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## **Congressman Dicks Honored by Conservation Coalition As National Wildlife Refuge System Marks Anniversary**

**Washington, D.C.** – U.S. Representative Norman D. Dicks (D-6<sup>th</sup>) was honored today with an award from the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) in recognition of his work as a steward of the National Wildlife Refuge System. He joined Reps. Michael Castle (R-DE), Ron J. Kind (D-WI), Jim Saxton (R-NJ), Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Todd Tiahrt (R-KS) in being recognized for their efforts to protect—and adequately fund—the refuge system.

The awards were presented at a Capitol Hill reception sponsored by CARE and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. The landmark legislation laid the framework for a system that today includes 548 refuges representing nearly 100 million acres of the most visually stunning and biologically diverse lands and waters in the U.S. With at least one refuge in every state, the system attracts some 40 million visitors each year.

Congressman Dicks was recognized for his demonstrated commitment to protecting these biologically diverse wild spots by working to include the largest funding increase in the history of the refuge system, nearly \$56 million above the current level, in his first year as chairman of the subcommittee charged with writing the yearly bill that funds refuges. Congressman Dicks has been a staunch advocate and champion of the National Wildlife Refuge System for many years, including his work improving protection and conservation of native fish, wildlife and habitats in places such as the Nisqually watershed and Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge.

“I think it’s vitally important to support our refuge system because it really is the only national network of public lands that we set aside specifically for the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants,” Dicks said. “Refuge areas in all 50 states offer visitors unique opportunities for education and recreation in addition to their critical role in wildlife habitat protection, and as such they represent a wise investment in our ecological heritage.”

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act mandates a “wildlife first” conservation philosophy, and the system’s refuges are home to more than 700 bird species, 220 mammals, and 260 endangered or threatened species. While protecting wildlife is the primary mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the system offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities, including wildlife photography and observation, hunting and fishing, environmental education and interpretation. The system generates some \$1.4 billion in annual revenues.

“The Refuge System faces a budget crisis of extraordinary proportions,” said Evan Hirsche, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association and chair of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement. “We’re grateful to have Congressman Dicks leading the charge for a healthy and vital Refuge System. With his vision, our American wildlife heritage has a fighting chance.”

Working in partnership since 1995, CARE consists of 22 wildlife, sporting, conservation and scientific groups dedicated to educating Congress and the American public about the Refuge System. Recognizing the value of a healthy system for the wildlife and habitat refuges seek to protect, CARE works to represent the five million national constituents of its member organizations by securing strong investments in these remarkable lands and waters.

Please find additional information on CARE at:

[www.refugenet.org/CARE/CareHome.html](http://www.refugenet.org/CARE/CareHome.html)

Please find additional information from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at:

[www.fws.gov/refuges/](http://www.fws.gov/refuges/)

***Note to editors:***

***Quotes from leaders of CARE member organizations are included below***

## Quotes from CARE Organization Leaders

“The passage of the landmark Refuge Improvement Act 10 years ago provided a framework for building a vibrant National Wildlife Refuge System that supports diverse wildlife habitats visited by 40 million people annually. Unfortunately, inadequate funding of the system in recent years has resulted in the loss of staff and services that put the viability of the Refuge System at risk. Those members of Congress being honored by the CARE Coalition demonstrate a new commitment on Capitol Hill to building a strong network of refuges and wild places for future generations to enjoy.”

William H. Meadows

President

The Wilderness Society

“A well-maintained National Wildlife Refuge System is vital to the future of migratory birds and other wildlife species. The habitat and recreational opportunities available on refuges are just a couple of the reasons that we need to strengthen federal support for our National Wildlife Refuge System.”

Vaughn T. Collins

Director of Public Policy

Ducks Unlimited

“For decades, the refuge system has been under-funded, under-staffed, and generally under-appreciated for the role it plays in providing nearly 100 million acres of wildlife habitat for countless species. The representatives we are honoring today have shown tremendous leadership in recognizing that role and fighting to enhance it through better funding and management.”

David Hoskins

Executive Director

Izaak Walton League of America

“America’s National Wildlife Refuge System is the backbone of wildlife conservation in this country. Ten years ago, with passage of the Refuge Improvement Act, Congress made a commitment to the American people that the management of these precious places would reflect their vital role in safeguarding our diverse wildlife. Yet today, refuge managers are being asked to do their jobs with one hand tied behind their backs due to crippling budget shortfalls. We are extremely grateful to the members of Congress being honored today by CARE. With their leadership, we hope to turn this dire situation around.”

Rodger Schlickeisen

President

Defenders of Wildlife

“America’s national wildlife refuges provide some of the most remarkable hunting and fishing opportunities in the world because they are dedicated to preservation of fish and wildlife populations. Wildlife Forever is totally committed to the CARE agenda.”

Douglas H. Grann

President & CEO

Wildlife Forever