

Defenders of Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge Program



Dedicated to Wildlife

The United States has done something no other civilization has ever done: set aside places where wildlife come first. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest system of protected areas dedicated to wildlife conservation. The Refuge System spans every state and U.S. Territory, from arctic tundra to coral reefs. The Refuge System has been responsible for bringing species back from the brink of extinction, like the whooping crane and red wolf, and is the home to some of the most spectacular concentrations of animals on the planet.

A System at a Crossroads

Crippled by funding shortfalls since its establishment over 100 years ago, the Refuge System faces increasingly complex challenges: at least 8 million acres infested with invasive species, suburban sprawl making refuges islands of habitats, competition for scarce water resources, and escalating international border crossings and control activities. Increasingly, the impacts of climate change are affecting refuges throughout the country. Constant pressure in the halls of Congress and in the field is needed to protect the hidden treasures of the Refuge System.

Staying On Course

Defenders of Wildlife has been striving for decades to strengthen the Refuge System to protect these strongholds of wildlife habitat. In 1978 Defenders won the first lawsuit brought under the Refuge Recreation Act, successfully challenging the management of motorboats at Ruby Lake refuge in Nevada which were disturbing waterfowl. Defenders' legal work in the early 1990's led to a settlement with the Fish and Wildlife Service to make over 1,000 evaluations of incompatible uses on refuges throughout the country. Defenders was a leader in the push for passage of the landmark National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act in 1997, which strengthened management standards. Defenders has also been involved in refuges on-the-



ground, working to reestablish endangered black-footed ferrets on the Charles M. Russell refuge in Montana and endangered red wolves on the Alligator River refuge in North Carolina.

Moving the System Forward

Much more needs to be done to fulfill the vision of a wildlife-first system of habitats. To accomplish this, Defenders is continuing to be a leader on national refuge policy, defending individual refuges facing nationally significant threats, promoting the Refuge System to build support, and implementing on-the-ground conservation projects to complement and "ground" our policy work.



Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, GA



Environmental Education, Lake Woodruff Refuge, FL

National Policy

What happens in the nation's capital results in money and management changes at individual refuges. Defenders is a leader in pushing for funding increases, defeating damaging policy proposals, and improving Refuge System guidance documents. Defenders is working to develop refuge climate adaptation policy, reform oil and gas management on wildlife refuges, improve habitat acquisition planning, and improve endangered species management on national wildlife refuges.

Defending Threatened Refuges

Refuges face a dizzying array of threats every day. Defenders and our conservation partners successfully blocked drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and prevented the Navy from building a landing field next to Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina. Defenders is currently involved in a number of campaigns to save individual refuges that have national implications including:

Raising Refuge System visibility

Perhaps the biggest threat to the Refuge System is its lack of public visibility. Defenders launched our annual *Refuges at Risk* series to highlight both the tremendous wildlife values of the Refuge System and the significant threats refuges face. In addition, Defenders maintains a comprehensive refuge website.

Restoring Wildlife

Defenders participates in on-the-ground conservation projects on refuges. Recent projects include:

- Post-hurricane restoration of red cockaded woodpecker nesting sites in Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana
- Developing red wolf educational materials for Alligator River and Pocosin Lakes refuges in North Carolina