



# SHORTCHANGING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE

A REPORT ON THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM FUNDING CRISIS



## CARE

Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement

# CONSERVATION ON A SHOESTRING

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ight now, in every U.S. state and territory, our unique wildlife heritage is being shortchanged to the tune of \$2 billion. The National Wildlife Refuge System, America's wildlife trust — a legacy begun by Teddy Roosevelt nearly 100 years ago — faces a crippling conservation deficit. At the current rate of spending, the Refuge System funding backlog will never be eliminated. The result is that refuges everywhere are struggling to meet even their most basic wildlife conservation objectives.

**The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a coalition of twenty conservation and recreation organizations dedicated to ensuring that the Refuge System has funding, calls on President Bush and the Congress to increase the Refuge System budget from \$300 million to \$700 million annually in FY2003 to save Roosevelt's legacy for the benefit of future generations.**

The National Wildlife Refuge System, comprised of 538 refuges and 94 million acres of land and water in all states and U.S. territories, has been set aside by the American public to conserve wildlife. Home to thousands of species of birds, mammals, amphibians, fish, insects and plant species, and visited by more than 36 million Americans each year, the Refuge System is critical to conserving our diverse natural heritage. We have built and invested in this national treasure for close to a century, only to have it fall into disrepair for lack of adequate funding on the eve of its centennial in 2003.

As a result of shortchanging this remarkable national treasure:

- Eight million acres of habitat, including that which is important to recovering threatened and endangered species, are being destroyed by invasive exotic plants and animals.
- Hundreds of thousands of migrating waterfowl are being greeted by a parched earth rather than lush wetlands.
- Refuge staff are left to make important decisions about managing and recovering wildlife without sufficient scientific data.
- Thousands of students are being turned away from environmental education opportunities because of inadequate staffing or classroom space.
- Millions of Americans are failing to take advantage of outstanding recreational opportunities on national wildlife refuges due to the lack of signs, maps and educational materials.
- Thousands of buildings, roads, trails and other facilities vital to taking care of wildlife and accommodating visitors are left in a degraded and oftentimes dangerous condition.

In spite of its critical role in conserving America's wildlife over the last 100 years, the Refuge System is in danger of being unable to do the same in the next 100 years. Severe funding and staffing shortfalls have led to the decline of refuge habitats and wildlife populations, aging facilities and infrastructure and the cancellation of popular wildlife-oriented public use programs. Many refuges have no staff, no visitor facilities, no signs or brochures and no way to care for the wildlife they are entrusted by the public to protect.



## REFUGE SYSTEM BUDGET: POCKET CHANGE

The National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, currently operates on less than \$300 million each year and has a per-acre budget that is 1/5th the size of its sister federal land management agency, the National Park Service.

The facility and equipment repair backlog alone is \$800 million and rising.

Based on extensive data collection and analysis, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) believes that the Refuge System's budget should be more than doubled from \$300 million to \$700 million annually to meet minimum conservation and public use needs, and to begin reducing the massive funding backlog.

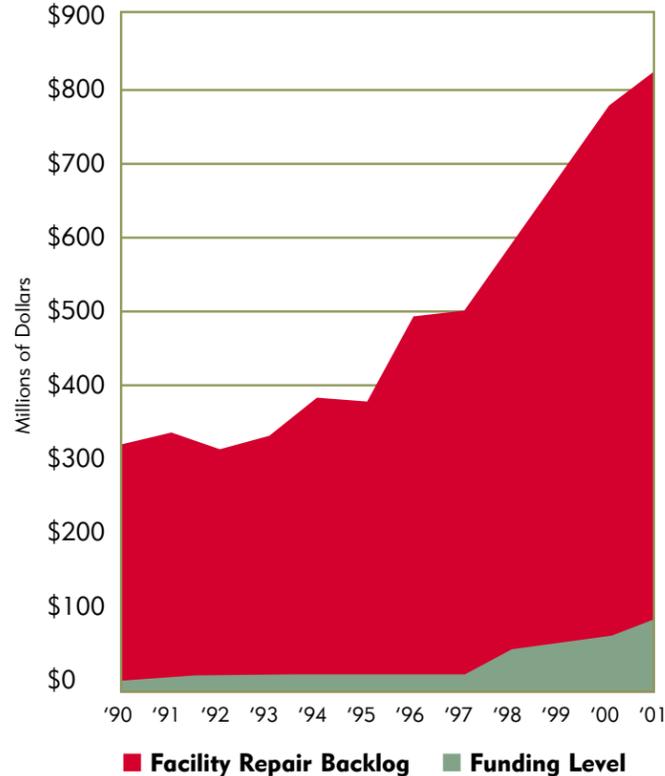
Produced by CARE, this report seeks to highlight how the Refuge System is being shortchanged by spotlighting 12 diverse refuges and their far-from-unique funding threats.

### ANNUAL FUNDING PER ACRE FOR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES AND NATIONAL PARKS



### NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

#### Facility Repair Needs

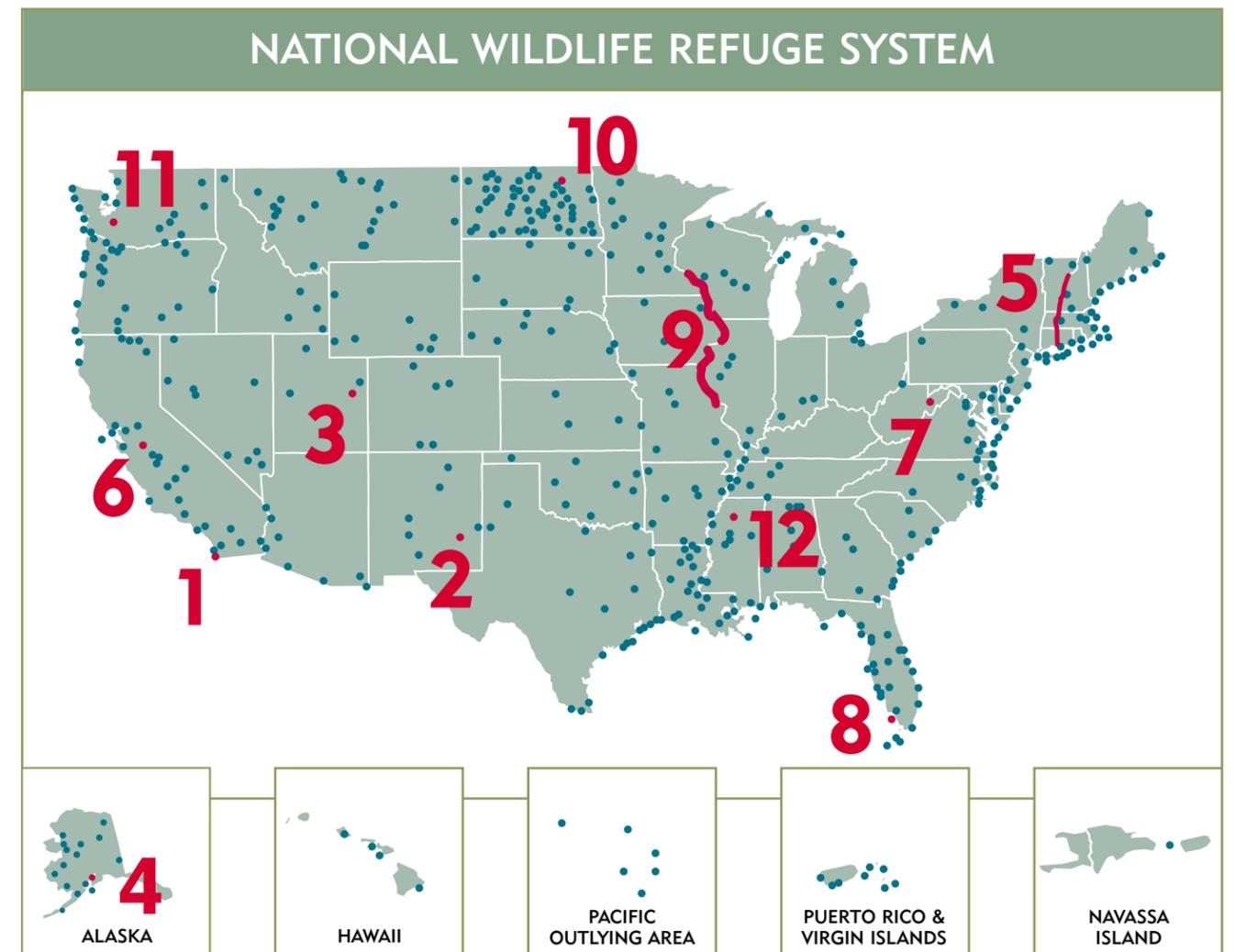


## A DOZEN GOOD REASONS TO FULLY FUND THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Invasive exotic species, inadequate water supplies, aging facilities and equipment and other problems plague many refuges, making it nearly impossible to meet their conservation mission. Management programs to help recover endangered species, restore damaged habitats and address threats to water quality and other problems are

left unaccomplished on an alarming number of refuges. Most refuges are operated with minimal staffing and approximately 200 refuges have no on-site staff at all. Meanwhile, refuge visitation is growing at such a rate that installation and maintenance of visitor facilities and services can no longer be considered a luxury.

The 12 refuges highlighted in this report illustrate the ways in which all national wildlife refuges throughout the country are unable to conserve wildlife or address increasing public demands as a result of the funding crisis.



# SHORTCHANGING WILDLIFE

## 1 SAN DIEGO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX CALIFORNIA



Throughout the nation, refuge staff is left to manage and recover threatened and endangered animals and plants with insufficient scientific research, personnel and

funds. Without sufficient funding for wildlife biologists and research both in the field and in the laboratory, many refuges are managing plant and animal populations with incomplete information.

Nowhere is this more critical than at the San Diego Refuge Complex which has more threatened and endangered species than anywhere else in the continental United States. These small, urban

refuges were set aside specifically to stem the decline of numerous endangered species including the Light-footed Clapper Rail, California Least Tern, Least Bell's Vireo, California Gnatcatcher and Arroyo Toad. Without funding for biologists to monitor and study these species, and to restore and properly manage hundreds of acres of wetland, riparian and upland habitats, these species face an uncertain future.

## 3 BEAR RIVER MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE UTAH



Many refuges are located on major waterfowl flyways and are vital to keeping populations of waterfowl and shorebirds healthy. Frequently, this requires intense management of wetlands. Without the necessary funding waterfowl and other wildlife suffer.

At Bear River, major flooding in the 1980s and 90s washed out several water control structures, robbing millions of birds of 70,000 acres of important

habitat. Located along the edge of both the Central and the Pacific Flyways, Bear River provides important breeding, resting and feeding habitat for more than 200 migratory bird species such as American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Western Grebe, Prairie Falcon and Bald Eagle, as well as hundreds of thousands of waterfowl. Unless funding is provided to restore dikes and water control structures, millions of migratory birds will be put at risk.

## 2 BITTER LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE NEW MEXICO

Invasive exotic plants and animals have infested eight million Refuge System acres at a cost of \$120 million annually. These silent intruders threaten wildlife and habitat without regard to refuge or community boundaries. With adequate funding, national wildlife refuges can mount an assault against invasives, potentially saving local communities, landowners and taxpayers millions of dollars.

At Bitter Lake NWR, exotic salt cedar trees have invaded 1,000

acres of critical habitat including Bitter Creek, one of the most sensitive habitats on the refuge and home to a variety of state and federally-listed fish species such as Pecos Gambusia and Greenthroat Darter, in addition to the Arid Land Ribbon Snake, Least Shrew and the newly-listed Pecos Puzzle Sunflower. Several resident invertebrate species – Koster's Springsnail, Roswell Springsnail, Pecos Assiminea and Noel's Amphipod – are not found anywhere else in the world except at Bitter Lake.



**KENAI NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE REFUGE  
ALASKA**

Across the country, even in remote Alaska, water quality problems are on the rise on national wildlife refuges. Many refuges are situated next to growing communities or agriculture lands and are indicators of

the quality of water in these areas.

Unless funding is received for preventative water quality monitoring in the Kenai NWR, refuge staff may not know there is a problem until it is too late. The Kenai Peninsula is one of the fastest-growing areas in the state, with the population expanding 22 percent between 1990 and 2000, bringing increased water quality threats such as residential and industrial development, and more public use.

Under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, one of the purposes for Alaska

refuges is to protect water quality and quantity, yet not enough funding is available to conduct ongoing water quality monitoring studies along the Kenai River corridor, which provides important salmon habitat. The salmon not only give sustenance for Bald Eagles and Brown Bears, but they also contribute significant economic and recreational benefits to local communities. These water quality studies would support a Kenai Peninsula-wide initiative that involves more than 27 cooperators, including local governments, other Federal and state agencies, private conservation groups, and private property owners.



**SILVIO CONTE  
NATIONAL FISH &  
WILDLIFE REFUGE  
VT, NH, MA, CT**

In addressing increasingly complex habitat conservation issues across state and refuge boundaries, many national wildlife refuges provide leadership and promote cooperation with wildlife conservation partners such as local communities, state agencies, private organizations and others.

Located in the 7.2 million-acre Connecticut River watershed, the Silvio Conte Refuge was established to protect and restore areas infested by numerous invasive plants, such as the



water chestnut, that are threatening a number of federal and state-listed endangered plants, and are displacing other native plants and wildlife. Lack of funding to support the refuge's war on exotic species could mean leaving many of these harmful plants unchecked not only on refuge lands, but throughout New England.

Led by Silvio Conte staff, the New England Invasive Plant Group, comprised of 45 federal and state agencies and other



organizations, has developed a strategy designed to protect rare plants and keep new invasive plant species out of the region. Yet the refuge lacks the funding needed for continued staff support and preemptive invasive control projects such as those involving a highly successful volunteer program.

**SACRAMENTO  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE  
REFUGE COMPLEX  
CALIFORNIA**



Refuges everywhere are pitched in a constant battle to secure water, the lifeblood for many wildlife species.

In California's Central Valley, each year brings uncertainty about whether 1,200 acres of wetlands and associated riparian habitats in the Llano Seco Unit will have water to support over 500,000 waterfowl during peak migration, or whether 80 acres in the Rennick Unit will be flooded to provide critical sanctuary for over 3,000 nesting pairs of white-

faced ibis and other colonial nesting species. Although the primary purpose of these refuges is to conserve ecosystems for threatened and endangered species, migrating birds, waterfowl, fish and plants, the refuge must often cannibalize other projects to help meet basic water use needs. Without funding for adequate water supplies, these refuges are unable to support migratory waterfowl and birds like the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, as well as other state and Federal-listed endangered species.

# SHORTCHANGING PEOPLE

## CANAAN VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEST VIRGINIA

Each year, 30,000 volunteers donate more than a million hours of their time to refuges across the country, totaling more than \$13 million in services that help address the system's massive funding shortfalls. Many times, the facilities and equipment that volunteers and staff use are in such severely degraded condition that they pose a safety hazard.

At Canaan Valley NWR, volunteer members are literally risking their lives to serve the refuge. With an old, deteriorated roof and exterior siding, inadequate insulation, rotted decks and stairways, and no smoke detectors, the building that acts as their headquarters is visibly falling apart. The structure needs electrical wiring work, plumbing repairs and new windows and doors. Until repairs required by building codes are made, hard working volunteers cannot be guaranteed safe exit in the event of fire.



## J.N. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FLORIDA



In 2000, the National Wildlife Refuge System hosted more than 36 million visitors, making it a major public as well as wildlife destination. Nevertheless, few refuges are equipped to provide even the most rudimentary visitor services, and even the best equipped now face a crisis. When services at many refuges are lacking, the local economy, as well as the wildlife and habitat, suffers.

This year at "Ding" Darling NWR, more than 700,000 visitors are expected to visit the refuge's 11,300-square foot Center for Education, which opened in October 1999. But one day soon visitors may arrive to find the center's door bolted

shut. The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, a nonprofit organization that supports the educational endeavors of the refuge, raised three million dollars in private funds for construction of the center but the refuge has never received federal funding to cover operating expenses for the center.

In order to keep the center operating, the refuge has had to leave at least three staff positions vacant, and will be forced to close the center from Friday through Sunday each week, leave more positions vacant, and/or refrain from repairing buildings and equipment as needed if necessary funding isn't provided.

UPPER MISSISSIPPI  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE  
& FISH REFUGE  
IA, IL, MN, WI



For millions of first-time refuge visitors, introduction to wildlife, habitat and recreation opportunities is a simple brochure. While not as interactive as a high-tech exhibit, or as informative as trained refuge personnel, a brochure contains at least the basics – things like a map of refuge trails, recommended places for viewing wildlife, fishing hotspots, hunting boundaries and guidelines and a species checklist.

But at many refuges, like the Upper Mississippi Refuge, visitors are greeted by confusion: Wildlife and plants they see go without name or description, the size of the refuge, its purpose and history and what activities take place there are a complete mystery.



While brochures are the bare minimum requirement for educating communities, the Upper Mississippi Refuge is so poorly funded it is unable to reprint a popular series of fishing and hunting site maps. Recently they were lucky enough to scrape together enough money for a one-time run of general brochures using funding from a vacated staff position.

As with many other refuges, one day Upper Mississippi would like to have visitor services employees to meet the public, and an interpretive center with displays to educate thousands of school children. But in the meantime, the refuge will continue underserving millions of people.

SULLYS HILL  
NATIONAL GAME  
PRESERVE  
NORTH DAKOTA



While most refuge staff have their hands full with day-to-day management of wildlife conservation and public use programs, they are often required to act as law enforcement officers. Protecting wildlife from environmental hazards and safeguarding critical habitat for endangered species are among the most important functions of law enforcement staff. In addition, they enforce federal migratory game bird hunting regulations and work with states to protect other game species from poaching.

herds and other native animals, use its environmental education facilities, walk the nature trails, drive the auto tour route, or see a show at the amphitheater. Remarkably, the refuge has no law enforcement staff to address a range of inevitable safety issues including visitor drug possession, speeding, fee compliance, vandalism and auto accidents. In fact, there is only one full-time employee at the refuge who must add law enforcement to an already full complement of responsibilities, not the least of which is attending to the wildlife central to the purpose of the refuge. Without adequate staffing, Sullys Hill, established by Teddy Roosevelt in 1904, will be unable to preserve its unusual natural and historical character over the long-term.

Each year, more than 40,000 visitors descend upon Sullys Hill NGP to gaze at Bison and Elk



NISQUALLY  
11  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE  
REFUGE  
WASHINGTON



As urban development moves closer to many national wildlife refuges, there is greater public demand than ever for environmental education opportunities. Last year, more than nine million students visited refuges to learn about wildlife.

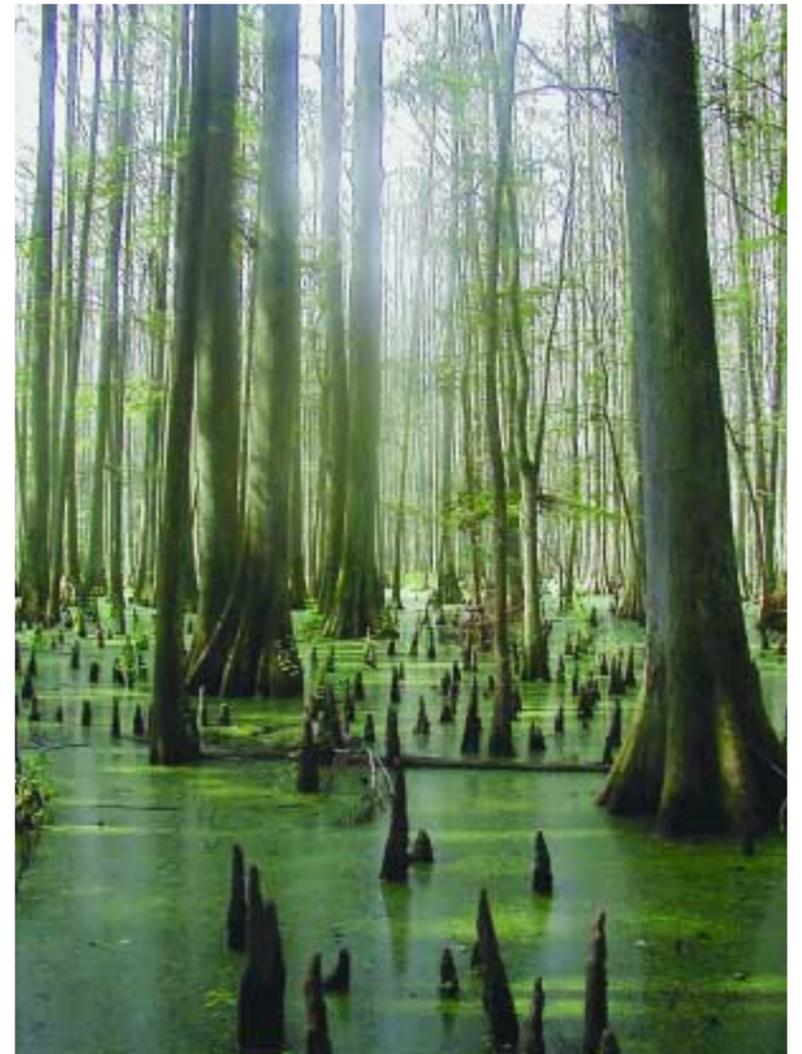
As a gateway refuge to a large metropolitan area, Nisqually NWR is an important envoy for the Refuge System by helping to educate children and adults, alike, about the vital role refuges play in conserving America's unique natural heritage. Environmental education has been designated as one of the refuge's "highest and best uses," with its potential to attract a tremendous diversity of students that might not otherwise learn

about natural resources. The refuge's program involves up to 6,000 students annually – though the potential exists to reach more than three times that number.

But in 2001, the Nisqually Earthquake permanently closed an already unsafe, dilapidated barn used for education on the refuge, and forced the program into a vacated trailer next to the maintenance yard. Without adequate facilities, the outstanding potential this refuge offers to educate large numbers of students is lost. Funds to build and operate a quality education facility at Nisqually will ensure that tens of thousands of children in years ahead will have a premier opportunity to understand and appreciate our natural world.



NOXUBEE  
12  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE  
REFUGE  
MISSISSIPPI



Like many refuges in the Refuge System, flammable and potentially explosive materials must be stored in Noxubee's facilities. Aging buildings and equipment on national wildlife refuges and increasingly necessary safety code requirements have resulted in refuges diverting staff time and funds away from wildlife conservation.

Remarkably, Noxubee's oil and paint storage building is in violation of OSHA\* regulations, putting refuge employee safety at risk. Separated by just 20 feet from the headquarters building, the storage facility lacks explosion proof lighting or spill containment yet contains a variety of petroleum-based products including lubricants and flammable liquids. By law, these highly flammable materials must be stored in a specially designed building, located more than 50 feet away from any inhabited building. Funding is needed to purchase a new pre-assembled building equipped with the appropriate ventilation equipment and spill containment features.



\*Occupational Safety and Health Act



For more information on how you can help the National Wildlife Refuge System or to obtain a copy of CARE's Refuge System funding plan: *Restoring America's Wildlife Legacy*, please contact CARE, c/o Wildlife Management Institute, 1101 14th St. NW, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 371-1808.

## CARE Groups

American Birding Association

American Fisheries Society

American Sportfishing Association

Assateague Coastal Trust

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Defenders of Wildlife

Ducks Unlimited

International 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 Wildlife Society

The Wilderness Society

Trout Unlimited

Wildlife Forever

Wildlife Legislative Fund of America

Wildlife Management Institute

# CARE

**Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement**

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*Photos by: Pamela Abeles, Ed Britton, Evan Hirsche, Larry Knadle, Karen Lindsey, Will Meeks, David Pitkin, Debra Reynolds, Phil Roullard, Richard E. Smith, and Ken Sturm*