

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Alaska



Since funding has been unavailable to build needed storage facilities at **Innoko National Wildlife Refuge**, managers have been forced to store fuel barrels illegally.



Because budget shortfalls limit infrastructure maintenance and repair, deteriorating and unsafe boardwalks at **Kenai National Wildlife Refuge** could result in closures to the public.



Harbor Seals at Alaska Maritime NWR

Wildlife Refuges in Alaska face \$186 million budget shortfall

Alaska is home to spectacular natural resources including 16 National Wildlife Refuges that comprise over 75% of the land area of the entire National Wildlife Refuge System. These refuges are national treasures, providing habitat to millions of migratory birds and the entire suite of Alaska's native wildlife including Moose, Caribou, Wolves, Musk Ox, Grizzly, Black, and Polar Bears, Salmon, and Bald Eagles. Each year, nearly 1.4 million visitors enjoy hiking, bird watching, environmental education, and hunting and fishing on Alaska refuges, which are also vital to Native Alaskan subsistence hunting.

Years of meager budgets coupled with ballooning fixed costs such as fuel, electricity, and salary adjustments have prevented the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from filling vital positions and completing thousands of essential projects; 255 mission-critical projects are on the shelf in Alaska today.

In 2007, Alaska refuges suffered from a shortfall of 89 critical staff positions. These essential positions will likely remain unfilled as budget shortfalls are projected for years to come. Staff losses include wildlife biologists, refuge managers, interpretive rangers that teach and guide visitors, and essential maintenance personnel. Without these people, Alaska refuges will continue to cut educational programs, close offices, allow equipment and visitor infrastructure to fall into disrepair, and significantly reduce biological management and monitoring of endangered species at certain refuges.

But there is a reasonable solution to fix these seemingly complex challenges: increase funding to \$514 million in FY 09.

About C.A.R.E.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement is a diverse coalition of 22 conservation, recreation, sporting, 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
Assateague Coastal Trust
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Izaak Walton League of America
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association of America
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Corps Network
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute*

1901 Pennsylvania Avenue NW,
Suite 407
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202.333.9075
Fax: 202.333.9077

[www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/
CareHome.html](http://www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html)



CARE recommends a \$514 million FY 2009 Operations and Maintenance budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System

The Refuge System now struggles with a crippling backlog of \$3.5 billion and needs an annual increase of \$15 million just to keep pace with inflation. \$514 million will finally lift the Refuge System above FY 04 inflation-adjusted levels, and be an important step toward reaching a level that not only prevents the Refuge System from spiraling into deeper debt, but also permits the FWS to commence long-overdue restoration or management on over 9 million acres, begin repairs on more than 11,400 deteriorating facilities, and start recovering visitor services now languishing or completely eliminated due to scarce funding and staff.

The Refuge System currently has a Maintenance backlog approaching \$2.5 billion, creating a veritable logjam of deferred maintenance projects that has handcuffed refuge staff in their pursuit to protect wildlife and serve the public. Coupled with an Operations backlog of more than \$1 billion, this funding shortfall has forced scores of missed project opportunities. Alaska refuges alone have 631 unfunded, yet essential projects totaling over \$89.9 million. The Maintenance backlog for Alaska refuges reaches nearly \$96.2 million, which severely impedes refuge staff from protecting wildlife habitat and providing for recreational opportunities.

National Wildlife Refuges are undeniable economic engines.

According to a recent economic analysis by the FWS, *Banking on Nature*

- Visitors to refuges generate impressive economic activity. In 2006, nearly 40 million people visited national wildlife refuges. Their spending generated over \$1.7 billion of sales in regional economies and created 27,000 jobs and \$543 million in employment income. These economic data do not include Alaska or Pacific island refuges, which together hosted over 2 million visitors in 2006.

- At *Kenai National Wildlife Refuge*, for every dollar appropriated to the refuge budget, an astounding \$27.75 is generated in expenditures to the local economy. Visitor spending totaled \$54.5 million, generating 734 local jobs, \$24.3 million in employment income, and \$8.6 million in total tax revenue.