



National
Wildlife Refuge
Association

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For Release July 20, 2006

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Wildlife Refuge Funding Cuts Hitting Home

At Congressional Hearing, NWRA Details Growing Refuge Funding Crisis

Washington, D.C. – At a hearing today in the U.S. House of Representatives, the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) detailed the mounting budget crisis facing national wildlife refuges (NWR) and urged Congress to take swift action to address funding shortfalls for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Noting the escalating operations and maintenance (O&M) backlog of \$3.1 billion, the Refuge Association voiced concern about a declining budget that hurts wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) employees and volunteers working for the Refuge System, as well as the more than 40 million Americans who visit and appreciate national wildlife refuges each year.

“The Refuge System already suffers from a crippling \$3 billion backlog in top priority operations and maintenance needs. Continued funding cuts for refuges harm our ability as a nation to conserve America’s unique wildlife heritage,” said Michael Woodbridge, Director of Government Affairs for the NWRA. “Without modest funding increases from Congress, refuges will continue closing their gates, and the public will be the ones who pay the price.”

The president’s fiscal year 2007 budget requests \$381.7 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System’s O&M account, approximately \$11 million less than last year’s request. Compounding the \$11 million cut, the Refuge System requires an annual budget increase of approximately \$16 million just to stay level due to increased costs for salaries, energy and other needs. The House of Representatives passed a \$388.7 million budget for refuges in May. While more than the president’s request, this funding level still falls far short of covering fixed cost increases for the Refuge System. Refuges are currently managed at a cost of less than \$4.00 per acre. By comparison, the National Park System receives more than \$20.00 per acre for management.

Refuges across the country enjoy strong support from eager and enthusiastic volunteers, many of whom belong to the approximately 250 volunteer refuge “Friends” groups, located across the country, that are dedicated to supporting their local refuge and the Refuge System. In fact, the Refuge System depends on these volunteers for more than 20 percent of the refuge workload. However, without FWS staff to work with Friends organizations, volunteers and supporters will be turned away. Volunteers are already giving 110 percent—without adequate funding, this tremendous contribution will be lost.

Established in 1975, the National Wildlife Refuge Association is the only organization dedicated exclusively to protecting, enhancing and expanding the National Wildlife Refuge System, lands and waters set aside by the American people to protect our country's diverse wildlife heritage. A national membership organization, the organization benefits from the support of U.S. Fish and Wildlife professionals, more than 115 refuge “Friends” group affiliates, and thousands of individual members in all states. For more information, visit www.refugenet.org.

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