

National Wildlife Refuge Association  
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**TESTIMONY**  
**BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,**  
**ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES**  
**CONCERNING FISCAL YEAR 2011 APPROPRIATIONS**  
**March 19, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and its membership comprised of current and former refuge professionals, Friends organization affiliates and concerned citizens, thank you for your strong support for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) including the meaningful funding increases over the past 3 years which allowed the System to emerge from years of declining budgets following the 2003 Refuge Centennial. Unfortunately, the President's budget request, a \$3.3 million cut, is a step in the wrong direction and if enacted, could reinstate the downsizing plans that called for a 20% reduction of staff on refuges nationwide. Because the Refuge System needs *at least* \$15 million annually to address management capabilities (rent, utilities, staff salaries, gas, etc...) the President's proposal is in actuality an \$18.3 million reduction. The NWRA appreciates the opportunity to offer comments on the fiscal year 2011 Interior Appropriations bill and we respectfully request the Subcommittee support the following programmatic funding allocations for programs in the NWRS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS):

- **\$578 million for the operations and maintenance (O&M) accounts of the NWRS;**
- **\$600 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), including \$150 million for the NWRS;**
- **\$19 million for the Challenge Cost Share Program in the Department of the Interior including \$6 million for the NWRS;**
- **\$40 million for Landscape Conservation Cooperatives in the FWS;**
- **\$25 million for Climate Change Inventory and Monitoring for refuges;**
- **\$100 million for the NWRS construction account for large scale restoration projects, visitors centers and energy efficiency projects;**
- **\$5 million for Volunteer Community Partnerships for the NWRS;**
- **\$25 million for invasive species control and eradication projects on and near refuge lands, including \$5 million for large scale projects;**
- **\$35 million for the management of the new Pacific Marine Monuments;**
- **\$75 million for the FWS' Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program;**
- **\$115 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program;**
- **\$52.6 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund;**
- **\$6.5 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund;**
- **\$10 million for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in the FWS' Resource Management General Administration appropriation.**

### **National Wildlife Refuge Funding – O & M and Construction**

The NWRA is the chair of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a diverse coalition of 22 sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations representing more than 15 million Americans. The Refuge System needs at least \$900 million in annual operations and maintenance funding to properly administer its 150 million acres as mandated in the Refuge Improvement Act. To reach this reasonable goal, we respectfully request that you provide \$578 million in FY 11 for Refuge System Operations and Maintenance (O&M).

After years of flat budgets, Congress in recent years has demonstrated a commitment to fund our national wildlife refuges. The increases in the past three years allowed for the suspension of workforce downsizing plans that outlined an eventual 20% reduction in overall staffing levels. But with more than 10% of staff already eliminated since 2004 and a current O&M backlog of more than \$3.7 billion, additional increases that build upon recent years are essential.

Within the \$578 request for refuge O&M, we recommend \$15 million for inflationary costs. We know the System needs *at least* \$15 million annually to maintain management capabilities which includes rent, utilities, salaries, concrete, gas and steel – everything a refuge needs to fully function. The President's requested \$3.3 million decrease is an effective \$18.3 million cut due to these annual needs. Without providing adequate funding for these fixed costs, refuges will simply be unable to maintain current programs and public services, and the backlog will grow.

For example, at the Potomac River Refuges in Northern Virginia, the past 3 years of funding increases allowed the complex to hire a temporary staffer to conduct public outreach and education and provide the *ONLY* staff presence on the weekends deterring criminals from illegal dumping, poaching and even prostitution. Should the President's budget cut be enacted, that staff person would likely be eliminated and conditions would return to those of only a few short years ago, when the complex was plagued with illegal squatters, turtle and fish poaching, dumping and a prostitution ring. In many cases the simple presence of an official refuge vehicle is enough to deter would-be criminals. We must ask ourselves, is a cut to the Refuge System budget really worth the consequent costs?

Within the allocation for refuge operations, we request \$25 million for inventory and monitoring to help refuges cope with Climate Change; \$25 million for invasive species removal projects including \$5 million for large scale efforts; \$5 million for Volunteer and Partnership programs and \$35 million for the management of the new Pacific Marine Monuments.

We also ask the Subcommittee to expand funding for the Refuge System's construction budget to \$100 million. The FWS has more than \$1 billion worth of construction needs, including the replacement of quickly deteriorating structures that are not energy efficient and are becoming more expensive to maintain. Construction funds also support large-scale habitat restoration projects such as the Salt Pond restoration efforts at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay NWR. Funds for new visitor/administration centers will be a net benefit with regards to both efficiencies and economic impact to local communities. Refuges with a broad range of outdoor and indoor programs create more revenue, jobs in service industries, and income for local communities.

### **Climate Change – FWS and NWRS**

The FWS and the Refuge System are just beginning to develop strategies to address Climate Change and are still woefully behind what is truly needed – especially with species in extreme locations such as Alaska and Hawaii on the verge of collapse. We strongly support the FWS initiative to establish Landscape Conservation Cooperatives to bring the best science to bear to help all agencies make the most educated management decisions. We recommend an allocation of \$40 million to fund these LCCs in FY11, building upon the investments made this fiscal year.

Even with new funding for refuge inventory and monitoring this year, refuges are still in dire need of additional dedicated dollars to aid species adaptation. We recommend \$25 million for inventory, monitoring and planning for refuges. Refuges are perhaps our best natural laboratories to assess impacts to wildlife as a result of global climate change; a small investment could yield valuable insights that will guide wildlife management and land use planning well into the future.

### **Invasive Species – Control and Eradication**

The NWRS is succumbing to a relentless onslaught of invasive species with over 2.3 million acres of refuge lands infested with invasive plants and 4,400 invasive animal infestations. Funding is needed to halt their progress and in some cases remove them entirely. Of the total 2.3 million plant-infested acres, the System was able to treat only 14.6% in 2008 – the same year a GAO report found that the number one management action that had increased in cost was the management of invasive plants. We urge the Subcommittee to allocate \$25 million for invasives eradication efforts on refuges with \$5 million for large-scale projects.

### **Strategic Growth and Partnerships**

While providing adequate funding to operate and maintain the Refuge System is of vital importance, most refuges are too small in size to fully achieve their conservation objectives. Their integrity depends on the health of surrounding lands and waters; and in turn, the health of refuge lands and waters has an enormous impact on surrounding communities. Consequently, there is a growing need to provide funding to ensure that lands and waters outside refuge boundaries are conserved. NWRA encourages a *Beyond the Boundaries* approach, which identifies and prioritizes crucial additions to the nation's conservation estate while improving connectivity between refuges and other conservation lands and encouraging partnerships to implement conservation strategies.

One of the most effective tools for effective partnering for conservation is the Challenge Cost Share (CCS) program and we strongly urge the Subcommittee to fund the program at \$19 million. The program was zeroed out in the Administration's budget due to inadequate reporting by DOI agencies; however, the lack of reporting was in many instances due to a lack of staff resources – NOT because the program was not receiving a match from partners or was being used inappropriately. The program leverages taxpayer dollars, turning a \$19 million investment into at least \$38 million in completed projects. We support DOI efforts already underway to strengthen reporting and we hope you will work with the Administration to repair the program and not eliminate it. The CCS has provided important opportunities for tens of thousands of citizen volunteers to do thousands of stewardship projects on public lands by leveraging these federal funds in a way that cannot be duplicated through other federal funding programs.

Another demonstrated conservation partnership is the FWS' Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and we ask that the Subcommittee appropriate the authorized \$75 million next year.

Partners is a powerful tool to work with private land owners and leverage federal dollars. A \$75 million investment in the Partners program will conservatively net \$300 million worth of additional conservation. On average, every \$1 appropriated leverages between \$4 and \$10.

To strategically grow the Refuge System, NWRA strongly supports President Obama in encouraging Congress to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to its authorized annual level of \$900 million in the next four years. We urge the Subcommittee to allocate \$150 million for the FWS to secure high-priority water rights and high-priority lands and conservation easements. Inadequate water quantity and quality represent some of the biggest obstacles for refuges to overcome and unfortunately, many refuges do not own the water rights on the refuge or they are not guaranteed an allocation of water from a river or stream.

Currently, there are roughly 8.3 million acres remaining to be acquired within approved refuge boundaries. \$150 million for refuge land acquisition may seem high, but consider that if Congress appropriated the full \$900 million annually ONLY to refuges, it would still take almost 20 years before the System could acquire all the lands currently in acquisition boundaries.

Within this request, the NWRA encourages the Subcommittee to provide funding for the following projects, which have willing sellers, are immediately available for purchase and provide increased connectivity between important public and private lands that will ultimately increase species ability to adapt:

- \$ 4.9 million, Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (UT) to acquire 3,000 acres;
- \$2.5 million, Blackwater NWR (MD) to acquire 1,515 acres;
- \$ 4 million, Cache River NWR (AR) to acquire 5,000 acres;
- \$ 2.5 million, Charles M. Russell NWR (MT) to acquire 2,400 acres;
- \$500,000, Cokeville Meadows NWR (WY) to acquire 2,200 acres;
- \$ 2 million, Lake Wales Ridge (FL) to acquire 800 acres;
- \$ 2 million, Nestucca Bay NWR, OR to acquire 300 acres;
- \$6 million, Silvio O. Conte NFWR (MA, CT, NH and VT) to acquire 2,050 acres;
- \$ 3.5 million, Sheldon - Hart NWR Complex (NV, OR) to acquire 2,500 acres;
- \$ 10 million, Stillwater NWR, NV to acquire 10,000 acres of water rights.

There are several additional extremely worthy refuge land acquisitions that are advocated for by refuge “Friends” organizations and refuge partners and we have provided the Subcommittee with those requests in a separate document.

The NWRA also urges the Subcommittee to appropriate \$115 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program to implement State Wildlife Action Plans; \$52.6 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund; \$6.5 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and \$10 million for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

In conclusion, the NWRA believes the National Wildlife Refuge System can meet its important conservation objectives only with strong and consistent funding leveraged by the valuable work of refuge volunteers. We extend our appreciation to the Subcommittee for its ongoing commitment to our National Wildlife Refuge System.