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Contact: Desiree Sorenson-Groves, 202-290-5593 or dgroves@refugeassociation.org

Soldiers, Cowboys, and Pilots: Report Finds that National Wildlife Refuges Deliver Surprising Benefits to People

Coalition Warns that Slashing Funds Will Be Rude Awakening for Americans

Washington, DC – As Congress wrestles with next year's budget, the [Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement](#) (CARE) warns that proposed funding cuts to the nation's federal conservation lands will have big impacts for more than just wildlife. While the National Wildlife Refuge System is charged with conserving wildlife and providing recreational opportunities to the public, a report released by CARE today describes some of the unlikely benefits that the nation's 561 wildlife refuges add to the health, safety, and economic well-being of the American people. The broad coalition is urging Congress to provide the Refuge System with sufficient funds to allow these benefits to continue.

Among the most surprising benefits described in [America's Wildlife Refuges 2013: Delivering the Unexpected](#):

- Eighty percent of the nation's 561 wildlife refuges provide natural buffers against urbanization and other development pressures, thereby preserving undeveloped lands and airspace that enable military units to execute their vital training missions.
- Conservation easements on nearly 3.5 million acres of refuge lands allow many private landowners to keep their ranches and farms in production.
- Henderson Airfield on the remote Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, one of only a handful of emergency landing sites available for transpacific flights, has been estimated to save commercial airlines at least \$28 million annually and, in 2012 alone, was used by nearly 50 private and military flights for emergency or refueling purposes.
- 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.
- Refuge employees often double as first responders to natural disasters and other emergencies in their local communities.
- The more than 47 million hunters, anglers, wildlife watchers, and other recreationists who visit wildlife refuges generate between \$2.1 and \$4.2 billion in sales to local communities each year.

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According to the report, the [National Wildlife Refuge System](#) needs at least \$900 million annually to carry out its conservation mission, but at its highest funding level in FY 2010, it received only \$503 million. Since then, Congress has not only failed to provide the \$8 million annual increase needed to cover rising costs, but has steadily cut the Refuge System's budget. With Congress poised to slash federal spending, the System could see its funding drop to \$389 million in FY 2014 – a 23% cut from FY 2010 that would leave an average of only \$2.59 to manage each of its 150 million acres.

“The National Wildlife Refuge System continues to remind us that conserving nature is essential to our own well-being,” said David Houghton, president of the [National Wildlife Refuge Association](#) and chair of the CARE coalition. “If we ignore those reminders and fail to invest in our national wildlife refuges, everyone loses.”

The report calls on Congress to provide at least \$499 million for the System's operations and maintenance accounts to prevent wildlife refuges from reaching a tipping point that would not only eliminate many of the benefits they provide to the public, but also prevent them from carrying out even the most basic functions central to their conservation mission. CARE is also urging lawmakers to pass legislation authorizing the U.S. Postal Service to issue a special “semipostal” stamp, which would offer the public a voluntary way to support national wildlife refuges. Offered at a slightly higher rate than first-class stamps, proceeds from the semipostal stamp would be used to complete refuge projects that have been backlogged due to chronic funding shortfalls.

For CARE's full report and additional information, please visit www.FundRefuges.org.

Quotes from CARE's member organizations are available at www.FundRefuges.org/care/2013-CARE-Member-Quotes.pdf.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) is a national coalition of 22 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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