



Make Refuges Great Again

America's Wildlife Conservation Legacy

Recommendations to President Donald J. Trump
FY2018 – FY2021 Annual Appropriations

The Cooperative Alliance for
Refuge Enhancement (CARE)

March 2017



Dear President Trump,

On behalf of our 23 organizations and more than 16 million members and supporters nationwide, we respectfully ask for your support of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This vast system of public lands and waters offers Americans a place to hunt, fish, go birding, hike, and watch wildlife. It is also an economic engine for rural communities: outdoor enthusiasts generate \$650 billion annually in economic activity, and for every \$1 in federal funds invested, \$4.87 is returned to local communities. These lands and waters belong to and are accessible to all Americans, and it is our responsibility to manage and fund them appropriately.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) was formed in 1995 as a national coalition of organizations interested in preserving the Refuge System for all citizens. We have one goal: ensure robust funding to maintain a strong National Wildlife Refuge System. We support this System of 566 refuge units, 5 marine national monuments in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and 38 wetland management districts: more than 850 million acres of land and water in total. It is the pre-eminent wildlife refuge system in the world.

Our coalition works because of our diversity — we represent Americans from urban and rural areas, hunters and wildlife photographers, scientists and wildlife lovers, Republicans and Democrats and Independents. And our coalition works despite our diversity — on some issues we have member groups that are at opposite ends of the political spectrum yet together we focus on the priorities we share.

On national wildlife refuges, we stand together.

Our coalition supports funding for the Refuge System at \$900 million annually. That's what it will take for our refuges to be properly maintained, for our wildlife to thrive, and for all Americans to enjoy these public lands and waters. We ask for your support in this endeavor.

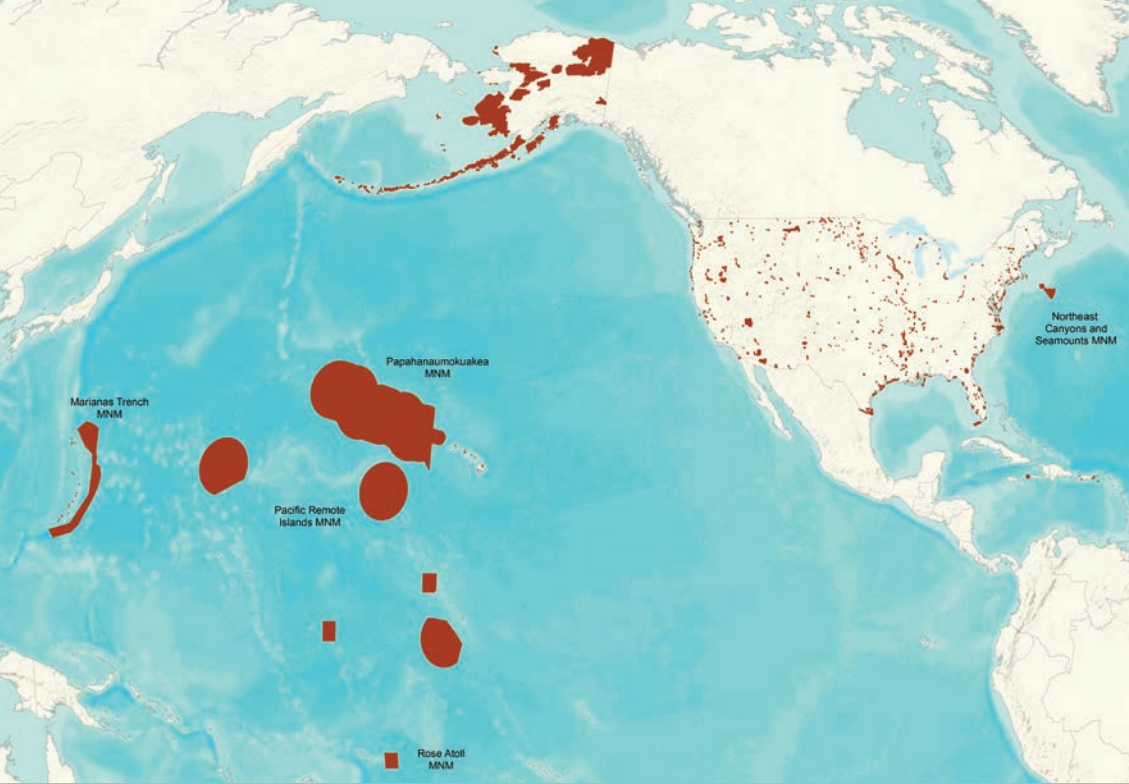
Thank you,

American Birding Association
American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Izaak Walton League of America
Marine Conservation Institute
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association
National Wildlife Federation

National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Corps Network
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute



The CARE coalition is comprised of 23 wildlife, sporting, scientific, and conservation organizations that span the political spectrum, representing 16 million Americans who value outdoor recreation and wildlife conservation. CARE was created in 1995 to advocate for robust funding for the Refuge System—lands for Americans across the country to enjoy and where wildlife can thrive.



Black skimmers at Prime Hook NWR, DE | April Allyson Abel, USFWS

At a Glance

The National Wildlife Refuge System

Mission: To conserve the nation's wildlife and wildlife habitats for present and future generations of Americans.

Management: By the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Size: More than 850 million acres of lands and waters, including:

- ✦ **566 refuges**, with at least one in every U.S. state
- ✦ **38 wetland management districts** that oversee 3.6 million acres of waterfowl production areas
- ✦ **5 marine national monuments**, along with more than 100 million acres of public land in Alaska, Hawai'i, and across the lower 48 states

Economics:

- ✦ **388% return on investment:** for every \$1 appropriated, \$4.87 is generated in economic activity to local communities
- ✦ **6,464% return on investment** in environmental services: for every \$1 appropriated, \$65 is generated in ecosystem benefits, totaling \$32.3 billion
- ✦ **35,000 private sector U.S. jobs** and \$792.7 million in employment income

✦ **A vast source of economic revenue**, where outdoor recreationists today generate \$650 billion a year in economic activity

The National Wildlife Refuge System also:

- ✦ **Protects** more than 8,000 known species of bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian, and fish species, as well as countless invertebrates and plants.
- ✦ **Offers** compatible wildlife-dependant recreation, including The Big Six: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.
- ✦ **Provides** an opportunity for 38,000 Americans to volunteer their time and expertise.
- ✦ **Generates** more than \$2.4 billion to local economies and adding more than \$340 million in tax revenue annually.



Birdwatching at Minnesota Valley NWR | Joanna Gilker, USFWS



Kodiak brown bear at Kodiak NWR, AK | Lisa Hupp, USFWS



Bison at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, CO | Ian Shive

Wildlife Conservation: A Model for the Rest of the World

The Refuge System is the world's largest network of lands and waters dedicated to fish, wildlife, and their habitats. Stretching from Maine to Guam, and Alaska to Puerto Rico, the Refuge System is home to more than 380 of the nation's more than 1500 endangered or threatened species.

Wildlife conservation in the United States is built around the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, which is based on the precept that fish and wildlife belong to all Americans and should be managed. The model is based on the precept that fish and wildlife belong to all Americans and should be managed to sustain forever their populations for current and future generations. We ask for your help in making sure our National Wildlife Refuge System remains strong and under the watchful stewardship of fish and wildlife professionals.

The Refuge System is managed in the spirit of the North American Model and under the framework of the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, where lands and waters are maintained and managed for the benefit of wildlife species and for compatible recreational use. Nearly all Refuge System lands are federally owned, and are maintained and scientifically managed for the benefit of all Americans and for wildlife.

This wildlife conservation model is key to the entire mission of the Refuge System. Almost every refuge (98%) provides habitat to at least one plant or animal listed under the Endangered Species Act, and 59 refuges were established specifically to protect one or more endangered species.

There is a concrete and proven value in having a system of lands and waters united in mission and shared goals,

across state lines, ecosystems, and even national boundaries. As a system, careful thought can be given to entire populations of species, migratory corridors, flyways, and important seasonal habitats. This helps ensure species and habitats are represented, redundant, and resilient across refuge units. And in this wildlife-dependent model, visitors can expect that these lands will be open for recreation as long as the science indicates it's a compatible use.

Stretched across millions of acres in all fifty states and nearly all territories, in rural and urban areas, and across every ecosystem in our great country, our system of national wildlife refuges is unique in the world.



Environmental education at William L. Finley NWR, OR | George Gentry, USFWS



Mallards and Pintails at Columbia | NWR David F. Gowse

CARE Request

\$900 million annually for the Refuge System by Fiscal Year 2021, with \$586 million allocated for Fiscal Year 2018

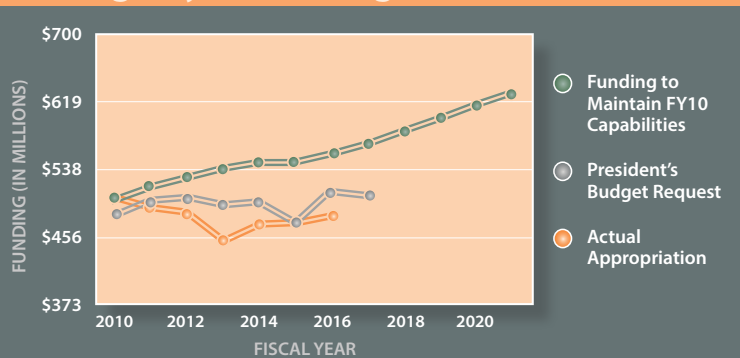
Adequate funding for the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System is critical to maintain these public lands and waters. Not only does the Refuge System depend on this funding for basic functions, such as habitat management and refuge staff, but it also supports everything from controlled burns and law enforcement to trail maintenance and fuel for refuge vehicles.

A number of issues are affecting the ability of the Refuge System to function at its highest potential for wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation. Staffing levels are the lowest they have been in a generation, with staff cuts of 15 percent over the last 6 years. Controlled burns cannot safely be completed, leading to destructive wildfires. Habitat restoration has been deferred, sometimes for years. Roads have deteriorated, visitor centers have been partially closed, and the visitor experience is declining.

The reason for these issues is a lack of funding. Refuge O&M funding has been declining for several years, and the result is that essential work is left unfinished. During the high water mark of support in FY2010, the Refuge System was able to devote resources to critical projects, tackle the maintenance backlog, and improve visitor experiences such as increased recreational hunting and wildlife watching opportunities and school programs. Any further reduction in funding will severely hamper the System's ability to meet its mission to maintain and conserve this great system of public lands and waters, with plant and animal resources for the benefit of all Americans.

We have a vision of the Refuge System where wildlife populations are thriving, as many refuges as practicable are open to the public for hunting, fishing, photography and wildlife observation, consistent with refuge law, environmental education programs are available to children and adults, and habitats are healthy.

Refuge System Budget Trends



This graph takes into account the \$10-15 million yearly increases for management capability needs such as rising salaries and benefits, and rising costs of fuel, steel, water, and other fixed costs.

This vision requires a financial investment, which will reap many rewards for the American people. We know that investment in wildlife refuges generates local economic benefits and provides recreational and educational opportunities in the great outdoors for everyone.

In an era in which the nation's wildlands quickly give way to urban encroachment, the Refuge System has the important mission of conserving a network of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. We respectfully request your support in building this future.



Santee NWR | Joe Milnes, USFW



The Big Six

For nearly 100 years, no one single piece of legislation governed the management of the Refuge System. In 1997, Congress overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act to establish how the System would be managed and used by the public.

The Improvement Act recognized the “Big Six,” wildlife-dependent recreational uses of the Refuge System. These six recreational uses receive priority consideration on refuges so long as they are determined to be “compatible” with wildlife conservation.



Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge | Ted Steinke

HUNTING and FISHING

A total of 364 refuges are open to hunting and 303 are open to fishing, with all 38 wetland management districts available for both.

In 2011, 13.7 million U.S. hunters spent \$33.7 billion and 33.1 million anglers spent \$41.8 billion on equipment, licenses, trips, and other related items.

The Refuge System conserves a large base of lands and waters where America’s sporting heritage thrives. Youth hunting events offered at refuges around the country are empowering a new generation of sportsmen and sportswomen to carry on the tradition. Fishing derbies are a popular pastime among families on dozens of wildlife refuges. And virtually every type of sport fishing on the continent can be found within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

For many hunters and anglers across the nation, wildlife refuges are a free and easily accessible way to get outside and

pursue their passions. CARE supports the special priority given on refuges to wildlife-dependant recreation under the law, and believes that existing refuge lands should continue to be accessible for consumptive and non-consumptive recreation wherever these uses are consistent with the Improvement Act.

Duck Stamp

The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, or the Federal Duck Stamp, is critical to refuge management and acquisition. At \$25, the stamp is a required license for all waterfowl hunting, but is also purchased by non-hunters who want to contribute to wetland habitat conservation. Created in 1934, proceeds have been used to purchase 5.7 million acres of habitat, and more than 300 refuges were created or expanded using these funds. For each stamp purchased, 98 percent of proceeds go directly towards the purchase or easement acquisition of waterfowl habitat.



Merced NWR | Bill Bouton



Green Jay at Laguna Atascosa NWR | Mike Capob. USFWS

WILDLIFE OBSERVATION and PHOTOGRAPHY

In 2011, nearly 72 million people went outdoors to go wildlife watching, spending an estimated \$54.9 billion on hotels, food, equipment, and related expenses.

In 2014, more than 8.4 million visitors took part in photography across 463 refuges. Millions of Americans have cell phones that have camera features, so photography on refuges is expanding at a rapid rate.

Our National Wildlife Refuge System provides incredible and varied opportunities for all Americans to connect with wildlife and the majestic settings they inhabit. From brown bears and caribou at Alaska's Kenai National Wildlife Refuge to bison and songbirds at Oklahoma's Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge to manatees at Florida's Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge, diverse and iconic wildlife of our great nation is found all across this remarkable system of refuges.



J.N. Ding Darling NWR | Brett Billings, USFWS

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION and INTERPRETATION

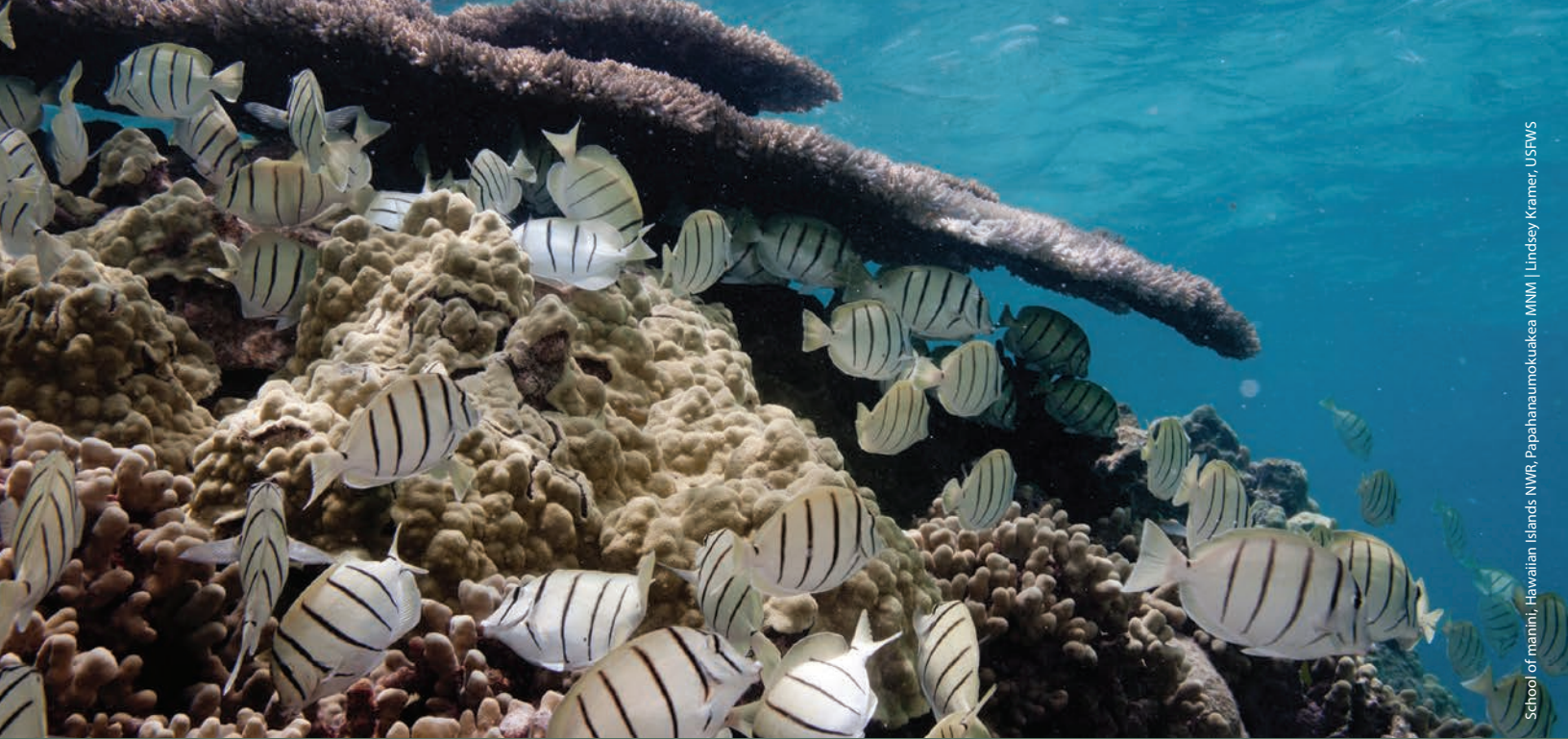
In 2013, approximately 3.5 million people participated in refuge environmental education and interpretation programs.

394 units of the Refuge System (70%) offer environmental education programming, although that number is falling with shrinking budgets.

National wildlife refuges are some of America's most important outdoor classrooms, introducing youth to the outdoors and helping visitors understand what they see in the natural world. In years past, children played outdoors and in the woods much more often than they do now, and environmental education and interpretation programs are helping to fill that void.

With nearly 80 percent of Americans now living in urban or suburban areas, there are fewer occasions for them to enjoy public lands and open space. The National Wildlife Refuge System, particularly units closer to cities, provide needed opportunities for a new generation of city dwellers to make that connection and get outside. The Urban Wildlife Conservation Program is focused on engaging a new audience and building on the legacy of wildlife conservation that has existed in the United States for generations.

Increased funding for wildlife refuges will expand the opportunities for Americans, whether rural or urban, to get outside and participate in these "Big Six" programs.



School of snappers, Hawaiian Islands NWR, Papahānaumokuākea MNL | Lindsey Kramer, USFWS

CARE's member organizations are available to provide further information about their programs and their ongoing commitment to protecting and funding refuges.

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