

*The Friends of the Bosque del Apache  
National Wildlife Refuge*

*P.O. Box 340, San Antonio, New Mexico 87832  
Leigh Ann Vradenburg, Executive Director*



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Chairman David R. Obey & Ranking Member Jerry Lewis  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Room H-218, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey:

The Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge wish to express our sincere thanks for your efforts to increase funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. We also thank you for again holding a Public Witness Hearing, allowing citizens to describe our individual refuges and the challenges we face. As the Executive Director of the Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, I submit this written public testimony to offer comments on the fiscal year 2010 (FY10) Interior Appropriations Bill. Specifically, we request a funding level of **\$514 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System in FY10**, including a \$3.1 million appropriation for program upgrades at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in San Antonio, New Mexico.

As you know, the National Wildlife Refuge System faced stagnant or declining budgets prior to the \$39 million increase in FY08 and the recent \$29 million increase for FY09. However, while these increases were substantial and badly needed, refuges nationwide continue to struggle with an Operations and Maintenance backlog of \$3.5 billion. In the last four years, the Bosque del Apache NWR has lost staff and program support required to achieve basic operational objectives for research, habitat management, invasive species control, and public use programs. In the same timeframe, the Friends of the Bosque contributed more than \$1 million to Refuge programs, and volunteers donated \$2.3 million in work hours to ensure that these programs have not faltered, but it has not been enough. Much of the fiscal contribution by the Friends organization was for wilderness land acquisition and construction of an education center. Volunteer organizations such as the Friends provide laudable and needed supplements to the Refuge System, but should not be looked to as substitutes for the Refuge programmatic and operational support that is a proper Federal responsibility.

*The Friends of the Bosque del Apache NWR is a non-profit organization dedicated to:  
Supporting the Refuge's efforts in creating quality wildlife habitat  
Supporting the Refuge's environmental education and scientific projects  
Enhancing the public's understanding and enjoyment of the Refuge.*

The economic role of the Bosque del Apache NWR in New Mexico is significant, as recreational visits to the Refuge generate over \$4.3 million in tax revenue for the region. For every dollar of the Refuge budget, there was a local economic effect of nearly \$8. Ecologically the Refuge is one of the most intensively managed wildlife areas in the country, benefiting hundreds of thousands of migratory birds annually and serving as a pioneer in invasive salt cedar research and control. Salt cedar is a plague throughout waterways of the Southwest, depleting water resources, crowding out native vegetation, and greatly increasing fire danger. As one of only a handful of active Land Management and Research Demonstration (LMRD) sites for the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Bosque del Apache NWR staff has experience, knowledge, and skills that are recognized throughout the U.S. and Mexico and are sought out by private citizens, tribes, universities, and a spectrum of government agencies.

To maintain the Bosque del Apache NWR as a vital economic engine and ecological keystone, we must upgrade program efforts in research, habitat management, invasive species control, and public use programs through equipment acquisition and program and facilities enhancement.

### **Program Development Funding Requirement - \$3,100,000:**

#### **❖ One-Time Costs for Equipment Acquisition (\$750,000)**

- Excavator: \$260,000 - required to allow the full time utilization of a recently acquired Slashbuster (vegetation masticator) that is a key component of the invasive salt cedar control program and the fuels reduction program as it relates to wildland and urban interface issues and wildfire prevention. This excavator will allow for improved firebreak establishment and maintenance, thereby improving the security of adjacent private landowners and the community of San Antonio.
- D8 Dozer with attachments (root rake and root plow): \$490,000 - required to expand invasive salt cedar control efforts on the “active floodplain” of the Rio Grande.

#### **❖ Program and Facilities Enhancement (\$2,350,000)**

- Visitor Services - Interpretive Plan Development and Implementation: \$800,000 - provides for the development of an interpretive media plan and its implementation through: 1) complete renovation of the 30-year old Visitor Center exhibits; 2) installation of interpretive signage/facilities at 18 sites throughout the public use area; and 3) production of updated audio, video, and written materials for outreach and education.
- Biology - “Green” Short-Term Housing: \$900,000 - provides for construction of a 6 room/ 15 bed facility utilizing alternative power and “green” building techniques. The construction would allow on-site lodging for the researchers, students, and technicians that have made Bosque del Apache a cornerstone for research on wetland and riparian restoration and management in arid ecosystems.

- Biology - Water Control Improvements: \$650,000 - provides for upgrades, new structures, and other improvements for the miles of ditches and canals necessary for efficient and regulated water delivery for habitat management.

Our commitment to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge has allowed us to supplement the economic and educational opportunities for our region. However, we can scarcely maintain, much less grow, the Refuge's capabilities without financial support. The Bosque del Apache NWR has often been described as the "Jewel of New Mexico." Yet that description applies not only to the amazing natural resource that is the Bosque, but also to the Refuge's role as an economic engine. Its role in our community, in our economy, and in the broader mission of restoring and preserving our natural heritage is why we must do what we can to help it thrive. As our cities grow and water demands increase, future generations will need the Bosque del Apache NWR and the lessons it is teaching us to help us appreciate the delicate ecological balance that exists in the Southwest and beyond. We can never underestimate the importance of National Wildlife Refuges to our children's futures, to the environment, and to our economies.

We encourage you to help us make a difference by funding the National Wildlife Refuge System at \$514 million in FY10, and by ensuring that the national appropriation includes \$3.1 million for Bosque del Apache NWR.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,  
*Leigh Ann Vradenburg* (via email)  
Executive Director, Friends of the Bosque del Apache NWR  
P.O. Box 340  
San Antonio, NM 87832  
friends@fdc.org  
575-838-2120