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NWRA Applauds House Appropriations Subcommittee for Proposed Increase in Refuge System Funding

Washington, DC- The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauds the House Appropriations subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies for its proposed increase to the annual budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System for Fiscal Year 2009 (FY09). The proposed increase of \$35 million would take the operating budget for the Refuge System to \$469 million, roughly \$4.69 per acre for the 100 million-acre System.

“If enacted, this allocation will help the Refuge System regain its footing in achieving its core wildlife conservation and public outreach priorities,” said Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “Many wildlife and public programs that have been terminated due to inadequate funding will be resurrected.”

The recommended funding level for FY09 makes national wildlife refuges one of Congress’s leading conservation priorities and builds upon the significant \$39 million increase approved in FY08.

“Because of the remarkable leadership in Chairman Norm Dicks (WA) and Ranking Member Todd Tiahrt (KS), communities that depend on refuges for economic prosperity and a higher quality of life, will greatly benefit,” said Hirsche. “The NWRA expresses special appreciation to all members of the subcommittee for making refuges a priority in the FY09 budget.”

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), chaired by the NWRA, requested \$514 million for FY09. Prior to this year’s increase, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service was forced to implement downsizing plans at refuges calling for a 20% reduction of the workforce nationwide, equating to 565 jobs. The Refuge System needs at least \$15 million annually to keep up with the rising costs of inflation and without it, refuges were forced to close, while visitor services were sharply reduced. CARE estimates the NWRS would need at least \$765 annually to meet fundamental wildlife conservation and public use mandates.

The full House Appropriations Committee House will take up the measure on June 18th after which the proposal will move to the full House.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to conserve America’s wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries that secure its ecological integrity.

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