

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Alabama



Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge needs to hire a refuge manager and a wildlife biologist to direct the first large-scale water quality analysis of the Cahaba River since 1993. That's the first step as the refuge seeks to re-establish the 11 freshwater mussel species, five fish and three snail species that are on the federal list of endangered species. All have been extirpated from the upper Cahaba River, which runs through the refuge.



The biological programs and Longleaf Pine management at **Mountain Longleaf, Cahaba, and Watercress Darter National Wildlife Refuges**, which are home to 13 endangered species, will continue to suffer without a biologist on staff.



Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge, Alabama

The National Wildlife Refuge System struggles to meet its wildlife conservation mission

In Alabama alone, 54 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf.

Alabama is home to spectacular natural resources on 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.

In 2008, close to 1.2 million visitors enjoyed hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and hunting and fishing on Alabama refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Alabama may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Alabama wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$93.5 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 49 additional positions. Those include 23 wildlife biologists, 7 guides and educators, and 17 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Alabama refuges will fall further behind in meeting the demand.

What's the solution? CARE recommends \$514 million for the Refuge System's FY 2010 Operations and Maintenance budget and an increase to at least \$765 million by FY 2013

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

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 Nature Conservancy

The Wilderness Society

The Wildlife Society

Trout Unlimited

U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance

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



Saddled with declining purchasing power and a \$3.5 billion backlog of deferred operations and maintenance projects, the National Wildlife Refuge System is in a financial vise.

The Refuge System needs an annual increase of \$15 million in its operations budget just to keep pace with inflation and demand. The Refuge System welcomed more than 41.2 million visitors in 2008, up from 33 million in 1998.

National Wildlife Refuges are undeniable economic engines.

According to the *Banking on Nature* report from the FWS:

- Spending by visitors to refuges generated more than \$1.7 billion of sales nationwide, created 27,000 jobs in local communities and added \$543 million in employment income. These economic data do not include Alaska or Pacific island refuges, which together generate millions of annual visitors.

- 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.

Yet, according to Management Systems International, a respected business consultant, the Refuge System has seen its real purchasing power decline by 11 percent between fiscal years 2003 and 2008.

The Government Accountability Office found that with continuing funding constraints and an expanding list of challenges, it may 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.”

There is a solution to safeguard the world's finest network of public lands dedicated to wildlife conservation: \$514 million in FY 2010 for the National Wildlife Refuge System and an increase to at least \$765 million by FY 2013 – steps that will restore operational quality and begin to chip away at the deferred operations and maintenance backlog.