

# Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for U.S. Virgin Islands



**Green Cay National Wildlife Refuge** provides habitat for one of only two populations of the critically endangered St. Croix Ground Lizard, which was extirpated from the mainland of St. Croix Island. Lack of permanent staff at the refuge may impact the refuge's ability to maintain this crucial population.



Planned staff reductions at **Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge** would impact efforts to maintain and protect the largest nesting population of the endangered Leatherback Sea Turtle under U.S. jurisdiction.



Erin LaCasella/NOAA-NMFS-SWFSC

*Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Virgin Islands*

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

### **In the U.S. Virgin Islands 7 mission-critical projects remain unfunded**

The U.S. Virgin Islands are home to spectacular natural resources including four national wildlife refuges. These wildlife refuges are national treasures, providing habitat to many species, including the federally endangered St. Croix Ground Lizard, and Leatherback and Hawksbill Sea Turtles. These refuges safeguard important habitats such as coastal mangroves, tropical dry forest, grasslands, and salt flats.

In **2008**, more than **4,400 visitors** enjoy hiking, bird watching, wildlife photography, and environmental education on U.S. Virgin Island refuges.

**Yet, national wildlife refuges in the U.S. Virgin Islands may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation.** U.S. Virgin Island wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$4 million.

**Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 8 additional positions.** Those include 4 wildlife biologists, 1 guide and educator, and 2 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, U.S. Virgin Island 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*

*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*

*Wildlife Forever*

*Wildlife Management Institute*

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[www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/  
CareHome.html](http://www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html)

## *Puerto Rico / U.S. Virgin Islands*



### **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.