



America's 548 National Wildlife Refuges Under-Funded By 43 Percent
One in Three Refuges Fully Unstaffed – 300 Staff Lost, 250 More At Risk

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2008 (Washington, DC) – A new report released to Congress today finds the nation's 548 National Wildlife Refuges are vastly under-funded, leading to unstaffed refuges and closings; unsafe roads and trails; decreased safety; millions of acres of invasive species; unprotected at-risk species; and hundreds of layoffs.

America's National Wildlife Refuge System, comprising nearly 100 million acres, requires a minimum of \$765 million annually to operate adequately. However, the System is currently receiving \$434 million per year – an average of just \$4.34 per acre.

The report finds that:

- One in three refuges are operating without a single staff member
- The System has already cut 300 staff positions; without adequate funding increasing, plans for a 20 percent staff reduction will resume
- Unfunded projects regarded as "Mission Critical" total more than \$115 million
- The system needs 845 full-time law enforcement officers, but currently has just 180 – one officer for every 555,000 acres
- The System is able to invest just 0.67 percent of its value in annual maintenance
- More than two million acres have already been lost to invasive species, placing threatened and endangered species at even greater risk

The Refuge System, created by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, provides habitat for more than 250 at-risk animal and plant species. The 40 million people who visit refuges each year contribute an estimated \$1.7 billion in annual sales and over 27,000 jobs to local economies. Close to 800,000 Americans participated in environmental education programs last year, and more than half of the nation's refuges are available to anglers and hunters.

"Hundreds of thousands of Americans will visit their local wildlife refuges this Memorial Day weekend, but too many will find them either completely closed, open without staff or a visitor's center, or with decaying infrastructure," said Evan Hirsche, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and Chair of CARE.

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The report, entitled “*Restoring America’s Wildlife Refuges 2008*,” was issued by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a diverse group of 22 organizations representing environmental groups, hunting and fishing advocacy groups, and scientific organizations representing more than 14 million members and supporters.

“This year’s report continues to highlight the dire needs of our National Wildlife Refuge System and the failure of the federal government to meet them,” said Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI), a founding co-chair of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus. “It serves as another wake-up call to the U.S. Congress that we need to do better in order to preserve and maintain these national treasures and the wildlife they support. I applaud the CARE alliance for its tireless efforts to bring these issues to light.”

CARE recommends that Congress increase Refuge System funding to \$514 million in fiscal year 2009, and that it reaches full funding of \$765 million per year by fiscal year 2013.

“The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of America’s greatest natural resources, and it cannot be ignored,” said Rep. Jim Saxton (R-NJ), a senior member of the House Natural Resources Committee and a founding co-chair of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus. “The CARE report demonstrates that our refuges are severely underfunded and inadequately maintained. Congress should act to increase funding of the refuges.”

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The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) was created in 1995 as a loose coalition of diverse organizations concerned about the ability of our National Wildlife Refuges to fulfill their missions. Members of CARE recognize the inadequacy of existing funds to operate and maintain the National Wildlife Refuge System and the biological, recreational, and economic consequences that this lack of funding has on the Refuge System and its surrounding communities.

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ALSO AVAILABLE TO JOURNALISTS:

- **Localized State-by-State Refuge Status Available at:**
<http://www.fundrefuges.org/care/carehome.html>
- Interviews with Evan Hirsche, NWRA president, and CARE Coalition Members
- Photos
- Full Report