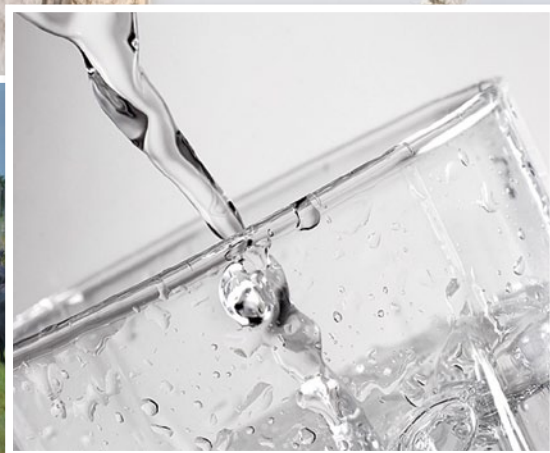


America's Wildlife Refuges 2013

Delivering the
Unexpected





**Cooperative Alliance
for Refuge Enhancement (CARE)**

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 (Chair)
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

CARE is a national coalition of 22 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations. Together, these organizations represent a national constituency numbering more than 16 million Americans. Working together, and with the support of more than 200 refuge Friends groups, CARE educates Congress, the Administration, and the public about America's magnificent National Wildlife Refuge System.

For a copy of this report, please visit www.FundRefuges.org
or contact CARE at:
5335 Wisconsin Avenue • Suite 521 • Washington, DC 20015
Phone: 202.290.5593



Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, CA | Michael Rubin

Executive Summary

All Americans — including those who have never set foot on a national wildlife refuge and may not even know that refuges exist — benefit from their protection. From preserving airspace for military training missions to securing the nation's food supply, this report highlights just a few of the unique and unexpected benefits that the National Wildlife Refuge System delivers to the nation.

Since 1903, the National Wildlife Refuge System has been protecting the nation's wildlife, lands, and waters for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. Today, with 561 national wildlife refuges and 38 wetland management districts located across our increasingly urban country, the Refuge System is more valuable than ever.

More than 47 million people visited national wildlife refuges in FY 2012 to enjoy the opportunities they offer for hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, photography, and study. Yet all Americans — including those who have never set foot on a refuge and who may not even know that refuges exist — benefit from their protection, often in surprising ways. For example, our national wildlife refuges and their staff:

- Protect clean air, safe drinking water, and a wealth of other natural goods and services for nearby communities;
- Provide secure airspace for military training operations;
- Keep agricultural lands in production;
- Safeguard communities from devastating wildfires;
- Maintain emergency landing facilities for transpacific flights;
- Generate an estimated \$2.1 to \$4.2 billion to local economies and create approximately 34,000 U.S. jobs;
- Serve as first responders in local communities affected by natural disasters and other emergencies; and
- Empower a new generation of sportsmen and wildlife enthusiasts with an understanding of the natural world.

To ensure that these benefits continue, the Refuge System must have sufficient funding to carry out its essential functions, such as:

- Conducting management and restoration activities (e.g., invasive species removal and prescribed fires) that provide healthy habitats for wildlife and, in turn, draw visitors;
- Keeping refuges open and staffed so that quality recreational opportunities continue to be offered and visitor

programs (e.g., hunting and fishing programs) can be added or expanded;

- Maintaining the facilities and equipment that are used to serve the public and manage habitat; and
- Providing the law enforcement officers necessary to keep refuge resources and the people who come to appreciate them safe.

CARE estimates that the Refuge System needs at least \$900 million each year in operations and maintenance funding to properly administer its 150 million acres. At its highest funding level in FY 2010, the System received only \$503 million — little more than half the needed amount. Since that time, congressional appropriations have not only failed to account for rising costs, but have been steadily backsliding toward levels that, in real dollars, have not been seen since FY 2003.

In order to bridge the growing gap between what the Refuge System needs and what it receives, and to enable our refuges to continue serving Americans both within and beyond their boundaries, CARE urges Congress to provide at least \$499 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts in FY 2014. To help address the backlog that has resulted from chronic funding shortfalls, CARE further calls on Congress to pass the Wildlife Refuge System Conservation Semipostal Stamp Act of 2013, authorizing the U.S. Postal Service to issue a special stamp that offers the public a voluntary way to support America's valuable national wildlife refuges.



Girl with refuge sign, Upper Souris NWR, ND | Jennifer Jewett, FWS

CARE urges Congress to:

- Provide at least \$499 million for the Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts for FY 2014, and
- Pass the Wildlife Refuge System Conservation Semipostal Stamp Act of 2013.

The National Wildlife Refuge System

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established the first refuge at Pelican Island, Florida, to conserve bird populations that were being decimated for their feathers. Since Roosevelt's time, the National Wildlife Refuge System has expanded to include 561 national wildlife refuges and 38

wetland management districts, encompassing approximately 150 million acres of lands and waters. From the Virgin Islands to Guam, the Refuge System spans 12 time zones and protects diverse habitats ranging from arctic tundra to arid desert, boreal forest to sagebrush grassland, and prairie wetland to coral reef.

Established primarily to protect wildlife and the habitat they need to survive, refuges are home to at least 700 bird, 220 mammal, 250 reptile and amphibian, and 1,000 fish species, as well as countless invertebrates and plants. They provide safe havens for some 280 threat-

ened and endangered species and helped save our national symbol, the American bald eagle, from extinction.

Found in every U.S. state and territory, and within an hour's drive of most metropolitan areas, national wildlife refuges host a growing number of visitors each year — more than 47 million in FY 2012. Treated to some of North America's most visually stunning and biologically rich lands and waters, these visitors come to enjoy activities including wildlife-watching, hunting, fishing, photography, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and environmental education.



A Small Investment for Wildlife

Far from being a bloated bureaucracy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) manages the Refuge System on a shoestring budget of about \$3 per acre — funds that are used to remove invasive species, inventory and monitor refuge resources, maintain equipment and facilities, offer visitor programs, enforce laws, and more. A dedicated staff stretches these dollars as far as they can go and continues to work toward improving management efficiency by:

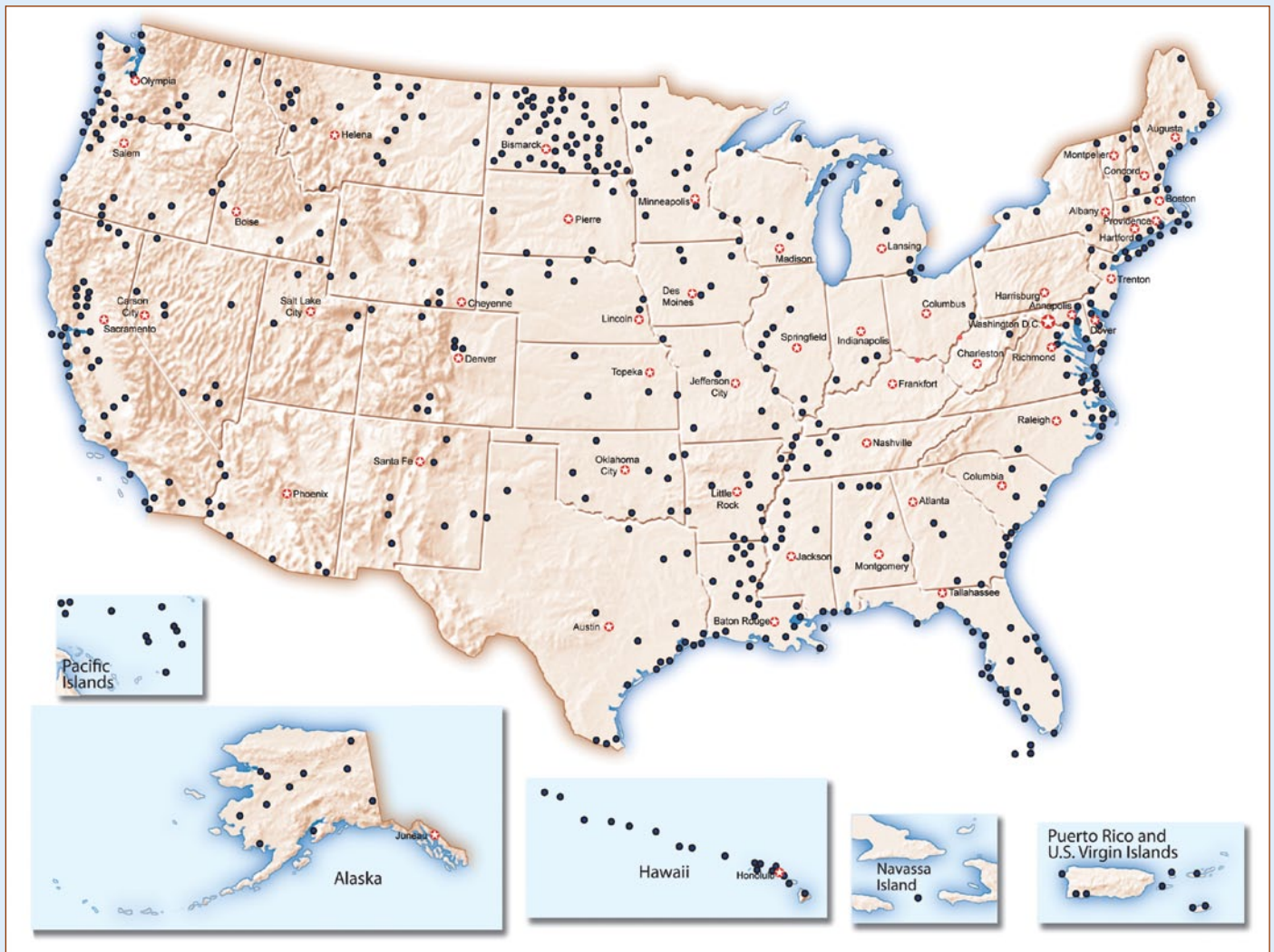
- Consolidating administrative reporting requirements so staff have more time for habitat management and public use projects on the ground;
- Enlisting volunteers, who contribute an additional 22% of work on refuges that wouldn't have been accomplished otherwise;
- Forging partnerships with interested stakeholders, which enables the Refuge System to leverage additional dollars and work, accomplishing shared goals that would otherwise be impossible; and
- Streamlining the way refuge inventory and monitoring data are collected and shared in order to facilitate management decisions that tackle such issues as invasive species, fire management, and water quality.

Big Returns for America

Throughout our history, conservation-minded individuals from all walks of life and across the political spectrum have realized that investing in the conservation of our native ecosystems and the organisms they sustain is in our own, collective, best interest. The work carried out on refuges is intended to conserve wildlife and provide compatible opportunities for public enjoyment, yet, from preserving airspace for military training missions to securing the nation's food supply, Americans reap the benefits of these efforts in many unexpected ways.

The Refuge System at a Glance

- Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior
- Mission: to conserve the nation's wildlife and their habitats for present and future Americans
- Made up of approximately 150 million acres of lands and waters, including:
 - 561 refuges, with at least one in every U.S. state and territory
 - 38 wetland management districts that oversee 3.6 million acres of waterfowl production areas
- Protects more than 700 bird, 220 mammal, 250 reptile and amphibian, and 1,000 fish species, in addition to countless invertebrates and plants
- Offers compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, and environmental education and interpretation
- Attracted more than 47 million visitors in FY 2012
- Generates between \$2.1 and \$4.2 billion in annual sales to local communities, supporting approximately 34,000 U.S. jobs and \$687 million in employment income, and adding more than \$235 million in tax revenue
- Generates more than \$32.3 billion each year in natural goods and services, such as buffering communities from storms and purifying water supplies



Map courtesy of FWS

Securing Military Airspace

When most Americans think of national security, the National Wildlife Refuge System doesn't readily come to mind. But most of our 561 national wildlife refuges provide natural buffers against urbanization and other development, preserving open land and airspace necessary for military units to execute their vital training missions.

Close to our nation's capital, the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex, consisting of Mason Neck, Occoquan Bay, and Featherstone refuges, not only protect precious natural resources like nesting bald eagles, but also safeguard restricted airspace for U.S. Army and U.S. Navy training activities. The Patuxent River Naval Air Station Complex in Maryland and the Davison Army Airfield at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, are two vital training grounds for military

readiness on the east coast. In a region that is becoming more urban every day, the open areas protected by these refuges preserve critical airspace for the Department of Defense (DOD).

The relationship between DOD and the Potomac River NWR Complex is just one example of a larger trend playing out across the Refuge System's 150 million acres. In total, 447 refuges, or about 80 percent of the System's units, secure open space that is crucial to military training. For example, Deer Flat NWR in southwest Idaho, known for serving as a primary wintering area for migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway, also preserves restricted airspace for the U.S. Air Force's Mountain Home Range Complex. In Alaska, Yukon Flats and Innoko refuges provide open airspace for the Elmendorf-Richardson Joint Air Force Base in addition to conserving waterfowl, moose, wolverines, and salmon.

U.S. Air Force A-10s fly over the Barry M. Goldwater Range in Arizona. The Range's airspace includes much of Cabeza Prieta NWR to the south. | Airman Jerilyn Quintanilla, U.S. Air Force





When managed properly, refuge habitats can significantly reduce excess nutrients and pollutants from the water supply. For example, wetland ecosystems have been shown to remove up to 60% of metals and 90% of nitrogen from the water; streamside forests can remove up to 90% of nitrogen and 50% of phosphorous. | Jeff Turner

Protecting Nature's Goods and Services

Wildlife and people alike rely on the many goods and services provided by healthy ecosystems, and our national wildlife refuges offer them in spades. Their vegetation stabilizes the soil while removing pollution from the air, and their wildlife helps to pollinate our plants and control pest populations. They filter groundwater before it enters municipal supplies and store water needed to meet urban demands. And as the frequency and intensity of storms increase with the changing climate, they help to absorb floodwaters and buffer communities against coastal storm surges.

Across the country, FWS is working to protect and restore refuge habitats that provide these benefits. Without the environmental services that they provide, Americans' access to clean air and water would be compromised, and governments and taxpayers would be forced to pay high prices — either for the infrastructure needed to replicate these services or for the public health impacts that would result from their loss. New York City offers a prime example of the cost-savings that result from preserving these benefits. A \$1.5 billion investment in protecting the Catskill/Delaware watershed and operating a UV disinfection facility exempted the City from spending an estimated \$10 billion to construct and operate a water filtration plant.¹

The goods and services that functioning ecosystems provide



Refuges provide important habitat for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and other wildlife that help to pollinate 75% of our food crops. With the steep decline in domesticated honeybees due to the unexplained phenomenon known as Colony Collapse Disorder, these wild pollinators are more critical than ever. | Laura Hubers, FWS

to human communities are undervalued and often overlooked until they are gone. Fortunately, research has begun to measure the value of some of these benefits, with a 2011 study revealing that refuges generate more than \$32.3 billion in ecosystem services each year — a return of over \$65 for every \$1 appropriated by Congress.²



Florida cowboy guards the herd in an area under consideration for easements in the Everglades Headwaters NWR & Conservation Area | Carlton Ward Jr., Carltonward.com

Keeping Working Lands Working

Increasing development is a threat not only to wildlife, but to America's agricultural lands as well. Fortunately, the nearly 3.5 million acres of refuge lands under conservation easements protect both. Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements that limit the type and amount of development that may take place on a property, while at the same time keeping it in private ownership and thus on the tax rolls. Refuge conservation easements typically prohibit subdivision and commercial development activities, but allow for

continued agricultural uses such as livestock grazing and haying that contribute to the nation's food supply.

Many of the landowners who have entered into easements with the Refuge System have done so because of concerns that nearby development pressure could threaten their way of life. They understand that their heirs could be forced to sell the family land due to high inheritance taxes or that a future owner may not share their desire to keep the property undeveloped. With these conservation easements, landowners may retain the land, sell it, or — because estate taxes are significantly lower — pass it on to their heirs with the assurance that the land will remain protected for agricultural use. In addition, easement lands are sometimes subject to lower property taxes, which provide cost-savings to landowners while allowing the property to continue supporting the local tax base.

Most landowners of refuge easements have a deep appreciation for wildlife. The flexibility afforded to them by the conservation easements allows them to protect wildlife resources while also meeting their own needs. For the Refuge System, easements offer a cost-effective way to protect important fish and wildlife habitat. Because the landowner retains management responsibility for the land, the operations and maintenance costs for easements are minimal (*see Figure 1*). FWS now has 55 refuges with conservation easements, including 15 refuges where easements are the exclusive or primary method of land protection.

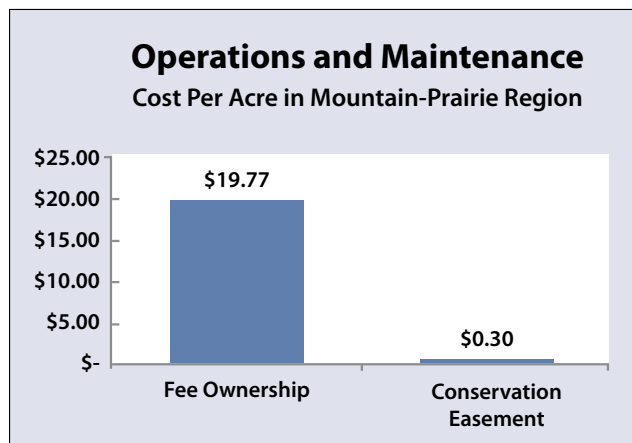


Figure 1. Operations and maintenance costs for refuge easements are a fraction of what they would be if the lands were owned outright by the Refuge System. In FWS's Mountain-Prairie Region, it is a difference of \$19.47 per acre. | FWS

Making America Fire-Safe

Fire is one of the most important tools available for managing wildlife habitat. In the many ecosystems where fire has historically occurred with some regularity, organisms have adapted to withstand and even depend on these disturbances. Because of changing fire regimes and the need to suppress fires along the growing wildland-urban interface, we can no longer rely on wildfires alone to maintain healthy habitat. To address this deficiency, the Refuge System frequently conducts controlled burns. These burns not only help wildlife, but also benefit people by reducing the hazardous fuel loads that can put communities at greater risk from devastating wildfires and by lowering the cost to suppress them.

At Merritt Island NWR in Florida, prescribed fire has been used to improve habitat for species like the endangered Florida scrub jay, as well as to reduce hazardous fuels that pose a threat to neighboring communities and the nearby Kennedy Space Center. In May 2012, lightning strikes sparked three wildfires that burned a total of 1,353 acres on the refuge. The affected areas had previously received fuel treatments costing \$56,000. The treatments helped to minimize the spread of the wildfires, and suppression costs totaled \$106,000. A recent study estimated that these wildfires would have burned more than 40,000 acres had fuel reduction not been conducted and would have cost at least \$3.6 million.³ More importantly, they could have put the surrounding communities at great risk. The success at Merritt Island NWR is not unique. From Big Branch Marsh



At Merritt Island NWR, a prescribed fire helps to manage habitat and reduce fuel loads that heighten the risk of devastating wildfires. | Michael Good, FWS



The Southern Area Type 1 Red Team gathers in New Jersey to make recommendations to the state fire marshal following Hurricane Sandy. The interagency team is led by Incident Commander Tony Wilder (at right of statue), who serves as a fire management officer at Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR. | FWS

NWR in Louisiana to Sacramento NWR in California, the Refuge System's fire program has helped to reduce the intensity of wildfires and allowed staff to rapidly suppress them before any serious damage was done.

The Refuge System's fire staff helps to protect communities well beyond refuges as well. As part of the National Interagency Fire Center, refuge firefighters are often called upon to assist in suppressing large wildfires around the country. For example, Tony Wilder, a fire management officer at Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR, leads an Interagency Incident Management Team that has managed some of the nation's most complex wildfires. The team, which includes several other refuge firefighters, helped to manage the massive 2011 wildfire in Bastrop County, Texas, and they were later honored for their work.

The Refuge System currently has about 410 firefighters and fire managers — approximately 18% fewer than it had two years ago. The fire program's hazardous fuels reduction budget sustained a 23% cut between FY 2012 and 2013, and plans are already being made to accommodate an additional 30% cut in FY 2014. Unfortunately, that will bring the program's staffing level down even further. Although the remaining capacity will prioritize human safety and property, refuges even in fire-prone western regions may be left unstaffed.



A Delta flight from Honolulu to Japan makes an emergency landing at Midway Atoll NWR in 2011 due to a crack in the cockpit window. | FWS

Providing A Safe Place to Land

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge is one of the treasures of the Refuge System. As home to threatened green turtles, spinner dolphins, endangered Hawaiian monk seals, and the world's largest population of Laysan albatrosses, it serves as a haven for wildlife, provides opportunities for research and education, and offers a window into the beauty of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Yet the refuge also provides life-saving facilities for aircrafts and ships traveling across the Pacific Ocean.

Federal regulations require that transoceanic twin-engine planes stay within 180 minutes of an airport in case of emergency, and Midway's Henderson Airfield is one of only a handful of emergency landing sites available for transpacific flights. About 38,000 twin-engine planes cross the Pacific Ocean every year. Without Midway, many of those flights would be forced to make long detours in order to remain within safe distance of alternate emergency landing fields, incurring additional flight time and fuel costs. Several years ago, even before a dramatic rise in fuel prices, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) conservatively estimated that commercial airlines save at least \$28 million each year with the continued operation of the emergency landing site at Midway Atoll NWR.

Both commercial and government flights have made use of the refuge. For example, in June 2011, a Delta Air Lines flight carrying 378 people from Honolulu to Japan landed at Henderson Airfield after a crack was discovered in the cockpit window. In August 2012, a mechanical problem forced the emergency landing of a U.S. Marine Corps fighter jet flying the same route — one of nearly 50 private, Coast Guard, or military flights to stop at the refuge for refueling or emergency purposes that year.

The Refuge System plays a major role in keeping Henderson Airfield running. In addition to sharing the cost of infrastructure maintenance with the FAA, FWS administers the contract for airport staff, and refuge employees work with all parties on the logistics and day-to-day communication regarding the airport's operation. The refuge has also served as a base for at-sea medical evacuations, which are supported by refuge and contract staff. In 2012, these included medevacs from a commercial container ship, a fishing vessel, and a Coast Guard ship. Qualified back-up boat staff is required to send the refuge's small boat beyond the atoll to rescue passengers from vessels that may be as high as 20 stories, but due to staff reductions, the refuge has been unable to support at-sea evacuations in FY 2013.

Driving Local Economies

Outdoor recreation is big business. In 2011, 37.4 million U.S. sportsmen spent a combined total of \$89.8 billion on hunting and fishing. Even more popular, wildlife watching was enjoyed by 71.8 million Americans, who spent \$54.9 billion that same year.⁴ With a diverse collection of habitats, a mandate to prioritize wildlife-dependent recreation, and a steadily growing number of visitors (see Figure 2), the National Wildlife Refuge System provides an expansive base of lands and waters on which to support this booming industry.

Recreation on America's refuges has been estimated to generate between \$2.1 and \$4.2 billion in annual sales to local communities alone, creating approximately 34,000 U.S. jobs and \$687 million in employment income, while contributing more than \$235 million in tax revenue.^{5,6} By those numbers, every dollar invested in our Refuge System by the federal government returns an average of between \$4 and \$8 to local communities, though that figure is likely much higher when factoring in the ripple effect as recreation expenditures flow through the economy.

Local communities benefit from more than recreation, though. Numerous studies have shown that property values are higher near parks and open space.⁷ Refuges are no exception. For example, a 2009 study revealed that homes close to Great Meadows NWR in Massachusetts are valued nearly \$1,000 more than those just 100 meters away.⁸ National

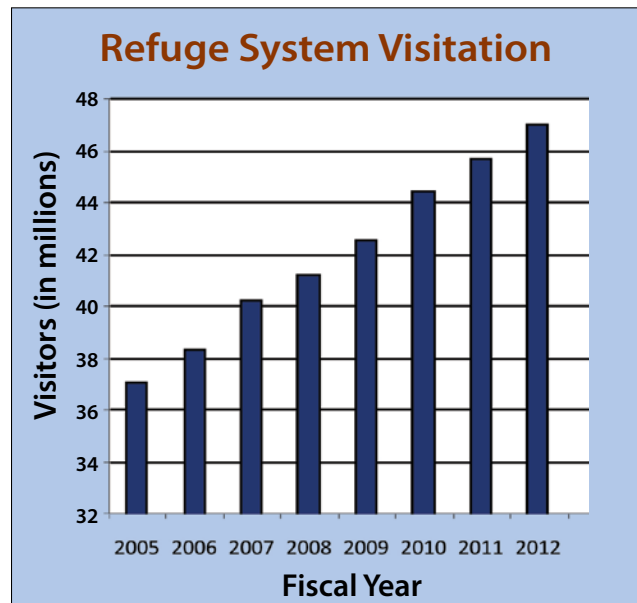


Figure 2. Refuges draw a steadily growing number of visitors each year. In FY 2012, they attracted more than 47 million people, an increase of approximately 10 million from FY 2005.

wildlife refuges included in a 2012 study were found to boost local property values by an estimated \$122 million in FWS's Southeast Region, \$95 million in the Northeast Region, and \$83 million in the California/Nevada Region.⁹

While the economic benefits that refuges provide are undeniable, the mere existence of most refuge lands and waters is not enough to generate these impressive returns. Adequate staffing, equipment, and facilities are needed to manage habitat and provide positive experiences for the visitors whose spending has helped to make the Refuge System such an important economic driver for local communities. For this reason, the operational changes that the Refuge System must make to cope with current and expected budget cuts will surely impact the economy. These changes include:

- Delays or cuts to new and expanded hunting programs planned for nearly 29 refuges.
- Reduced hours at many visitor centers, including Savannah NWR in South Carolina, Necedah NWR in Wisconsin, and Alaska Maritime NWR.
- Canceling plans to construct and repair visitor facilities, such as new trails at Great Swamp NWR in New Jersey, a new boat ramp at Tennessee NWR, and repairs to the visitor center at Merritt Island NWR in Florida.
- Canceling popular events like the 2013 "Cradle of Birding" festival at John Heinz NWR in Philadelphia.



Brigham City, Utah, shows its pride in the nearby Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. Visitors to the popular refuge generate business for local hotels, restaurants, stores, and gas stations. | Brigham City, Utah



Left: FWS staff clear roads and parking lots to allow access to Louisiana Heart Hospital following Hurricane Katrina. | Tom MacKenzie, FWS
 Right: Refuge System staff and a National Guardsman travel by FWS airboat through a neighborhood in Minot, North Dakota, as part of the response to the 2011 floods. | FEMA

Lending a Helping Hand

The employees of our national wildlife refuges not only demonstrate perseverance and dedication in saving wildlife, but also as first responders in their local communities. Though it may not be in their job descriptions, they can often be found on the front lines after disaster strikes, sometimes risking their own lives to save others. From law enforcement officers and firefighters to refuge managers and maintenance workers, these dedicated individuals have answered calls for help all around the country.

In the aftermath of some of the worst natural disasters in the nation's history, refuge workers have repeatedly jumped into action to rescue victims and aid in the recovery — often while coping with the loss of their own homes and workplaces. After Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, refuge staff joined with their colleagues from across FWS in going from house to house looking for survivors, responding to 911 calls, clearing access routes to local hospitals, providing meals to victims and relief workers, and even offering up the headquarters of the Southeast Louisiana NWR Complex to house Red Cross workers. When severe flooding hit North and South Dakota in 2009, they worked to fill and place sandbags to protect local homes and infrastructure, employed refuge airboats to search for victims and survey the damage, and helped rescue several people and their pets. As recently as May 2013, federal wildlife officer

Matt Belew volunteered to search for survivors of the devastating tornado in Moore, Oklahoma — an hour and a half away from his station at Wichita Mountains NWR; FWS's Southwest Region later named him Refuge Officer of the Year in recognition of his efforts during this disaster and for training other refuge employees in search and rescue.

Oftentimes, though, the calls for help come in the midst of an accident or a medical emergency. In December 2012, for instance, a federal wildlife officer was the first to respond to a report that two duck hunters had overturned in their canoe near Idaho's Minidoka NWR. The men had been in the Snake River's freezing water for a half-hour and were suffering from severe hypothermia when Officer Russell Haskett arrived, wading up to his neck before using a stick and rope to pull the men toward him and then bring them to shore. A helicopter crew arrived in time to perform CPR on one of the men, who had gone into cardiac arrest, and both men survived the ordeal. And in May 2013, employees of New Jersey's Edwin B. Forsythe NWR became concerned after noticing that the founder of the Refuge Friends group had failed to turn up for a refuge event at which he had been expected. They went to his home to check on him and found him in distress, later learning that he had been incapacitated for a day and a half. The refuge staff called the paramedics and notified the man's family, and he is now recovering.

Empowering Future Generations

The mission statement of the National Wildlife Refuge System says it all: to conserve a national network of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. With more than 150 million acres, the National Wildlife Refuge System is within reach of Americans in all 50 states. This rich and diverse set of public lands stands alone as the only land and water system in the world with a mission that prioritizes the needs of wildlife — and our children will benefit from this dedication.

Refuges are some of America's most important outdoor classrooms. Each year, approximately 769,000 students and teachers visit national wildlife refuges, where educational programs introduce youth to the natural world. Many more students visit refuges each year to participate in outdoor events, hike on refuge trails, volunteer, fish, and hunt.



Pepper Middle School students explore John Heinz NWR in Philadelphia.
| Eastwick Friends & Neighbors Coalition



Youth hunt at Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR, MS | Roger Smith

Of the 561 national wildlife refuges around the country, 426 are open for public use, 329 are open to hunting, and 271 are open to fishing. All 38 Wetland Management Districts are open to the public, including hunters and anglers, as well. For years, the number of hunters and anglers was in decline — a symptom of people spending more time indoors and a lack of easy access on public lands. This trend has begun to turn around, though, and over the last five years, the number of hunters increased 9% while the number of anglers increased 11%. The Refuge System has been working to build on this recent momentum with youth programs that empower the next generation to carry America's sporting heritage forward.

But while rural Americans generally gain an appreciation for the outdoors at an early age, nearly 80% of people in the U.S. now live in urban or suburban areas and may have limited opportunities to connect with the natural world. FWS's urban refuges are providing venues for a new generation of city dwellers to make that connection and perhaps join the ranks of the 90 million people who already enjoy wildlife-related recreation in this country. Don Edwards San Francisco Bay NWR, John Heinz NWR in Philadelphia, Denver's Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, and Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge are among those refuges that are reaching out to urban youth.

Keeping America Moving Forward

The growth of the Refuge System since the first national wildlife refuge was created by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 reflects a passion among Americans for preserving and enjoying the nation's wildlife, lands, and waters. Each year, a growing number of people from every state and around the world visit our national wildlife refuges to hunt, fish, watch and photograph wildlife, learn, and simply experience the best of America's natural resources. Many more benefit from the contributions these refuges make to their safety, their health, and their economy, usually without even knowing it.

Because the Refuge System is so integral to the wellbeing of local communities, to the important agricultural and outdoor industries, and to the critical work of other agencies like the FAA and DOD, what happens on national wildlife refuges may be felt well outside their boundaries. Recent funding cuts have already pushed the Refuge System dangerously close to a tipping point, beyond which it may be difficult to carry out even

the most basic functions related to its mission. If sequestration cuts continue as reflected in the U.S. House of Representative's appropriations allocation for the Department of the Interior, CARE estimates that the Refuge System's FY 2014 appropriation would drop to only about \$389 million — a cut of \$114 million, or 23%, compared with FY 2010. On the ground, however, it will feel more like a \$153 million, or 30%, cut (*see Figure 3*). That is because each year, the Refuge System needs an increase of at least \$8 million to cover the rising cost of fuel, utilities, rent, and other fixed expenses.

Because budgets have not kept pace with rising costs, the gap between the level of funding needed to maintain the Refuge System's capabilities and the level of funding appropriated by Congress has widened dramatically. To begin to bridge that gap, CARE is calling on Congress to provide at least \$499 million for the Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts for FY 2014. While this funding level still represents a major cut

in real dollars from just a few years ago, it is a reasonable step toward moving refuge budgets in the right direction again — one that will allow the National Wildlife Refuge System to keep America moving forward.

Further, to help address the \$3.1 billion backlog that has resulted from chronic underfunding, CARE urges Congress to pass the Wildlife Refuge System Conservation Semipostal Stamp Act of 2013 (H.R. 1384). Modeled after the Save Vanishing Species semipostal stamp, the semipostal stamp proposed by H.R. 1384 authorizes the U.S. Postal Service to issue a semipostal stamp that the public could voluntarily purchase to support America's national wildlife refuges. The stamp could generate as much as \$10 million toward projects that have been shelved due to lack of funding — projects that would improve wildlife habitat, repair visitor facilities, and ultimately help our refuges continue to benefit the American people.

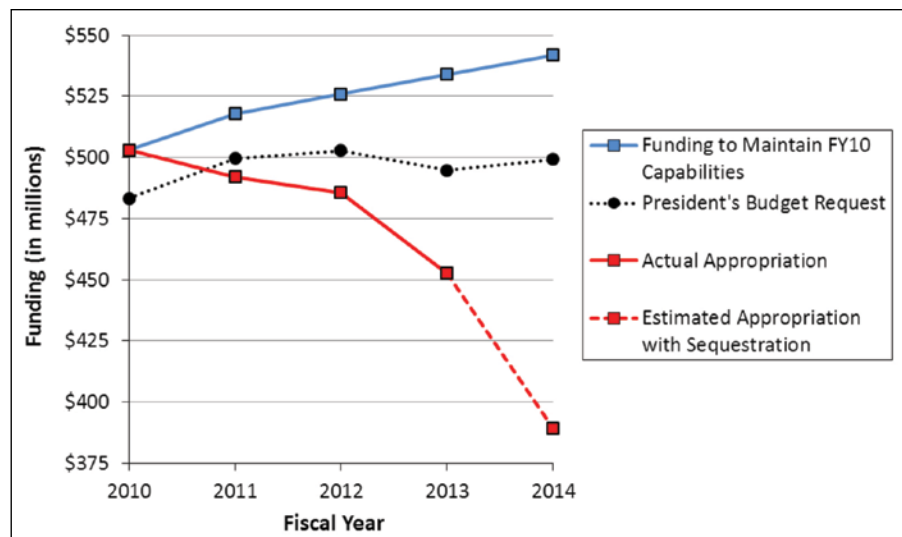


Figure 3. At its highest funding level in FY 2010, the Refuge System received only \$503 million — little more than half the amount that CARE estimates is needed to carry out the System's mission. Since that time, congressional appropriations have not only failed to account for rising costs, but have been steadily backsliding.

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*To the nearly 43,000 volunteers who contribute almost
1.6 million hours annually and add 22% more capacity
to what the Refuge System would otherwise have,*

*To the more than 200 Friends organizations
around the country that support their local national
wildlife refuges and the entire Refuge System,*

*To the approximately 3,500 Refuge System
staff who make it all possible,*

CARE thanks you.



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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