

National Wildlife Refuges: Alabama Funding Crisis



Because budget shortfalls have forced downsizing, losing the assistant manager at **Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge** will result in a 50% loss of management capability and will adversely affect law enforcement, hunting programs, maintenance and administrative services.



USFWS

Endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (RCW) once thrived at **Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge**. Now, due to budget cuts, the entire biological program will be lost, along with the opportunity for RCW reintroduction and the oversight of 15 threatened and endangered species.



Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge, Alabama

Wildlife Refuges in Alabama face \$48.6 million budget shortfall

Alabama is home to spectacular natural resources including 11 national wildlife refuges. Its coastal refuges provide essential habitat for millions of migratory birds exhausted from their 500 mile flight across the Gulf of Mexico. Alabama refuges also protect forested wetlands, remnant longleaf pine forests, and many other habitats vital to hundreds of species. Over one million visitors enjoy hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and hunting and fishing each year on Alabama refuges.

Southeastern wildlife refuges need an annual increase of \$2.8 million just to meet rising salary and benefit costs. Alabama refuges alone need a \$116,000 annual increase just to retain current services. But years of flat budgets coupled with rising fixed costs such as fuel, electricity, and cost of living increases, has forced Fish and Wildlife Service to destaff and divert resources from some refuges in order to fulfill its responsibilities region-wide.

Under the new workforce restructuring plan, Alabama staffing will be reduced by 17% from 2004 levels. With the permanent loss of managers, biologists, and maintenance personnel, Alabama refuges will be forced to cut educational programs, close offices, allow equipment and visitor infrastructure to fall into disrepair, and completely eliminate biological management and monitoring of endangered species at certain refuges.

These dramatic cuts to refuge budgets and staffing have already impacted the accomplishments of Alabama's refuges, and the Refuge System admits that additional performance impacts are expected.

About C.A.R.E.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement is a diverse coalition of 21 conservation, recreation, sporting, and scientific organizations with more than 5 million members 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
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
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 Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever
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[www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/
CareHome.html](http://www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html)



CARE recommends \$451 million FY 2008 operations and maintenance budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System

In total, the Refuge System faces a crippling budget backlog of more than \$2.5 billion and needs an annual increase of \$15 million just to keep pace with inflation and rising fixed costs. Funding of \$451 million for FY 08 will return the Refuge System to a level even with its FY 04 purchasing power. This critically needed level of funding will prevent the Refuge System from spiraling into deeper debt and allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to begin restoring habitat, maintaining facilities, and expanding public use opportunities that have languished due to insufficient funding.

The Refuge System categorizes its operational needs into tiers. Considered the most urgent and important of priorities, unfunded Tier-1 projects currently number more than 2,320 and sum to over \$251 million. Of these, 919 backlogged projects are considered "mission critical." With a total operational backlog nearing \$1.23 billion, funding shortfalls have forced scores of missed project opportunities. Further, the maintenance backlog now exceeds \$1.5 billion, creating a veritable logjam of deferred maintenance projects that has handcuffed refuge staff in their pursuit to protect wildlife and serve the public.

Investing in refuges is vital for communities and for wildlife

National Wildlife Refuges are undeniable economic engines in many areas. According to a recent economic analysis by the Fish and Wildlife Service, *Banking on Nature*

- Visitors to refuges generate substantial economic activity. In FY 2004, more than 36.7 million people visited refuges for recreation. Their spending generated \$1.37 billion of sales in regional economies and created nearly 24,000 jobs and \$453.9 million in employment income.
- At *Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge* in Alabama, for every \$1 spent on the refuge's budget, almost \$20 are generated in recreational expenditures to the local economy. Over \$2 million of local tax revenues are generated through recreational expenditures.