

RESTORING AMERICA'S Wildlife Refuges 2008

A Plan to Solve the Refuge System Funding Crisis



CARE is a national coalition of 22 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations that represent a national constituency numbering more than 14 million Americans. Working together and with the support of more than 200 refuge Friends groups and other local, regional and national conservationists, CARE seeks to educate Congress and the Administration about critical Refuge System needs. CARE also works closely with the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus, a diverse group of more than 140 members in the U.S. House of Representatives that support a Refuge System that is able to achieve its wildlife conservation mission and public outreach objectives.

For additional copies of this report, please visit
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Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE)

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RESTORING AMERICA'S Wildlife Refuges

A Plan to Solve the Refuge System Funding Crisis

COASTAL MARSH | BRAZORIA NWR, TX | KEITH RAMOS

Executive Summary

Throughout the country, our national wildlife refuges are being closed to the public, millions of acres of wildlife habitat are being overrun by invasive species, and nearly 600 refuge positions, including biologists, public outreach specialists and law enforcement officers, have been terminated or are on the chopping block. We must act swiftly to fund the stewardship of these national treasures if we are to ensure the vitality of the National Wildlife Refuge System and its crucial role in protecting America's natural lands, waters and wildlife.

A comprehensive analysis by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) finds that America's National Wildlife Refuge System needs a minimum of \$765 million in annual funding—or just \$7.65 an acre—to properly administer its nearly 100 million acres, educational nature programs, habitat restoration projects, and much more. While Congress's \$39 million increase for refuge stewardship in FY 2008 represents an important turnaround, to ensure fulfillment of President Theodore Roosevelt's conservation vision of more than a century ago, CARE recommends that Congress increase Refuge System funding to \$514 million in FY 2009.

For over a century, our Refuge System has preserved America's wildlife, hunting and fishing traditions, water quality, and ever-shrinking natural areas. Each year, tens of millions of people hunt, fish, watch wildlife, and learn from educational programs on wildlife refuges in every U.S. state and territory. In addition, wildlife refuges are critically important on local and regional scales, as visitors generate more than \$1.7 billion in annual sales to local economies, resulting in employment for more than 27,000 U.S. workers. And in keeping with its conservation mandate, the Refuge System provides a last bastion for more than 250 at-risk plant and animal species. But, unfortunately, wildlife refuges aren't as healthy as they may first appear.

Several years of inadequate budgets have rapidly ballooned the Operations and Maintenance backlog—core needs for the System to achieve its conservation mission—to \$3.5 billion, and required downsizing plans for a dramatic 20% reduction of the workforce. Wildlife refuge visitors often show up to find roads and visitor centers closed, viewing platforms and hiking trails in disrepair, and habitat restoration and school education programs eliminated. Non-native, invasive plants have degraded more than 2.3 million acres and crime is on the rise as only 180 full-time law enforcement officers are now asked to do the job fit for 800 law enforcement personnel.

Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges details the impact now being felt across the country:

- A planned 20 percent cut in refuge managers, biologists, environmental educators, and maintenance staff; with 300 jobs already eliminated and another 250 on the chopping block;
- Dramatic downsizing plans needed to prevent the eventuality that by 2013, more than 57% of wildlife refuges (305 of 547) would be unable to afford anything but staff salaries;
- A crippling backlog of \$3.5 billion in shelved Operations (\$1 B) and Maintenance (\$2.5 B) projects.

For 40 million Refuge System visitors each year the experience is increasingly dismal, as school-children and wildlife enthusiasts meet with increasing frequency:

- Closed visitor centers, gated refuge roads;
- Dilapidated viewing platforms and overgrown, unmaintained hiking trails;

- Aggressive, non-native plants and animals outcompeting native wildlife;
- Eliminated visitor education programs, cancelled hunting and fishing events;
- No law enforcement officers, compromising visitor safety and resource protection.

Wildlife refuges not only face encroachment from housing developments on their borders, but increasingly from oil and gas drilling, invasive species, impacts from a rapidly changing climate, tons of marine debris, and a sharply reduced workforce. In a world with ever-shrinking natural areas, America must act quickly to safeguard our unique natural resources for the benefit of wildlife and millions of present and future Americans.

Quite simply, one of the most important things we can do today to ensure a future with vibrant and healthy habitats, wildlife populations, and diverse recreational opportunities is to increase the Refuge System's annual funding.

Refuge System Funding Needs

This report, *Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges: A Plan to Solve the Refuge System Funding Crisis*, presents funding recommendations by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) for fiscal years 2009 through 2013. While Congress provided modest funding increases from 1998 to the National Wildlife Refuge System's centennial in 2003, subsequent budget cuts have compromised the proven conservation effectiveness of the Refuge System. The time is now to reverse this trend by building on the generous increase provided by Congress in FY 2008, and continue to invest in these special places at a level commensurate with the irreplaceable experiences cherished by a diverse array of Americans, including hunters, anglers, photographers, wildlife observers, students and teachers.

Based on a thorough analysis of the needs, opportunities, and challenges facing the Refuge System, CARE concluded that sizable increases in annual funding are necessary. Incremental increases

over the next five years will enable the Refuge System to fulfill its obligation of protecting wildlife and providing wildlife-dependent recreation. Recognizing that the Refuge System needs an additional \$15 million annually to keep pace with inflation (not included in the justifications below), CARE recommends reaching the following annual funding level for the Refuge System by FY 2013:

<i>Operations</i>	\$ 445 million
<i>Maintenance</i>	\$ 320 million
Total	\$ 765 million per year

These increases are deserved and urgently needed for many reasons:



To comply with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, refuges are tasked with additional, but worthwhile responsibilities and requirements. **These include increased**

biological monitoring, assessments, public use, and comprehensive conservation planning, all of which add financial burden on the Refuge System.

Simply put, the Refuge System cannot fulfill its conservation goals unless certain essential projects are completed. **Unfunded projects identified as 'Mission Critical' in the Refuge Operations Needs System (RONS) database will cost more than \$115 million.**

To date, more than 300 refuge managers, biologists, visitor service, and maintenance personnel have lost their jobs, with another 250 still on the chopping block. **These severe cutbacks are happening at a time when the RONS database identifies an additional 1,225 essential positions needed at an annual cost of \$164 million.**

According to strategic downsizing plans proposed by the FWS, the Refuge System may lose 565 jobs, or fully 20 percent of its nationwide staff, by fiscal year 2009. **Just to return to its modest staffing level of 2004,**

the Refuge System will need to rehire many of these lost positions at a cost of more than \$70 million.

Climate change has rapidly become an additional monitoring and management challenge for the Refuge System. Numerous demands have already been placed on refuge managers, biologists, and planners for monitoring and adapting to climate change, and on many refuges threats to infrastructure are creating new expenses. Additional monies will also be necessary to address longer and more intense fire seasons and to participate in vital carbon sequestration projects. **A timely response to prevent higher future costs entails annual expenditures of approximately \$12 million just for equipment and personnel.**

Since 2003, when a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report shined the light on the Refuge System's inability to effectively manage oil and gas activities on 155 of its wildlife refuges, there has been a



HANFORD REACH NATIONAL MONUMENT | FWS



COLUMBIA NWR | FWS

In many wildlife refuges, drugs are a serious problem. These aren't small-time marijuana gardens; drug operators on refuges frequently defend their plots with armed guards, meanwhile illegally diverting water sources, destroying native plants, and using fertilizers and herbicides harmful to refuge wildlife!

- dramatic increase in oil and gas exploration and drilling. The Refuge System urgently needs funds to implement the GAO's recommendations, which include increased staffing and more training and oversight of drilling activities. **To adequately manage oil and gas activities on wildlife refuges, including clean-up of degraded sites, \$15 million per year is needed.**
- ✦ Industry experts recommend that businesses invest 2-6% of a facility's total value in annual maintenance. The Refuge System maintains approximately \$20 billion in property assets and is only able to invest a woefully inadequate 0.67% in annual maintenance. **If the Refuge System invested merely 1.6%, it would need \$380 million per year for facilities maintenance.**
 - ✦ Non-native, invasive plant and animals have infested millions of acres, literally taking over some of America's wildlife refuges. **To address the problem through necessary public education, species mapping, monitoring, and targeted treatment, the Refuge System needs a minimum of \$10 million annually.**
 - ✦ A 2005 report by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) detailed the urgent need for additional law enforcement to respond to commercial-scale drug production and trafficking, wildlife poaching, vandalism, assaults, and a host of other crimes. The IACP report advises that 845 full-time law enforcement officers are needed to patrol the nearly 100 million acres of the Refuge System. **With approximately 180 full-time officers on the ground today, a dramatic increase of law enforcement staffing is clearly necessary. This addition of officers would cost the Refuge System at least \$53.5 million annually.**
 - ✦ Wildlife refuge visitation increased by nearly 10 million people, or 25 percent, in the last decade. In recent years, however, the rate of increase has slowed, due in large part to visitor center and refuge closures, deteriorating infrastructure such as observation towers and roads, and the unfortunate reduction of visitor education and interpretive programs. The downsizing plans call for the loss of approximately 160 visitor-services staff, **which will severely curtail the benefits derived from working with volunteers and friends groups. The cost of recovering these lost visitor-services professionals would cost the Refuge System nearly \$20 million.**
 - ✦ While Congress has created many new refuges in recent decades, the majority were established without additional appropriations. **The annual operations and maintenance costs for these new or expanded refuges are approximately \$23 million.**
 - ✦ The Refuge System is required to complete a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for each of its more than 550 units by 2012. As of January 2008, 295 were unfinished or yet to be started. Each CCP costs an average of \$220,000, which does not even include the salaries of the employees that research and write each CCP. **At this rate, the Refuge System needs approximately \$13 million per year to complete the CCP process on time.**
 - ✦ The Refuge System has acquired military properties that have come with enormous costs for demolition, management, and public safety. **The current maintenance and demolition cost for projects on former military land is \$22.4 million.**
- (Note: the preceding bullets do not sum to \$765 million due to overlap among some of the identified needs)*



America's National Wildlife Refuges

GREAT AND SNOWY EGRETS | ST. MARKS NWR, FL | ELIZABETH KELLENBERGER

Our country's National Wildlife Refuge System is one of the world's premier networks of wildlife habitat. Begun in 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt established Florida's Pelican Island as America's first national wildlife refuge, our Refuge System now includes 548 wildlife refuges and delights 40 million visitors each year. On nearly 100 million acres, these visitors are treated to the most visually stunning and biologically rich lands and waters in North America. Additionally, the Refuge System has been designated as a co-managing trustee of the 89 million acre Northwestern Hawaiian Island's Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, the world's second largest marine protected area.

Refuges are undeniably unique. They protect wildlife, water and natural lands on both small and large parcels, such as the half-acre Mille Lacs National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota and the 19 million acre Yukon Delta Refuge in Alaska. National wildlife refuges encompass a vast array of ecosystems from Arctic tundra and boreal forest to native prairie and arid desert to tropical lagoons and pristine coral reefs. Refuge lands include 21 million acres of designated Wilderness, located in remote places such as Fort Niobrara Refuge in Nebraska and Charles M. Russell Refuge in Montana. But wildlife refuges are also found in highly urban areas, including Don Edwards San Francisco Bay

Refuge and Philadelphia's John Heinz Refuge. These urban wildlife refuges provide unparalleled opportunity for children to learn about the wonder and complexity of nature, and for overworked adults to relax amid peaceful surroundings. The Refuge System also embraces a network of approximately 3,000 waterfowl production areas, found mostly in the Dakotas, which span 3.1 million acres and are vital wetland and grassland components of the Refuge System.

Preserving America's Land, Water, and Wildlife

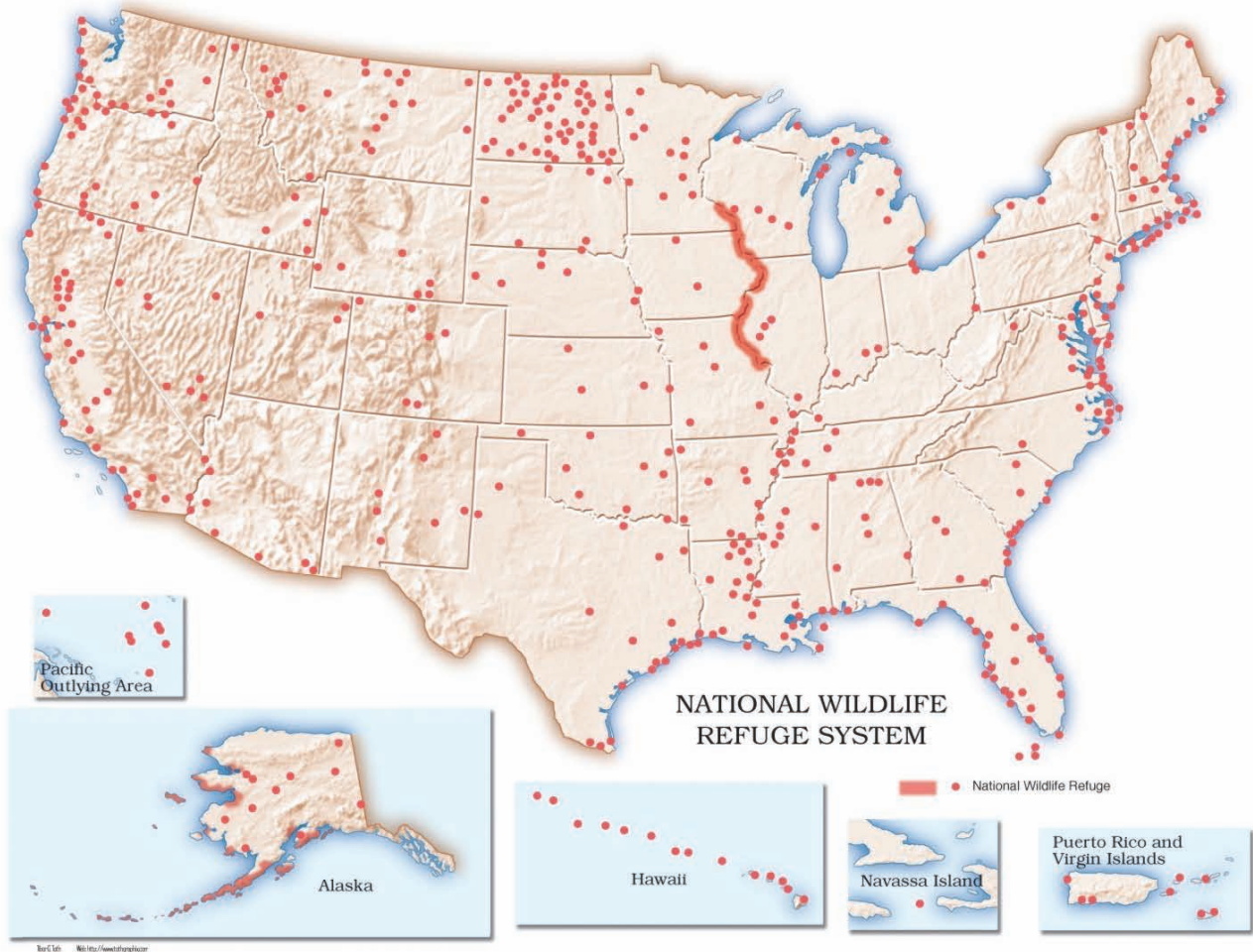
The diversity of landscapes and wildlife species within the Refuge System is stunning. National wildlife refuges are the only public lands and waters established explicitly to safeguard wildlife and their habitat. America's refuges provide habitat for more than 700 bird species, 220 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, more than 1,000 fish and a bewildering variety of invertebrate and plant species. Our most biologically diverse refuge, the Hawaiian Islands Refuge, is home to 7,000 species alone.

Wildlife refuges also offer protection for 260 endangered or threatened species, and are often directly responsible for their continued existence

or recovery. In fact, over 60 wildlife refuges have been specifically established to protect 124 endangered or threatened species. Whooping cranes are recovering from the brink of extinction due to conservation efforts at Necedah Refuge in Wisconsin, Chassahowitzka Refuge in Florida, and Aransas Refuge in Texas, while San Joaquin River Refuge in California protects the endangered Blunt-nosed leopard lizard and San Joaquin kit fox. In South Carolina, threatened and endangered species, including Red-cockaded woodpeckers and Pine Barrens tree frogs, find sanctuary at Carolina Sandhills Refuge. Each year, up to 20,000 sea turtles rely on undisturbed beaches of Archie Carr Refuge in Florida to produce the next generation.

An incredible 80 percent of the birds on the Pacific flyway migrate through the Klamath Basin wildlife refuges in Oregon and California, while the internationally recognized wetlands of Hori-

con Refuge in Wisconsin and Cypress Creek Refuge in Illinois provide vital habitat for countless waterfowl and other migratory birds. As part of the Atlantic flyway, Blackwater Refuge in Maryland hosts astonishing concentrations of Osprey and Bald eagles, and is home to the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel. Prairie dogs, mule deer, and elk wander freely on Charles M. Russell Refuge in Montana, while on Nevada's Sheldon Refuge large herds of pronghorn antelope and scattered bands of bighorn sheep roam one of America's last remaining areas of sage-steppe habitat. On West Virginia's Canaan Valley Refuge, ruffed grouse live alongside bobcats. Alligators bellow in the black waters of Georgia's primeval, swampy Okefenokee Refuge, and living among the islands of Flattery Rocks Refuge off Washington's coast are sea lions, harbor seals and many whales. The remote Pacific Islands refuges protect some of the last remaining untouched coral reef ecosystems in the world.





CRYSTAL RIVER NWR, FL | NOAH KAHN



PRESQUILE NWR, VA | NOAH KAHN

The budget crisis has caused many refuges to literally close their gates. Unfortunately, variations of the sign above are being taped up at refuges around the U.S. Without staff, popular hunting and fishing programs, school field trips, and volunteer opportunities have all been reduced or eliminated outright and volunteers such as these in Virginia, are doing work once done by FWS personnel.

To ensure that America's unique wildlife would be seen and enjoyed by future generations, Congress finally enacted organic legislation for the Refuge System in 1997, which declared that wildlife protection must be the primary focus on national wildlife refuges and required that refuges be managed as an interrelated system. Toward that end, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) emphasized wildlife conservation and the long-term "biological integrity, diversity and environmental health" of the Refuge System. The Improvement Act also recognized the importance of wildlife refuges for outdoor recreation and mandated that wildlife-related activities, including hunting, fishing, environmental education and interpretation, and wildlife observation and photography, receive priority consideration over all other possible activities.

Preserving our Sporting and Outdoor Opportunities

Wildlife refuges not only play a vital role in protecting lands and waters for rare plant communities, migratory birds, fish and other wildlife, but also offer an impressive variety of recreational and educational opportunities. For instance, in keep-

ing with America's centuries old fishing and hunting traditions, over 270 wildlife refuges are open to anglers, while hunters enjoy access to more than 315 refuges and 3,000 waterfowl production areas. Other outdoor enthusiasts come to refuges to watch birds, take photos and learn about plants and wildlife, or simply to enjoy the quiet solitude of these increasingly rare natural places. To guarantee these opportunities will continue for us, our children and grandchildren in the future, we must all make a commitment to ensure a thriving Refuge System today.

Visitor education programs are an important contribution that refuges make to local communities. In fact, demand for environmental education continues throughout the Refuge System, with 780,000 participants in 2007. Despite funding and staff limitations seriously reducing the scope of outreach programs, more than 350 wildlife refuges are still able to maintain wildly popular environmental education programs. By using innovative science-based programs and working in partnership with area schools, wildlife refuges offer education programs that benefit teachers and students. Facilities such as the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center in Minnesota and the environmental education center at Savannah Refuge in

Georgia stimulate much-needed interest in wildlife and the natural world.

Visitation trends in recent years show that people are increasingly interested in birding and wildlife watching on refuges. Bird watching is one of the fastest growing outdoor recreation activities in the country with 46 million people over the age of 16 involved. In fact, the FWS recently launched a program to highlight the Refuge System's prominent role in birding and wildlife conservation. Birding offers year-round opportunities for individuals, families and schools to better understand and connect to nature through unstructured exploration that often creates a lifelong interest in natural history and a commitment to conservation. Unfortunately, limited staffing, the lack of appropriate visitor facilities, and inadequate support for important local partnerships hinder the Refuge System's ability to respond to America's growing interest in birding and wildlife watching.

Economic & Environmental Benefits

There is a national wildlife refuge in every state and within an hour's drive of most major cities, thereby allowing people to experience wildlife and



SILVIO O. CONTE NFWR | LISA DENSMORE

wildlife-related recreation without having to travel to distant or remote areas of the country. Not surprisingly, 40 million wildlife refuge visitors create impressive economic and environmental benefits for many local communities. In 2007, national wildlife refuges received twice as many visitors as Acadia, Grand Teton, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Zion national parks combined.

According to a Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) analysis entitled *Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*, those refuge visitors generated \$1.7 billion of annual sales to local economies, of which 87% was spent by travelers from outside the local area. As this spending flowed through the economy, over 27,000 jobs were created and more than \$543 million in employment income was generated.

Of course, America's wildlife refuges also provide innumerable environmental benefits beyond just those felt by wildlife species. For example, wildlife refuges filter groundwater and rainwater before it runs downstream to municipal water supplies and in many areas, reduce flooding by capturing excess rainwater and attenuating coastal storm surges. The native vegetation on many of America's wildlife refuges helps absorb pollution and carbon from the air, while natural filtration and sound water management promotes healthy fisheries within and beyond refuge boundaries.

Recovering a System in Trouble

America's public lands, waters, and wildlife are now at great risk due to persistent under-funding. Adjusting for inflation, the Refuge System is operating today with fewer dollars than in 2004 and has truly reached a crisis. Refuge managers nationwide are having to make tough choices: which school groups to turn away, what invasive species to let spread unchecked, which oil drilling rigs not to monitor, which staff to keep and who must go, though none are expendable. Some wildlife refuges are losing all staff and thousands of essential maintenance projects are long overdue, which threatens visitor safety and in many cases, forces refuges to turn eager visitors away. Visitor centers

are closing, invasive species are, in some cases, literally taking over, and planned habitat restoration and population monitoring work is being shelved.

Refuges are working under the tight constraints of a federal appropriation that has declined or remained flat for several years. However, refuge expenditures must grow each year to meet ever-escalating fixed costs for salary adjustments, fuel, utilities, and rental space. Because the Refuge System budget typically fails to keep pace with inflation, the FWS is now in the process of eliminating staff and services. If this trend continues, increasing numbers of refuges around the country will be devoting all of their budget to employee costs, with nothing left over for non-staff expenses such as machinery, office supplies, and fuel (see Figure 1). To avoid this disastrous scenario, the FWS has had no choice but to release downsizing plans that sharply reduce staff nationwide by 20 percent.

But these losses aren't of expendable federal bureaucrats; these are refuge managers, wildlife biologists who monitor endangered species such as Florida manatees, interpretive rangers who teach and guide schoolchildren, and essential maintenance personnel who keep each refuge functioning smoothly. Without these people, America's Refuge System must continue to cut educational

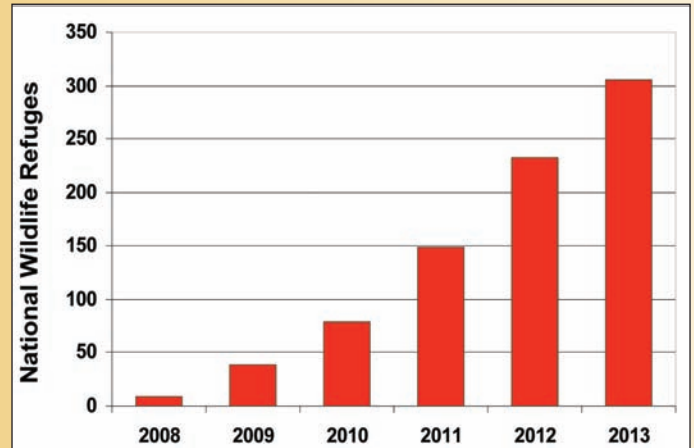


Figure 1. The number of wildlife refuges devoting 100 percent of their budget to employee salaries and benefits would skyrocket to 305 of 548 refuges (56 percent) by 2013, leaving no money for maintenance or programs. To avoid this disastrous scenario, the FWS had no choice but to plan on sharply downsizing its nationwide workforce by 20 percent.

programs, eliminate hunting and fishing access, close offices, allow equipment and visitor infrastructure to fall into disrepair, and significantly reduce management and monitoring of wildlife and non-native, invasive plants.

When wildlife refuges have insufficient staff, it doesn't only affect activities inside refuge bound-



NISQUALLY NWR | FWS

At Nisqually Refuge in Washington, wildlife and 155,000 annual visitors are feeling the effects of years of tight budgets; from a 40% reduction in janitorial services to the cancellation of the popular Weed Warrior Program in 2007 and International Migratory Bird Day, which had previously delighted 500 people each year.

aries. Rather, refuge staff are unable to dedicate sufficient attention to threats beyond refuge boundaries, such as huge rafts of incoming marine debris, water rights issues, upstream water contamination, adjacent landfill sites, or planned commercial developments. Further, when staff levels are reduced to only one or a few staff per refuge, those people are unable to partner with other interested stakeholders, which dramatically and adversely affects volunteer involvement and leveraging additional dollars. For example, consider that the reasonably well-staffed San Luis Refuge Complex in central California often triples its annual budget through creative partnerships. With these extra resources, more trees are getting

tem's centennial in 2003. Those increases were needed to help refuges keep pace with inflation and rising fixed costs, while helping to reduce the increasing rate of backlogged high-priority projects. However, after the centennial and until FY 2008, the Refuge System budget stayed essentially flat and did not keep pace with rapidly rising inflation costs of \$15 million per year. In other words, simply to keep the modest annual budget on pace with inflation, the Refuge System needs an annual increase of \$15 million per year.

On the heels of the generous increase in FY 2008, it is vital that Congress facilitate the turnaround of the Refuge System by making an annual commitment to increasing funding. Otherwise, the FWS will continue down the road of diminishing capacity to protect America's irreplaceable wildlife from threats including climate change, declining water quantity and quality, and non-native invasive species.

\$1.05 BILLION OPERATIONS BACKLOG

A FWS database called Refuge Operations Needs System, or RONS, tracks operational needs, including the staff and equipment necessary to perform routine activities. With a total Operations backlog now over \$1 billion, scores of great opportunities have been missed. RONS creates priority rankings based on essential staffing needs, projects considered critical to fulfilling the mission of both the individual wildlife refuge and the entire Refuge System, and projects for both new wildlife refuges and land acquisition. As of 2007, these top-priority backlogged projects numbered more than 2,320 and amounted to \$251.5 million. Of these, 919 projects are considered "mission critical" by the Refuge System and are valued at \$115.3 million. Other important projects in the RONS database total an additional \$976 million.

Most of the operations budget supports the refuge personnel necessary to perform essential habitat management and restoration, wildlife research and monitoring, planning, public use activities, and maintenance. The inadequate level of staffing is now the most critical problem facing



OKEFENOKEE NWR | JAMES CUTLER

planted, invasive species are being eradicated, and refuge staff can closely monitor external threats. This situation demonstrates how much is possible when sufficient staffing is available to capitalize on partnership opportunities, and how much is being lost at other wildlife refuges, when these basic needs are unmet.

Funding Challenges

A decade ago, Congress recognized the Refuge System's downward spiral and began providing modest funding increases from 1998 to the Sys-

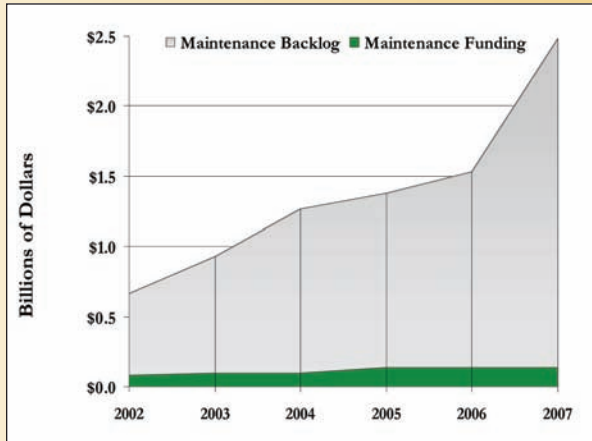


Figure 2. As annual funding for Refuge System Maintenance has remained essentially flat in recent years, the size of the overall maintenance backlog has ballooned to \$2.5 billion.

the Refuge System, which has lost more than 300 staff since 2004 and projections target at least another 250 jobs for elimination by 2010. And while the Refuge System is forced to continue slashing critical staff, the 2007 RONS database identified 1,225 high-priority staffing vacancies critical to fulfilling the mission of providing quality wildlife habitat and wildlife-dependent recreation.

\$2.5 BILLION MAINTENANCE BACKLOG

Deferred maintenance projects have been piling up for years and the Refuge System now reports a total maintenance backlog of \$2.5 billion. This exorbitant backlog has created a veritable logjam of deferred maintenance projects and has greatly limited refuge personnel in their dual pursuit to protect wildlife and serve the public. In total, the Refuge System now has more than 11,000 facilities that are in need of some repair, and the longer they are allowed to deteriorate, the more money repairs will ultimately cost. At a time when the maintenance backlog is soaring (see Figure 2) and refuge roads, hiking trails, observation towers, hunting blinds, and heavy equipment are falling into disrepair, our 548 wildlife refuges cannot af-

ford to wait any longer for the attention and funding priority they deserve.

CONCLUSION

The National Wildlife Refuge System stands alone as the only land and water system in the world with a mission that prioritizes wildlife conservation over all other activities. For well over a decade, CARE has worked to showcase the needs of the Refuge System and to secure a strong Congressional commitment for America's remarkable wetlands, deserts, tundra, and forests.

To protect America's wildlife and move toward achieving the conservation vision that began more than a century ago, our Refuge System needs \$514 million in FY 2009. Reaching this level is an essential step along the pathway toward an annual budget of \$765 million, which is widely considered to be the baseline funding level that wildlife refuges need to protect water quality and wildlife and ensure a positive experience for all visitors.

Congress's FY 2008 funding increase for the Refuge System reflects a passion among Americans for preserving wildlife and wild lands and waters; a passion shared by President Theodore Roosevelt more than a century ago that led him to establish a vision for protecting the nation's wildlife and natural areas for future generations. Roosevelt once said that "our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method." From these ideals, the National Wildlife Refuge System was born and is today leading the effort to conserve and restore America's diverse wildlife heritage. CARE stands ready to work with Congress and the Administration to ensure another 100 years of successful wildlife conservation on America's national wildlife refuges.



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