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INVASIVE SPECIES JEOPARDIZE WILDLIFE REFUGES; MILLIONS OF ACRES ALREADY DEVASTATED, SAYS NEW REPORT

Senators, Representatives Join with Administration to In Call for Action

Washington, DC – At a press conference today on Capitol Hill, the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA), joined a bipartisan coalition of Senators, Representatives and the Bush Administration on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Refuge System, to release *Silent Invasion*, a new report that examines how invasive species are wreaking havoc on National Wildlife Refuges across the country. Senators Bob Graham (D-FL), Jim Jeffords (I-VT); Congressmen Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), Nick Rahall (D-WV) and Norman Dicks (D-WA); and Jim Tate, Science Advisor to the Secretary of the Interior, all called for new efforts to stop the invasives.

Invasive species - foreign insects, plants and animals that wreak havoc on native ecosystems - cause more than \$100 billion damage annually. Invasive plants alone have invaded more than 100 million acres of land nationwide. Nearly eight million of those acres are in wildlife refuges, areas created to protect the most important examples of biological diversity across the country. NWRA urges Congress and the Administration to provide \$150 million over five years to protect these natural treasures against the advancement of invasives.

“America’s wildlife is under siege by a relentless force that respects neither geographic nor political boundaries,” said Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “*Silent Invasion* makes it crystal clear that we have to act now before it is too late. To stop the Refuge invaders, we need a three-part strategy— educating and mobilizing volunteers, deploying rapid response strike teams across the nation and implementing the strategic management plan of the National Invasive Species Council, a Presidentially-mandated commission.” “The approach outlined in *Silent Invasion* is already receiving bipartisan support and we urge the US Congress and Bush Administration to fund our national campaign to protect our national wildlife refuges from certain destruction.”

The release of *Silent Invasion* marks the beginning of National Wildlife Refuge Week and NWRA’s campaign to stop the advancement of invasive species before the problem spirals out of control and spoils some of America’s most important natural treasures.

“Utilizing volunteers and mobile strike teams is a practical and affordable use of taxpayer funds to solve a problem that could effect 37 million refuge visitors annually,” added Hirsche. “Recognizing the problem early on and responding rapidly are a crucial elements to this campaign. We need to catch the invasives and work to eradicate them before they swell to uncontrollable proportions.”

Silent Invasion profiles the “Dirty Dozen” invasive species and shows how 12 diverse refuges in as many states are working to address this ecological crisis. These refuges include: Silvio O. Conte in New England, Blackwater in Maryland, Loxahatchee in Florida, Attwater Prairie Chicken in Texas, Upper Mississippi, Lacreek in South Dakota, Red Rock Lakes in Montana, Willapa in Washington, the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge, Ellicott Slough in near Monterey Bay, CA, Hakalau Forest in Hawaii, and Alaska Maritime Refuge.

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