concerned about the ability of our national wildlife refuges to fulfill their

missions. We have determined that it will be necessary to increase the annual Refuge System budget to \$700 million simply to meet the System's top tier needs.

Each year, 40 million Americans from coast to coast visit national wildlife refuges to experience the best of our great nation's natural resources. During its first 100 years, the Refuge System has been instrumental in restoring vital North American wildlife populations; providing diverse recreational opportunities to fish, hunt, birdwatch, view and photograph wildlife; and educating the public about the wonders of the natural world. In addition, national wildlife refuges stimulate local economic growth, fostering nearly \$1.4 billion in recreation-based economic activity and generating nearly 24,000 jobs and \$453.9 million in employment income. While all of these activities are significant, the Refuge System's potential continues to be largely unrealized.

The mission of CARE has been to address the backlog in operations and maintenance needs within the Refuge System budget, needs that now total \$2.7 billion. Unfortunately, recent funding cuts in the refuge budget have adversely affected the Refuge System by exacerbating the already burdensome O&M backlog.

President Bush's FY07 request of \$381.7 million is approximately \$11 million less than the administration's FY 2006 request and \$763,000 less than the actual FY06 funding level (after Congressional rescissions and agency reprogramming). A \$16 million increase in Refuge System O&M funding would be a "no-net-loss" budget for the Refuge System to keep pace with inflation and other uncontrollable costs when taking into account cost-of-living, energy, and sustaining levels of visitor services and wildlife management requirements.

We respectfully request that you fund the National Wildlife Refuge System at \$415 million, which would equal the FY04 Refuge System budget (\$406.5 million) when adjusted for inflation. This level of funding would ensure a "no-net-loss" budget which would allow the Refuge System to avoid layoffs and reductions in services, maintain protections for wildlife and habitat, prevent backsliding on gains already made, and provide for addressing the backlog in coming years.

We extend our appreciation to the Subcommittee for its ongoing commitment to our National Wildlife Refuge System.