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[List of CARE organizational contacts](#)

National Wildlife Refuges More Than Pay for Themselves

Coalition calls on Congress to fund the Refuge System after report shows the economic benefit to the American public is almost five times the cost to run them

Washington, DC –A new report released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), *Banking On Nature: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*, shows that for every \$1 appropriated by Congress to run the Refuge System, nearly \$5 is generated in local economies. Despite the fact that the Refuge System has seen a significant increase in visitation, it has faced severe funding cuts. As Congress considers the budget bills for Fiscal Year 2014, the [Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement](#) (CARE) calls upon the House of Representatives and the Senate to fund the Refuge System at \$499 million this year.

“As hunters, anglers, bird and wildlife watchers, scientists, conservationists and concerned Americans, we know the National Wildlife Refuge System has always been a worthy investment,” said David Houghton, President of the [National Wildlife Refuge Association](#) and Chair of the CARE coalition. “Now the data proves it – refuges provide an enormous bang for the American buck.”

The report, spanning 2006-2011, shows that even during the worst recession since the Great Depression, the overall return on investment increased substantially for the Refuge System as well as every other major indicator. From 2006-2011 the Refuge System saw the following annual increases:

- 20% increase in sales and economic output to \$2.4 billion;
- 30% increase in visitors to 46.5 million;
- 22% increase in return on investment for every \$1 appropriated to \$4.87;
- 23% increase in jobs to 35,000.

“At the height of our economic downturn, Americans recreated on our national wildlife refuges more than ever before and that increase helped many businesses weather the economic storm,” said Houghton. “These public lands are increasingly important to hotel operators, restaurant owners, hunting guides and the countless other small businesses that depend on a vibrant Refuge System for their livelihood.”

CARE estimates that the Refuge System needs at least \$900 million in annual operations and maintenance funding to properly administer its 561 refuges and 38 wetland management districts spanning over 150 million acres. At its highest funding level in FY 2010, the Refuge 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. With its annual budget having declined by \$50 million over the past three years, the Refuge System cannot afford to lose another penny.

The Refuge System always did “more with less” but now, after three years of budget cuts, it has to do “less with less”. Everything from acres of invasive species being treated to volunteer hours were down substantially in FY13 and further budget cuts will simply make many operations impossible.

“We hope Congress looks at this report and sees what a great investment we have in the National Wildlife Refuge System,” continued Houghton. “Let our decision makers retain funding for the programs like refuges that grow our economy.”

- REPORT HIGHLIGHTS -

- Wildlife refuges generate more than \$32.3 billion each year in natural goods and services, such as buffering coastal communities from storm surges, filtering pollutants from municipal water supplies, and pollinating food crops.
- The more than 46 million hunters, anglers, wildlife watchers, photographers and other recreationists who visit wildlife refuges generate \$2.4 billion in sales to local communities each year.
- Visitors to refuges generated \$342.9 million in local, county, state and federal tax revenue.
- 77% of refuge spending was done by visitors from *outside* the local area.

- QUOTES FROM CARE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS -

[American Sportsfishing Association](#)

“Americans generally don't think of fish and wildlife recreation as an industry but it is. Whether anglers and hunters spending their money to pursue their respective sports or funds spent on wildlife viewing, fish and wildlife recreation is big business and for many communities near a national wildlife refuge it may be most of their business. The *Banking on Nature* report demonstrates the importance that fish and wildlife recreation makes to the economy. It needs to be taken seriously.”

— Gordon Robertson, Vice President

[Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies](#)

“National Wildlife Refuges are a mainstay of a system of state, federal, local and private lands that support our nation’s rich fish and wildlife heritage. They offer hunters, anglers, photographers and other wildlife enthusiasts a unique opportunity to connect with nature and uphold timeless traditions. The *Banking on Nature* report provides further economic proof of the value of wild places that accompanies their ecological worth.”

—Ron Regan, Executive Director

[Defenders of Wildlife](#)

"They are called 'refuges' for a reason. In this challenging economic environment, people depend even more than usual on opportunities to escape the worries of everyday living by engaging with nature and with wildlife. Those opportunities are provided by our country's National Wildlife Refuge System. Our investments in refuges are being returned fivefold to local economies, right where the money is needed most. It's simple math - Congress should increase funding for America's Refuge System for the benefit of people and wildlife."

—Jamie Rappaport Clark, President

Ducks Unlimited

"Every state has at least one national wildlife refuge which provides unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. This report further strengthens what sportsmen and the conservation communities already know: investment in our natural resources provide a valuable return in our nation's economy."

— Paul Schmidt, Chief Conservation Officer

Izaak Walton League of America

"Refuges nationwide provide some of the best hunting and fishing for American sportsmen and women and the *Banking on Nature* report shows once again that taxpayers and local communities receive tremendous economic benefits when we conserve natural resources and promote sustainable outdoor recreation."

—Scott Kovarovics, Executive Director

Marine Conservation Institute

"The refuge portions of the four Pacific marine national monuments constitute one-third of the refuge system; yet, funding to safeguard these national treasures has not followed suit. The Pacific marine national monuments were designated to protect invaluable coral reefs, essential habitat for an estimated 14 million seabirds, and many threatened and endangered marine species. But illegal trespass and illegal fishing have damaged coral reefs and other marine wildlife from vessel groundings and introduction of invasive species within the monuments. Continued budget cuts to the System will hurt current efforts to restore this damage and protect these areas effectively."

— Lance Morgan, Ph.D., President

National Rifle Association

"Hunters have been the backbone of the National Wildlife Refuge System beginning in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge. Since the 1930s, the purchase of Duck Stamps for waterfowl hunting and collecting have contributed substantially to the acquisition of important lands for the Refuge System. This citizen-based revenue for land acquisition is unparalleled in the world. The NRA supports CARE's efforts to protect the hunters' investment in our Refuge System and to strengthen public support for wildlife conservation through the economic benefits that wildlife-dependent recreation brings to local communities."

—Susan Recce, Director of Conservation, Wildlife and Natural Resources

National Wildlife Federation

"There's nothing more fiscally conservative than taking care of our vital assets and investing in the future. Despite years of underfunding, these important natural areas continue to draw people who want to connect to wildlife and the outdoors. They produce great economic benefits for neighboring communities. How long can that continue if Congress keeps shortchanging the refuge system?"

— Larry Schweiger, President & CEO

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

"The National Wildlife Refuge System provides outstanding hunting and angling opportunities for America's sportsmen and women. They are drawn from across the nation to these public lands because they provide quality habitat and opportunities to hunt, fish, and enjoy nature. The new *Banking on Nature* report demonstrates once again that local communities near refuges benefit a great deal from federal investment in the refuge system, and stands as further evidence that Congress should support increased refuge funding to ensure that these benefits are sustained."

— Whit Fosburgh, President and CEO

The Nature Conservancy

“The *Banking on Nature* report could not have come at a better time as it reinforces the tremendous value of nature as found in our National Wildlife Refuge System. National Wildlife Refuges provide innumerable public benefits for the nation – fish and wildlife habitat, special places for wildlife recreation and stimulation for local economies. The Refuge System also provides \$32.3 billion in goods and services such as natural defenses from storm surges and flooding for the thousands of communities nestled around refuge areas. Strong annual funding for the Refuge System is imperative to ensure the numerous public benefits provided by this system are sustained into the future.”

— Kameran Onley, Acting Director of Government Relations

The Wilderness Society

“Our national wildlife refuges are treasures that protect important wildlife habitat, bolster the economies of local communities, and provide places for Americans to learn about and experience nature in the wild. Continuing to cut critical funding for refuges hurts these iconic lands and waters and those who depend on them while shortchanging the American taxpayer who has invested in building this vibrant National Wildlife Refuge System.”

— Jamie Williams, President

The Wildlife Society

"Refuges are essential for the conservation of our nation’s wildlife and their habitats, and they also provide a natural laboratory for wildlife biologists who are engaged in field research efforts. As the *Banking on Nature* report shows, they also provide important economic benefits for local communities. In light of this report, The Wildlife Society encourages Congress to provide the necessary investments in the Refuge System to allow it to continue to provide these, and myriad other, benefits."

— Ken Williams, Executive Director

Wildlife Management Institute

"Conservation is good business and an essential investment in the future of our nation. The *Banking On Nature* report details the powerful economic impact of the National Wildlife Refuge System. True patriots recognize that additional funding is needed to protect our natural heritage and to enhance the economy it supports."

— Steve Williams, President

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) is a national coalition of 23 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations representing a constituency numbering more than 16 million Americans. CARE has been working since 1995 to educate Congress, the Administration, and the public about America’s magnificent National Wildlife Refuge.

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