



NEBRASKA

National Wildlife Refuges: *Assets for All Americans*

An ongoing budget and staffing crisis has left Nebraska's refuges struggling to uphold their mandated service to the American public.



Six of Nebraska's refuges are open to the public, as well as to hunting and/or fishing. Without adequate funding, public use programs and vital management activities, including those that benefit fish and game species, are at risk.



Desoto NWR (USFWS)

Safe and accessible refuge facilities are essential to providing positive experiences for visitors and ensuring that refuges continue to make important contributions to local economies. *Crescent Lake* is just one of the many refuges across the country that is awaiting funds to complete important visitor facility improvement projects.

CARE recommends funding the Refuge System's Operations and Maintenance budget at \$511 million in FY 2012, with a long-term goal of at least \$900 million annually.



Nebraska's National Wildlife Refuges – Benefiting Wildlife, People, and the Economy

Nebraska is home to 7 national wildlife refuges and 1 wetland management district. These national treasures protect diverse habitats such as riverine wetlands, tallgrass prairies, riparian woodlands, and sand dunes, which support a variety of species including the golden-winged warbler, sandhill crane, blacktail jackrabbit, bison, and mule deer.

In 2010, approximately 213,000 visitors enjoyed wildlife-related recreation on Nebraska refuges. Among these recreational opportunities are hunting, angling, and wildlife watching, activities for which Americans spent more than \$122 billion in 2006.¹ At *Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge* alone, for every dollar appropriated to the refuge budget, \$4.60 were generated in expenditures to the local economy.²

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Nebraska may not be able to continue protecting wildlife, offering world-class recreation, and ultimately enhancing local economies.

- Nebraska refuges are saddled with a backlog of approximately \$22.4 million in deferred maintenance and \$5 million in mission-critical operations projects.
- These refuges need at least 39 additional staff, including many wildlife management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance positions.

Without sufficient funding, Nebraska refuges will fall further behind in their mission to conserve wildlife for the benefit of the American public.

About CARE



The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement is a diverse coalition of 21 wildlife, sporting, recreation, and scientific organizations with more than 14 million members and supporters across the United States. CARE has been working since 1995 to help the National Wildlife Refuge System fight a serious funding crisis.

American Birding Association
American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Izaak Walton League of America
Marine Conservation Biology Institute
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Corps Network
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute



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THE BOTTOM LINE

With close to 45 million visitors in FY 2010, national wildlife refuges are immensely popular and undeniable economic engines. According to the Fish and Wildlife Service's *Banking on Nature* report, visitors to refuges in the continental U.S. generated approximately \$1.7 billion of sales in 2006, creating 27,000 jobs in local communities and adding \$543 million in employment income.¹



Snow Goose at Desoto Refuge (USFWS)

The Government Accountability Office found that with continued funding constraints and an expanding list of challenges, it will be difficult to maintain the Refuge System as envisioned in law – “where the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System are maintained; priority visitor services are provided; and the strategic growth of the system is continued.”

The Refuge System typically needs an annual increase of at least \$15 million simply to keep fuel in the trucks, pay for rising utilities and building rent, and to keep pace with increases in other fixed costs. Even with the current salary freeze, the Refuge System will need an increase of about \$8 million in FY 2012 just to maintain management capabilities.

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Bison at Fort Niobara Refuge (Phyllis Cooper, USFWS)

¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2006. National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

² U.S. Wildlife Service. 2005. Banking on Nature 2004: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation.

³ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation.