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NWRA Applauds Nearly \$29 million Increase for Refuge System Funding & Priority Programs to Increase Habitat Connectivity

Washington, DC- The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauds Congress and the Administration for including a nearly \$29 million increase for the National Wildlife Refuge System budget for Fiscal Year 2009 (FY09) which ends September 30, 2009. The much-needed increase brings the operating budget for the Refuge System to \$462.8 million, roughly \$3.08 per acre for the now 150 million-acre System.

“Added to recently approved stimulus dollars for green jobs on refuges, this increase helps put the Refuge System on course to meet its fundamental wildlife conservation and public outreach objectives by the end of President Obama’s first term,” said Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “Congress and the Obama administration have demonstrated a clear commitment to supporting our premier wildlife conservation lands and waters.”

The funding level for FY09 makes national wildlife refuges a leading conservation priority and builds upon the significant \$39 million increase Congress approved for FY08. Another NWRA priority, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) that supports refuge habitat acquisition and conservation, was increased to \$42.45 m, including \$1.5 million for the Crystal River NWR in Florida, \$3.8 million for New England’s Silvio Conte NWR, and \$1 million for Blackwater NWR, MD, all NWRA “Beyond the Boundaries” priority areas. In addition, Congress continued funding the successful NWRA-initiated Volunteer Invasives Program by allocating \$1 million, bringing the program total to \$5.5 million since the program’s inception in FY03.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), chaired by the NWRA, and nearly 190 NWRA refuge “Friends” Affiliate organizations, requested \$514 million for Refuge System operations and maintenance in FY09, and will request the same again in FY10. Prior to the recent increases, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was forced to implement downsizing plans at refuges, calling for a 20% reduction of the workforce nationwide that equated to 565 jobs. The Refuge System needs at least an additional \$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.

For more information about NWRA priorities funded in the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations Act, please visit www.refugeassociation.org.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, America’s premier network of lands and waters set aside to conserve our diverse wildlife heritage.

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