

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Rhode Island



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Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge

At **Sachuest National Wildlife Refuge**, budget and staffing shortfalls have resulted in closure of the visitor center during the week in winter. Public education programs will also be curtailed during the winter months.



USFWS

Budget cuts have forced the closure of the public contact station at **Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge**, where people come to learn about the threatened Piping Plover and many other species.

National Wildlife Refuges in Rhode Island face \$8.6 million budget shortfall

Rhode Island is home to five national wildlife refuges, which provide breeding, stop-over and wintering habitat for millions of migratory birds. Refuges in Rhode Island provide vital habitat for many at-risk wildlife species, including Least Terns and the federally threatened Piping Plover. Each year, almost half a million visitors enjoy hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and fishing on Rhode Island refuges.

Years of meager budgets coupled with ballooning fixed costs such as fuel, electricity, and salary adjustments have prevented the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from filling vital positions and completing thousands of essential projects; 45 mission-critical projects are on the shelf in Rhode Island today.

Unless funding increases to keep pace with inflation, the permanent loss of a refuge manager and public use personnel will result in reduced or eliminated educational and interpretive programs, maintenance of equipment and visitor infrastructure, and collaboration with neighbors and refuge volunteers that aid in improvement of wildlife habitat.

But there is a reasonable solution to fix these seemingly complex challenges: increase funding to \$514 million in FY 09.

About C.A.R.E.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement is a diverse coalition of 22 conservation, recreation, sporting, and scientific organizations with more than 14 million members and supporters across the United States. CARE has been working since 1995 to help the National Wildlife Refuge System fight a serious funding crisis.

American Birding Association
American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Assateague Coastal Trust
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Izaak Walton League of America
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association of America
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Corps Network
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
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[www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/
CareHome.html](http://www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html)



CARE recommends \$514 million FY 2009 Operations and Maintenance budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System

The Refuge System now struggles with a crippling backlog of \$3.5 billion and needs an annual increase of \$15 million just to keep pace with inflation. \$514 million will finally lift the Refuge System above FY 04 inflation-adjusted levels, and be an important step toward reaching a level that not only prevents the Refuge System from spiraling into deeper debt, but also permits the FWS to commence long-overdue restoration or management on over 9 million acres, begin repairs on more than 11,400 deteriorating facilities, and start recovering visitor services now languishing or completely eliminated due to scarce funding and staff.

The Refuge System currently has a Maintenance backlog approaching \$2.5 billion, creating a veritable logjam of deferred maintenance projects that has handcuffed refuge staff in their pursuit to protect wildlife and serve the public. Coupled with an Operations backlog of more than \$1 billion, this funding shortfall has forced scores of missed project opportunities. Rhode Island refuges alone have 45 unfunded, yet essential projects totaling over \$7.4 million. The Maintenance backlog for Rhode Island refuges exceeds \$1.3 million, which severely impedes refuge staff from protecting wildlife habitat and providing for recreational opportunities.

National Wildlife Refuges are undeniable economic engines.

According to a recent economic analysis by the FWS, *Banking on Nature*

- Visitors to refuges generate impressive economic activity. In 2006, nearly 40 million people visited national wildlife refuges. Their spending generated over \$1.7 billion of sales in regional economies and created 27,000 jobs and \$543 million in employment income. These economic data do not include Alaska or Pacific island refuges, which together hosted over 2 million visitors in 2006.

- At **Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge** in Rhode Island, for every dollar spent on the refuge budget, \$6.25 are generated in expenditures to the local economy. About \$214,000 in local tax revenues are generated by visitor spending.