

**CARE**  
**COOPERATIVE ALLIANCE FOR REFUGE ENHANCEMENT**  
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American Birding Association  
American Fisheries Society  
American Sportfishing Association  
Assateague Coastal Trust  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Ducks Unlimited  
Intl. Assoc. 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 Wilderness Society  
The Wildlife Legislative Fund of America  
The Wildlife Society  
Trout Unlimited  
Wildlife Forever  
Wildlife Management Institute

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 2:00 PM, NOVEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup>, 2001**

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**FUNDING CRISIS THREATENS NATION'S WILDLIFE REFUGES**

Conservationists, Including Sportsmen, Bird Watchers, Wildlife Professionals and Environmentalists Say Federal Government Shortchanges "One of our Most Vital National Resources"

WASHINGTON, D.C.: A broad based coalition of conservationists and outdoor recreation enthusiasts released a report today, called *Shortchanging America's Wildlife*, that details the funding crisis threatening America's most important wildlife conservation resource, the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), which includes twenty conservation and recreation organizations ranging from the National Rifle Association to Defenders of Wildlife, warned that the Refuge System faces a nearly \$2 billion funding deficit, endangering wildlife and denying Americans educational and recreational use of these natural places.

*Shortchanging America's Wildlife* calls on President Bush and Congress to address America's need to connect with nature by more than doubling the budget of the National Wildlife Refuge System to \$700 million annually, beginning in FY2003, the Refuge System centennial. National wildlife refuges have never been more at risk. At a time when the nation is under threat and the public is turning to natural places for solace and recreation, we must safeguard one of our most important national assets and protect a legacy created by President Theodore Roosevelt nearly 100 years ago for the benefit of future generations.

The National Wildlife Refuge System has played a central role in saving endangered species like the Bald Eagle, protecting open space, and providing more than 36 million Americans annually an opportunity to experience our country's natural wonders. But without immediate attention from the Administration and Congress, 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 declining refuge habitats and wildlife populations, aging facilities and infrastructure and the cancellation of popular wildlife-oriented public use programs. Unless the Refuge System gets the funding it needs, future generations of hikers, hunters, environmentalists, families and school children may miss out on a vital part of the nation's heritage.

- more -

The National Wildlife Refuge System includes 538 refuges and 94 million acres of land and water in all states and U.S. territories, and represents a cornerstone of conservation in the United States. Though larger than the National Park System, the Refuge System receives just 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the funding per acre of its smaller sister federal land agency. CARE's report, *Shortchanging America's Wildlife*, describes how federal funding has fallen far short of the System's basic needs in recent years.

The report finds that:

- Most refuges are operated with only minimal staffing, and approximately 200 refuges have no staff on-site.
- Refuge visitation grows at such a rate that installation and maintenance of visitor facilities and services can no longer be considered a luxury.
- Invasive exotic species, inadequate water supplies, aging facilities and equipment and other problems plague many refuges, making it difficult to meet their conservation mission.
- Management programs to help recover endangered species, sustain waterfowl, restore damaged habitats and address threats to water quality and other problems are left unaccomplished on an alarming number of refuges.

The report highlights the following dozen refuges:

**Alaska:** Kenai NWR, (907) 262-7021

**California:** Sacramento NWR Complex, (530) 934-2801

**California:** San Diego NWR Complex, (760) 930-0168

**Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont:** Silvio Conte NF&WR, (413) 863-0209

**Florida:** J.N. "Ding" Darling NWR, (941) 472-1100

**Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin:** Upper Mississippi NW&FR, (507) 452-4232

**Mississippi:** Noxubee NWR, (662) 323-5548

**New Mexico:** Bitter Lake NWR, (505) 622-6755

**North Dakota:** Sullys Hill NGP, (701) 662-8611

**Utah:** Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, (435) 723-5887

**Washington:** Nisqually NWR, (360) 753-9467

**West Virginia:** Canaan Valley NWR, (304) 637-7312

Enclosures:

- Statements by CARE members and contact information for each organization
- CARE's detailed Refuge System funding plan, *Restoring America's Wildlife Legacy*

For more information, contact CARE, C/O Wildlife Management Institute, 1101 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 371-1808 or visit on the web at: [www.refugenet.org](http://www.refugenet.org)