Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Colorado

USFS/Alan Dyck

The water that supports life at San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Colorado and Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge in Kansas comes from the Rio Grande in addition to various streams and wells. That costs money each year, along with the high electrical costs to run the pumps. The refuges have to be able to pay escalating costs to ensure the health and breeding of wildlife as well as recreational opportunities for hunters and birders.

USFWS/Jesse Achtenberg

Staff reductions at refuges such as **Rocky Mountain Arsenal** near Denver hamstring efforts to maintain and restore habitat for the recently reintroduced American Bison.

USFWS

Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge

The National Wildlife Refuge System struggles to meet its wildlife conservation mission

In Colorado alone, 50 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf.

Colorado is home to spectacular natural resources including 7 national wildlife refuges. These refuges provide habitat to hundreds of animal and plant species, including bison, moose, sage grouse, bald eagles, river otters, and the endangered Colorado pikeminnow.

In 2008, more than 45 thousand visitors enjoyed hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and hunting and fishing on Colorado refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Colorado may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Colorado wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that exceed $11.5 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 45 additional positions. Those include 23 wildlife biologists, 5 guides and educators, and 13 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Colorado refuges will fall further behind in meeting the demand.

What's the solution? CARE recommends $514 million for the Refuge System's FY 2010 Operations and Maintenance budget and an increase to at least $765 million by FY 2013

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
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
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
Wildlife Forever
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www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html

Saddled with declining purchasing power and a $3.5 billion backlog of deferred operations and maintenance projects, the National Wildlife Refuge System is in a financial vise.

The Refuge System needs an annual increase of $15 million in its operations budget just to keep pace with inflation and demand. The Refuge System welcomed more than 41.2 million visitors in 2008, up from 33 million in 1998.

National Wildlife Refuges are undeniable economic engines. According to the *Banking on Nature* report from the FWS:

• Spending by visitors to refuges generated more than $1.7 billion of sales nationwide, created 27,000 jobs in local communities and added $543 million in employment income. These economic data do not include Alaska or Pacific island refuges, which together generate millions of annual visitors.

Yet, according to Management Systems International, a respected business consultant, the Refuge System has seen its real purchasing power decline by 11 percent between fiscal years 2003 and 2008.

The Government Accountability Office found that with continuing funding constraints and an expanding list of challenges, it may be difficult to maintain the Refuge System as envisioned in law – "where the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System are maintained; priority visitor services are provided; and the strategic growth of the system is continued."

There is a solution to safeguard the world's finest network of public lands dedicated to wildlife conservation: $514 million in FY 2010 for the National Wildlife Refuge System and an increase to at least $765 million by FY 2013 – steps that will restore operational quality and begin to chip away at the deferred operations and maintenance backlog.