



National  
Wildlife Refuge  
Association

For Immediate Release

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## **Refuge Association Calls Refuge Funding Crisis Top Obstacle in Fulfilling Mandates of Guiding Legislation**

Washington, DC – October 10, 2007 – The National Wildlife Refuge Association yesterday urged Congress to commission an independent study of what it will take for the National Wildlife Refuge System to fulfill its mandates under the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. Calling the Refuge System funding crisis the main obstacle in accomplishing the worthwhile mandates of the Act, the NWRA detailed how the lack of funds is undermining the biological integrity of refuges, impeding public outreach opportunities, fostering lawlessness on refuges, and limiting their ability to adapt to habitat changes wrought by climate change.

“Today, on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the passage of the Refuge Improvement Act, we face perhaps the greatest challenges ever to the conservation of wildlife in America; if we are to protect our nation’s wildlife heritage for the benefit of future generations, then sufficient funding and political capital must be allocated to successfully carry out the Act,” said Evan Hirsche, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

Hirsche cited urban and suburban encroachment; invasive species; the rush to develop energy on public and private conservation areas; competition for water; and a public that is increasingly removed from the natural world, as representing enormous challenges to refuges. Adding that global climate change will require a “sea change” in the way we manage refuge habitat and the strategic growth the System, Hirsche stated that, “now is exactly the wrong time to shortchange our nation’s premier conservation gems.”

To illustrate how the funding crisis has limited the FWS’s ability to implement the act, Hirsche described how despite attracting 40 million visitors a year, half of the 548 refuges go without a staff biologist; just 5 percent of the refuge workforce is assigned to public outreach; vandalism and drug manufacturing is proliferating in the System; vital refuge acquisitions and private lands partnerships are falling by the wayside; and portions of refuges are drying up because requisite water rights haven’t been secured.

Also testifying at the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans hearing were former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director, Dale Hall, former EPA Administrator and Audubon Board Chair, Carol Browner, Bill Horn of the U.S. Sportsmen’s Alliance, and John Frampton, Director of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Copies of NWRA’s testimony can be downloaded at [www.refugenet.org](http://www.refugenet.org).

*The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, lands and waters set aside by the public to conserve America’s diverse wildlife heritage. Its membership is comprised of current and former refuge professionals, more than 140 refuge Friends organization affiliates and thousands of refuge supporters throughout the United States.*

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