



This Memorial Day, Funding Crisis on Display at America's Wildlife Refuges

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2009 (Washington, DC) – A new report released today by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement finds the nation's 550 national wildlife refuges are vastly under-funded, leading to unstaffed refuges and closings; unsafe roads and trails; decreased safety; millions of acres of invasive species; unprotected at-risk species; and a 10% reduction in workforce since 2004.

“Hundreds of thousands of Americans will visit their local wildlife refuges this Memorial Day weekend, but too many will find them either completely closed, open without staff or a visitor's center, or with decaying infrastructure,” said Evan Hirsche, Chair of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a diverse group of 22 national organizations representing more than 14 million environmentalists, sportsmen, scientists and other outdoor enthusiasts.

The report, entitled “*Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges 2009*,” says America's National Wildlife Refuge System, comprising 150 million acres, requires a minimum of \$808 million annually to operate adequately. However, the System currently receives just \$462.8 million per year – an average of only \$3.08 per acre.

The report finds that:

- One in three refuges operate without a single staff member;
- The System has already cut 300 staff positions; without adequate funding increases, plans for a 20 percent staff reduction will resume;
- The System needs 845 full-time law enforcement officers, but currently has just 205, or one officer for every 731,000 acres. CARE conservatively recommends immediately adding 241 positions to retain visitor and officer safety;
- Mission critical, non-law enforcement staffing must be increased by 74 percent, or nearly 3,000 positions;
- The System is able to invest just 0.67 percent of its value in annual maintenance – CARE recommends investing \$380 million annually or 1.6 percent, still woefully short the industry standard of investing 2-6 percent;
- More than two million acres have already been lost to invasive species, placing threatened and endangered species at even greater risk.

The Refuge System, created by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, provides habitat for more than 250 at-risk animal and plant species. The 40 million people who visit refuges each year contribute an estimated \$1.7 billion in annual sales and over 27,000

jobs to local economies. Close to 800,000 Americans participated in environmental education programs last year, and more than half of the nation's refuges are available to anglers and hunters.

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The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) was created in 1995 as a loose coalition of diverse organizations concerned about the ability of our National Wildlife Refuges to fulfill their missions. Members of CARE recognize the inadequacy of existing funds to operate and maintain the National Wildlife Refuge System and the biological, recreational, and economic consequences that this lack of funding has on the Refuge System and its surrounding communities.

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ALSO AVAILABLE TO JOURNALISTS:

- Status of Local Refuges in Journalist's Reporting Area
- Interviews with Evan Hirsche, Chair of CARE and the President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, and CARE Coalition Members
- Photos
- Full Report