

March 21, 2012

Robert C. Christensen, Treasurer  
Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge  
13751 Upper Embankment Rd  
Nampa, Idaho 83686

**TESTIMONY  
FOR THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES  
CONCERNING FISCAL YEAR 2013 APPROPRIATIONS**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge and its 80 members, we would like to thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We are a nonprofit volunteer group that "...is committed to promoting, protecting, and providing resources to preserve and enhance the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge as a treasure for the enjoyment of present and future generations."

**Background on Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge**

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (Deer Flat NWR) is one of the oldest refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Last month we celebrated its 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday. The refuge is located in Southwestern Idaho about 25 miles from Boise, Idaho, the state capitol. Deer Flat NWR is comprised of two separate units. The largest and most accessible is the Lake Lowell Unit comprising about 10, 588 acres located immediately south and west of the city of Nampa. The other sector, less accessible, is comprised of 101 islands (totaling about 1200 acres) in the Snake River--distributed along 113 river miles from the Canyon-Ada County line in Idaho, to Farewell Bend in Oregon.

Deer Flat NWR serves as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife--with emphasis on wintering waterfowl. Thousands of mallards and Canada geese spend a portion of the winter months at Lake Lowell. The refuge provides nesting habitat for two pair of bald eagles and two pair of osprey and numerous shore and wading birds such as the great blue heron, double-crested cormorant, and western grebe. The Snake River islands provide the refuge's primary nesting habitat for resident Canada geese.

The refuge received an estimated 225,000 visitors in FY11. Recreation pursuits include the "big six" priority wildlife-dependent opportunities typical of national wildlife refuges: fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing and photography, environmental education and interpretation. Other activities include boating, swimming, horseback riding, and hiking. In addition, interpretive and educational outreach programs provided by refuge staff and volunteers have, in recent years, reached about 6,000 people of varied ethnicities, while

environmental education activities have influenced another 9,000 to 11,000 young people living in the greater Boise area.

Of particular interest is “Discover Wildlife Journeys,” an inquiry-based field trip curriculum developed by Deer Flat NWR staff; Friends of Deer Flat; Northwest Nazarene University; and Canyon County Parks, Recreation and Waterways. To allow local students to have access to this new curriculum, the Friends of Deer Flat started a busing scholarship program to fund elementary students’ transportation to the refuge. This past year over 1,200 local school students participated in this hands-on experience.

Many of these programs would not be possible without the efforts of the over 500 volunteers who annually log in 11,000 to 12,000 volunteered hours.

### **Funding Level Impacts**

The Friends of Deer Flat realize the difficult economic times that we are experiencing and that funding increases are not feasible during this time of budget constraints. However, we respectfully ask that you seriously consider the adverse effects that budgetary shortfalls will have on the operational capacity of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

#### **Status Quo - At Current Budget Levels:**

Even at current levels, there will be adverse impacts on the ability of the Service to maintain the present infrastructure and programs because of inflationary costs on overhead, equipment, and maintenance activities. There will be loss of opportunities to enhance refuge habitats, curtail invasive species, provide safer and more interactive visitor experiences, and obtain essential scientific data.

For example, at Deer Flat NWR increased costs of doing business would most likely result in the loss of Challenge Cost Share Grants that in recent years have helped fund two intern positions. This would adversely affect volunteer, outreach, and/or environmental education programs, as well as hamper the collection of onsite scientific data from which to make local management decisions.

Loss of intern positions would be projected to result in the following reductions.

Effect on volunteers: **Reduction of up to 20%**

Effect on interpretation/outreach: **Reduction of about 30%**

Effect on environmental education: **Reduction of about 28%**

Law Enforcement - The refuge currently has no law enforcement officer—maintaining status quo would not ameliorate this situation. The law-abiding refuge users could have

less enjoyable experiences on the refuge because they would continue to be adversely impacted by those who flaunt the rules.

### **At 10% Reduction in Funding:**

With a 10% reduction in funds there would be obligatory cuts in staffing, maintenance activities, and public outreach and environmental education opportunities in the refuge system. There will be even more significant loss of opportunities to enhance refuge habitats, curtail invasive species, provide safer and more interactive visitor experiences, and obtain essential scientific data.

At Deer Flat NWR the following impacts would be expected:

Without Challenge Cost Share Grants, the refuge would be unable to fund both the environmental education specialist and the volunteer coordinator intern positions, and because of other more pressing duties, full time staff would be unable to do as much volunteer coordinating or environmental education/outreach as the interns are able to do. The inability to hire summer biological technicians would seriously hamper the collection of valuable scientific data on the refuge.

Based on numbers which the refuge experienced before intern programs were available to Deer Flat NWR, the following adverse effects would be expected to occur.

Effect on Volunteers: **Reduction of up to 40%** -- Based on the number of volunteer hours from before the refuge had a volunteer coordinator, we would predict that due to lack of a volunteer coordinator, volunteer hours at Deer Flat NWR would be reduced to about 7,000. Also, many volunteer efforts may go unrecognized. The refuge visitor center may not be able to be kept open on Saturdays--as it is now staffed by volunteers.

Effect on Interpretation/Outreach: **Reduction of about 60%** -- There would be a reduction in the number and scale of special events due to lack of planning assistance from interns as well as a reduction in off-site events that staff could attend. There would also be a reduction in the number of "Wild about Life lectures" (a monthly outreach program). These effects would result in a reduction to 2,500 participants.

Effect on Environmental Education: **Reduction of about 55%** -- There would be a reduction in the total number of on and off-site programs that staff would have time to participate in or time to recruit/coordinate volunteers to staff such programs. This would include a reduction in the number of "Discover Wildlife Journeys" field trips that could be provided for local school children; each field trip requires four guided stations, and with other pressing assignments, staff would have little time to recruit sufficient number of volunteers to staff a large number of those field trips. We project a reduction to 4,000-5,000 total participants in environmental education programs.

Effect on Refuge Visitations: **Reduction of 10% to 20%** -- Loss of visitation would be expected as a direct and indirect reduction in the outreach and educational programs listed above. We project a reduction to lower than 200,000 visitors during the year.

Law Enforcement: At 10% funding reduction, the refuge would have no hope of obtaining its own law enforcement officer. Law-abiding refuge users would continue to be adversely impacted as stated under the status quo scenario.

Fire Suppression and Invasive Species: These control programs would be drastically reduced because of the prohibitive costs of manpower and herbicides. Weedy species such as Scotch thistle and white-top, especially on the Snake River Islands, would range out of control and become more of a plague to neighboring private lands. The longer these infestations go uncontrolled, the more effort and expense it will require to tackle them in the future.

### **Request for Appropriations at no lower than Status Quo Levels:**

We respectfully ask the Subcommittee to approve appropriations for the National Wildlife Refuge System at no lower than the status quo levels. The Friends of Deer Flat believe that maintaining stewardship over the Deer Flat NWR and the National Wildlife Refuge System are vital to the well-being of our nation. How diminished our lives would be without the sounds of wildlife and the opportunity to view them in their natural habitats. Additionally, the National Wildlife Refuge System conserves natural ecosystems that provide support to local economies by cleaning water, regulating climate, reducing flood risk, and pollinating crops. The Refuge System upholds the American value of public lands and as Hugh Hammond Bennett, the first NRCS Chief, stated, "If we take care of the land, it will take care of us."

We again extend our appreciation to the Subcommittee for its ongoing commitment to our National Wildlife Refuge System and respectfully request the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee allocate \$495 million for the Refuge System's FY13 Operations & Maintenance budget, \$61.5 million for State Wildlife Grants, \$39.4 million for North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants, \$3.6 million for the Challenge Cost Share program, and in addition, fund the LWCF at \$700 million with \$150 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

We hope you will support the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge and all of the 556 refuges across the country by maintaining adequate funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. On behalf of the Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge we thank you for considering our requests.

Sincerely,  
Robert C. Christensen, Treasurer  
Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge