



America's Wildlife Refuges 2013: *Delivering the Unexpected*

FAST FACTS

About the National Wildlife Refuge System

- The Refuge System is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior.
- The Refuge System's mission is "to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans." It is the only land and water system in the world with a mission that prioritizes wildlife conservation over all other activities.
- President Theodore Roosevelt established the first national wildlife refuge on Florida's Pelican Island in 1903.
- The Refuge System currently includes 561 refuges and 38 wetland management districts, which encompass approximately 150 million acres of land and water. Spanning 12 time zones from the Virgin Islands to Guam, the Refuge System protects a broad range of habitat types, including tundra, desert, forest, grassland, wetland, and coral reef. Refuges can be found in all 50 states and within an hour's drive of most major U.S. cities.
- Refuges protect more than 700 bird, 220 mammal, 250 reptile and amphibian, and 1,000 fish species, in addition to countless invertebrates and plants. Among those, 280 species are federally threatened or endangered.
- Refuges attracted more than 47 million visitors in FY 2012, an increase of more than 25% since FY 2005.
- The Refuge System provides outstanding recreational opportunities for sportsmen, wildlife watchers, photographers, and students. In total, 426 refuges are open to public use, 329 are open to hunting, and 271 are open to fishing.

Benefits to the American People

- In total, 447 refuges, or about 80 percent of the System's units, 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. Encroachment on military installations and ranges due to urbanization and incompatible development impedes the military's ability to execute vital training operations across the U.S.
- Refuges provide more than \$32.3 billion in natural goods and services each year – a return of more than \$65 for every \$1 appropriated by Congress. These services include buffering coastal communities from storm surges, absorbing floodwaters, stabilizing soils, filtering pollutants from municipal water supplies, pollinating food crops, and controlling pest populations.
- Conservation easements on nearly 3.5 million acres of refuge lands allow many private landowners to keep their ranches and farms in production. Without the easements, high inheritance taxes can force their heirs to sell the land for development.

- The Refuge System frequently conducts controlled burns that not only improve wildlife habitat, but also reduce hazardous fuel loads that can put communities at greater risk from devastating and costly wildfires.
- Federal regulations require twin-engine transoceanic flights to stay within 180 minutes of an airport, and Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge's Henderson Airfield is one of only a handful of emergency landing sites available for transpacific flights. In 2012 alone, nearly 50 military and private flights used Henderson Airfield for emergency landing or refueling purposes.
- Recreation on America's refuges is estimated to generate between \$2.1 and \$4.2 billion in annual sales and support approximately 34,000 U.S. jobs in local communities alone.
- Refuge employees often double as first responders in their local communities following natural disasters, during medical emergencies, and after accidents.
- Each year, approximately 769,000 students and teachers visit national wildlife refuges, where educational programs introduce youth to the natural world.

Funding Needs

- CARE estimates that the Refuge System needs at least \$900 million in annual operations and maintenance funding to properly administer its 150 million acres; however, its highest funding level in FY 2010 reached only \$503 million – an average of only \$3.36 to manage each of the System's 150 million acres.
- Due to rising costs, the Refuge System would need \$542 million in FY 2014 simply to carry out the same amount of work that was performed in FY 2010. Proposed budget cuts by House appropriators could leave the Refuge System with only \$389 million in FY 2014 – 30% less than what it would need to maintain its management capabilities from FY 2010.
- Years of funding shortages have left the Refuge System with a nearly \$3.1 billion backlog of deferred operations and maintenance needs that would improve wildlife habitat, repair visitor facilities, and ultimately help our refuges continue to benefit the American people.
- Robust operations and maintenance funding allows the Refuge System to perform a broad range of activities that are vital to its mission, such as removing invasive species, restoring degraded habitats, educating students, offering hunting and fishing programs, maintaining visitor facilities, repairing equipment, and providing law enforcement.
- Refuge Friends groups and volunteers contribute nearly 1.6 million hours annually, adding 22% more capacity to the Refuge System than it would otherwise have. Without adequate funding, refuge staff will be unable to organize, train, and utilize its force of nearly 43,000 volunteers.

CARE's Recommendations

- CARE recommends that Congress provide the Refuge System at least \$499 million in operations and maintenance funding for FY 2014. This funding level would begin to bridge the widening gap between what the System needs and what Congress provides.
- CARE recommends that Congress pass legislation authorizing the U.S. Postal Service to issue a special "semipostal" stamp, which would provide 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 fund refuge projects that have been backlogged due to chronic funding shortfalls.

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