

Desiree Sorenson-Groves  
Vice President, Government Affairs, National Wildlife Refuge Association  
1250 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20036

**TESTIMONY**  
**BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,**  
**ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES**  
**CONCERNING FISCAL YEAR 2013 APPROPRIATIONS**  
**March 21, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and its membership comprised of current and former refuge professionals, Friends organization affiliates and concerned citizens, thank you for your strong support for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). The NWRA appreciates the opportunity to offer comments on the fiscal year 2013 Interior Appropriations bill.

The meaningful funding increases in fiscal years 2008-2010 allowed the System to emerge from years of chronic funding shortfalls. But unfortunately, those substantial gains are undermined by more than \$17 million in cuts to the System's funding in fiscal years 2011 and 2012 that equate to a larger loss of over \$41 million when annual increases in refuge fixed costs are factored in. Consequently, we support the President's 2013 budget request of \$495 million because it will maintain existing management capabilities. Should across-the-board sequestration cuts of 9-10% take effect in FY13, the impacts to the Refuge System would be devastating and could force FWS to close or end major programs at more than 130 refuges.

We respectfully request the Subcommittee support the following funding allocations for programs in the NWRS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS):

- **\$495 million for the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) accounts of the NWRS including \$23 million for Inventory and Monitoring, \$39 million for Refuge Law Enforcement, \$80 million for Visitors Services, \$3.8 million for Challenge Cost Share, \$2.5 million for Cooperative Recovery and \$5 million for the Pacific Marine Monuments;**
- **\$57 million for FWS for Preparedness and Hazardous Fuels Reduction (under DOI);**
- **\$30 million for the National Wildlife Refuge Fund;**
- **\$700 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), including \$150 million for the NWRS;**
- **\$33 million for Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) in the FWS;**
- **\$37 million for the FWS construction account for large scale refuge restoration projects, visitor facility enhancements, visitors centers and energy efficiency projects;**
- **\$60 million for the FWS' Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program;**
- **\$61.5 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program;**
- **\$39.4 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund;**
- **\$6.5 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund;**
- **\$8.4 million for Wildlife Without Borders;**
- **\$7.5 million for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in the FWS' Resource Management General Administration appropriation.**

### **National Wildlife Refuge Funding – O&M and Construction**

The NWRA chairs the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a diverse coalition of 22 sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations representing more than 15 million Americans that supports increased funding for the Refuge System. After a century of chronic under-funding, increases in fiscal years 2008 – 2010 put the Refuge System on a path to full funding. But cuts in fiscal years 2011 and 2012 totaling \$16.2 million (*\$40.5 million decrease in real dollars*) is reversing the gains made and puts damaging workforce downsizing plans on the table should an across-the-board sequestration cut of 10% occur in FY13. Should that happen, CARE estimates that FWS will be forced to close or end major programs at more than 130 refuges, eliminate more than essential 200 wildlife management jobs, cut more than 35 visitor services jobs needed to mobilize the System's 40,000 volunteers and administer recreational programs, and cut law enforcement staff by more than 40 officers leaving a force of only 170 when 845 are needed.

These cuts are particularly harmful because the System is already having to respond to damages from natural disasters. From fiscal years 2005-2011, the Refuge System sustained \$693 million in damages from natural disasters such as tornadoes, fires, hurricanes, flooding, a tsunami and an earthquake. The damages in 2011 alone were almost \$200 million, approaching half of the System's operations and maintenance funds for the year. Of the \$693 million in damages, Congress appropriated \$254 million in emergency supplemental funding and the remaining \$439 million has been added to the Refuge System's \$2.5 billion deferred maintenance backlog.

NWRA respectfully requests that the Committee provide **\$495 million in FY 2013 for Refuge System Operations and Maintenance (O&M)**, essentially level funding from FY12. We estimate that refuges would need *at least* \$527 million in fiscal year 2013 to maintain management capabilities from fiscal year 2010; this request would only maintain status quo at current funding levels. The current federal salary freeze still leaves Refuges needing at least \$8 million to absorb other fixed costs. CARE estimates that the Refuge System needs at least \$900 million in annual funding to properly administer its 150 million acres and remains committed to aiming for this goal.

Refuges have almost \$1 billion worth of construction needs, including the replacement of deteriorating structures that are becoming more expensive to maintain. We request **\$37 million for the System's construction budget**, including funds for large-scale habitat restoration and small-scale visitor facility enhancements. Funds for new visitor/administration centers, including those at the Potomac River Refuges near Washington D.C. and the Sherburne NWR outside Minnesota's Twin Cities, will provide a net benefit in efficiencies and in economic impact. Refuges with a broad range of programs create more service industry jobs and more income for local communities.

### **Supporting Prescribed Fire to Reduce Catastrophic Burns**

Fire as a wildlife habitat management tool is one of the most important items in the FWS tool chest but it is also perhaps the least understood. Unfortunately, the President has called for a 23% decrease to DOI's Hazardous Fuel Reduction program, which would have a negative impact on the FWS fire program. Prescribed burns reduce the occurrence of catastrophic fires and protect our most vulnerable communities and habitats. For instance, prescribed burns are used extensively in Florida where lightning strikes would normally cause fires annually or every couple of years. Consequently, when lightning caused a fire in the middle of the night at the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR in Palm Beach last year, the wildfire burned only 13 acres and extinguished itself despite record drought conditions. However, at the Alligator River NWR in North Carolina,

a lack of resources to do the amount of prescribed burning needed led to a wildfire that burned more than 45,000 acres on the refuge and adjacent lands, burning deep into the soil, and cost almost \$15 million to contain. A combination of hydrology restoration and prescribed burns would have reduced the fire's intensity and containment costs. We urge maintaining current capabilities for **FWS at \$57 million for FY 2013 for Hazardous Fuel Reduction and Preparedness** funding.

### **Supporting Jobs, Economic Activity and Leveraging American Volunteerism**

Refuges are economic engines and a good investment. According to a recent report by Southwick Associates, refuges generate more than \$32.3 billion in ecosystem services and \$4.2 billion in economic activity, returning over \$65 and \$8 respectively for every \$1 appropriated by Congress.

Refuges are job creators: more than 32,500 jobs – largely in the private sector – are attributed to refuge-related activities. And on a national level, each \$5 million invested in the Refuge System's appropriations (salary and non-salary) impacts an average of 83.2 jobs, \$13.6 million in total economic activity, \$5.4 million in job-related income and \$500,000 in tax revenue.

Refuges are vital places for the American people to connect with nature and get involved. Currently, refuge Friends and volunteers do approximately 20% of all work on refuges. In 2011, these 1.5 million hours equated to roughly 8 volunteers for every 1 Refuge System employee. Without staff to oversee volunteers, their commitment and passion is lost, as is their desperately needed contribution to the System. **We request \$80 million for Visitors Services for the NWRS.**

### **Protecting the Public and Refuge Resources – NWRS Law Enforcement**

In 2005, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conducted a first of its kind analysis of law enforcement (LE) needs for a land management agency, focusing on the Refuge System. They recommended a force of 845 full-time LE officers to adequately protect visitors and taxpayer resources; but the System has only a little more than one quarter of that amount with 246 officers for the 150-million-acre System. Further, since the report was completed in 2005, the System has grown by 50 million acres with the addition of the Pacific monuments by President Bush and visitation has grown by 15% from 37 million visitors in 2005 to over 45 million in 2011.

### **Using Science to Guide Adaptive Management**

The FWS and the Refuge System are developing landscape level strategies to address habitat changes due to shifting land use, increasing human population, the spread of invasive species and changing climates. We strongly support the FWS initiative to establish Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) to bring the best science to help local, state and federal agencies make the most educated management decisions. We recommend an allocation of **\$33 million to fund LCCs** in FY13 and **\$23 million for the System's Inventory and Monitoring program.**

### **Commitment to Refuge Communities – Refuge Revenue Sharing**

The Refuge System uses net income derived from things like use permits and timber harvests to make payments to local counties or communities to offset lost property tax revenue, and relies on Congressional appropriations to the Refuge Revenue Sharing program to compensate for the shortfall between revenues and obligations. Due to declining revenue and lack of appropriations, the Service has been paying less than 50% of its tax-offset obligations since 2001. This has a measurable impact on local communities that is felt even more starkly in difficult economic times – and it creates severe strain in relations between the federal units and their local community, threatening the goodwill and partnerships that are keystones of successful conservation. NWRA

requests **\$30 million for the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program**, which, in recognition of the President’s proposal to zero out funding, is still only about half of what is needed. The NWRA also calls for a review of the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act of 1935 as amended, and consideration of conversion to a Payment-in-Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program to be consistent with other federal land management agencies and to provide Refuge communities with more equitable payments.

### **Partnerships and Strategic Growth**

**We strongly support \$3.8 million in FY13 for Challenge Cost Share (CCS).** Partners are the key to successful conservation; no federal or state agency can do it alone. Because of this, we support programs that leverage federal dollars such as the CCS program. Partner organizations such as local volunteer “Friends” groups leverage these funds to give American taxpayers more bang for their buck for projects like trails, education, boardwalks and habitat restoration.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is another powerful tool for working with private landowners to collaboratively conserve refuge landscapes. The program consistently leverages federal dollars for conservation, generating between \$4-\$10 in conservation return for every \$1 appropriated, and has been key to the success of many iconic landscape conservation projects. If funded at its authorized level of \$75 million, the program would net at least \$300 million worth of additional conservation. NWRA requests an **FY 13 appropriation of \$60 million for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program**, a \$5 million increase to maintain current capabilities.

NWRA also calls upon Congress to **fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$700 million.** Created in 1965 and authorized at \$900 million per year (*more than \$3 billion in today’s dollars*), the LWCF is our most important land and easement acquisition tool. With more than 8 million acres still unprotected within existing refuge boundaries, and the need to establish key wildlife corridors and connections between protected areas, the LWCF is more important than ever. NWRA strongly supports the new Collaborative Conservation requests of the Departments of Interior and Agriculture, bringing together several federal agencies around a common goal.

NWRA supports the following projects and those advocated by refuge Friends organizations:

- Everglades Headwaters NWR & Conservation Area (FL) - \$50 million;
- Bear Lake NWR (ID) -- \$1.5 million
- Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (UT) – \$2.5 million;
- Blackwater NWR (MD) – \$2.5 million;
- Cache River NWR and White River NWR (AR) – \$8 million;
- Cokeville Meadows NWR (WY) -- \$1.5 million
- Connecticut River - Silvio O. Conte NFWR (NH, VT, MA, CT) – \$12 million;
- Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area (KS) – \$5 million;
- Great Bay NWR (NH) and Rachel Carson NWR (ME) -- \$4 million
- Middle Rio Grande NWR (NM) - \$1.5 million;
- Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area (MT) – \$19 million;
- Rhode Island NWR Complex (RI) – \$5 million;
- Southeast Louisiana Refuge Complex (LA) – \$3 million;
- St. Marks NWR/Longleaf Pine (FL) – 33 million
- St. Vincent NWR (FL) -- \$1 million

The NWRA believes the Refuge System can meet its responsibilities to the American people with collaboration and sufficient funding and we urge Congress to help the FWS meet these obligations.