

# Fiscal Cliff Dwellers

America's Wildlife Refuges on the Edge



November 2012



CARE is a national coalition of 22 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations formed in 1995. Together, these organizations represent a national constituency numbering more than 15 million Americans. Working together, and with the support of more than 200 volunteer refuge Friends groups, CARE educates Congress, the Administration and the public about America's magnificent National Wildlife Refuge System.

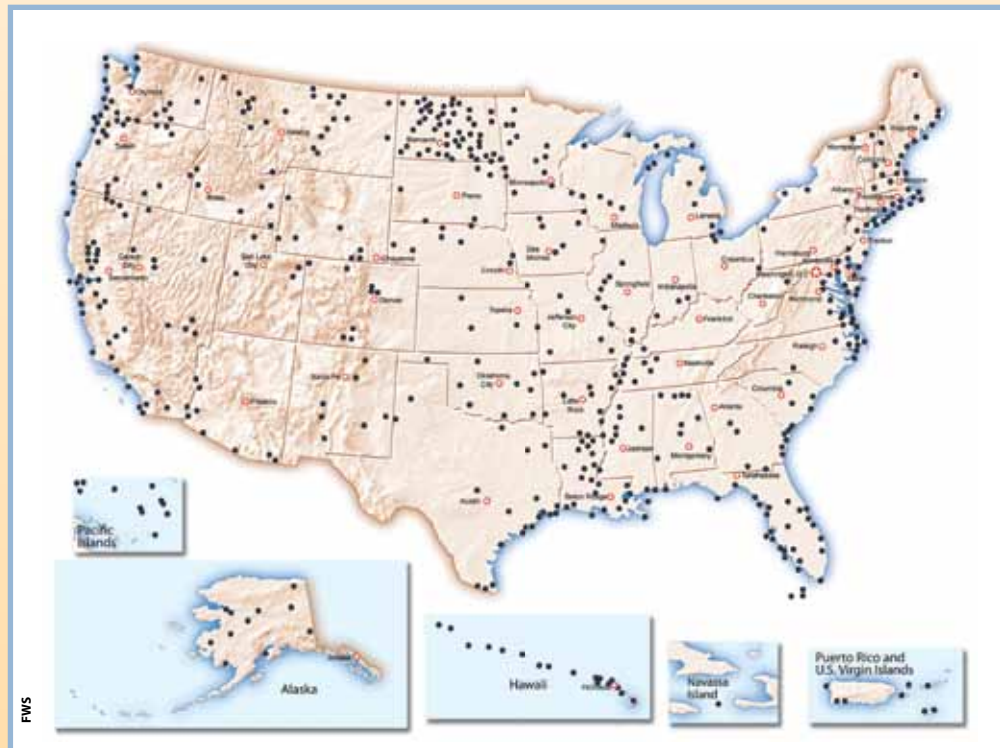
American Birding Association  
American Fisheries Society  
American Sportfishing Association  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Izaak Walton League of America  
Marine Conservation Institute  
National Audubon Society  
National Rifle Association  
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

### National Wildlife Refuge System at a Glance

- World's premier system of lands and waters devoted to wildlife conservation.
- Consists of 560 national wildlife refuges and 38 wetland management districts, with at least one refuge in every U.S. state and territory and within an hour's drive of most major metropolitan areas.
- Spans 13 time zones and covers 150 million acres, one-third of which belong to the refuges encompassed by four marine national monuments in the Pacific.
- Attracts approximately 45 million visitors each year, with a range of activities that include wildlife-watching, hunting, fishing, photography, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and environmental education.
- Provides clean air, safe drinking water and storm buffering for nearby communities.
- Generates more than \$4.2 billion for local economies and creates nearly 35,000 U.S. jobs annually.



For a copy of this report, please visit [FundRefuges.org](http://FundRefuges.org) or contact CARE at: 5335 Wisconsin Ave., Suite 521 • Washington, DC 20015 • Phone: 202.290.5593

# Top Ten Fiscal Cliff Impacts to the National Wildlife Refuge System

Should America's national wildlife refuges go over the Fiscal Cliff, both wildlife and local economies will sustain devastating impacts. CARE calls upon Congress to abandon Sequestration and fully fund the National Wildlife Refuge System.

As the nation approaches the Fiscal Cliff, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) urges Congress to abandon Sequestration and, instead, fully fund the National Wildlife Refuge System. Sequestration could cut the Refuge System's budget by nearly 10%, but coupled with an additional annual appropriation cut, the overall impact could be as much as 20%. The National Wildlife Refuge System is not a bloated bureaucracy that can absorb such cuts — the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the 150-million-acre System on a shoestring budget of only \$3.24 per acre. Further, refuges rely on the support of their Friends groups and volunteers, who perform 20% of all work done throughout the Refuge System.

Yet, when faced with the Fiscal Cliff, the Refuge System may be forced to eliminate or move staff that direct this critically important volunteer army, and radically cut successful wildlife conservation programs that help to ensure the vitality and diversity of species and habitats in America.

But it's not just about wildlife and the loss of a volunteer corps; the impact of the Refuge System going over the Fiscal Cliff could harm local economies just now emerging from the Great Recession. Approximately 45 million wildlife enthusiasts visit refuges each year, including hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers, generating an economic contribution of over \$4.2 billion and nearly 35,000 jobs.<sup>1</sup> Economists estimate that each 1 percent reduction in refuge visitation would cut \$16.9 million from local economies. Without the funding needed to keep refuges open and recreation programs running, the economic loss to local communities could be devastating.

Protecting — and adequately funding — the lands, waters, and wildlife of our 560 national wildlife refuges should be a bipartisan priority. Now, more than ever, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a worthwhile investment in America's economic recovery and future.



1. Closed Refuges and Visitor Centers
2. Lost Hunting and Fishing Opportunities
3. Volunteers Turned Away
4. Lost Revenue in Local Economies
5. Increased Poaching, Vandalism and Drug Smuggling
6. Lost Opportunities for Birding and Wildlife Watching
7. Spread of Invasive Species
8. Halted Habitat Restoration and Fire Management
9. Delayed Response to Hurricane and Natural Disaster Devastation
10. Termination of the Inventory and Monitoring Program

*“What a country chooses to save is what a country says about itself.”*

*Mollie Beattie, FWS Director 1993-1996*



# TOP 10 Fiscal Cliff Impacts to the Refuge System

## 1 Closed Refuges and Visitor Centers

Facing an almost 10% cut, the Refuge System will have no choice but to close refuges and visitor centers. Unfortunately, those with the highest visitation are usually the ones with the highest operating costs, so shutting the gates at a few popular refuges is a quick way to cut costs. That means hundreds of thousands of visitors could be turned away from iconic refuges like J.N. "Ding" Darling in Florida, Patuxent in Maryland, Kilauea Point in Hawaii and legendary World War II battle site, Midway Atoll, now home to the world's largest population of Laysan albatrosses and emergency landing site for commercial and military trans-Pacific flights.



Patuxent Research Refuge in suburban Maryland attracts visitors from around the world, but it is also one of the highest users of energy in the Refuge System.

## 2 Lost Hunting and Fishing Opportunities

With more than 320 national wildlife refuges open to hunting and about 270 refuges open to fishing, the Refuge System is an important part of keeping America's sporting tradition alive. But where will the next generation learn to sight a rising duck or hook a large-mouth bass when many refuges nationwide are forced to curtail popular hunting and fishing programs?

A 10% cut to the Refuge System could mean the end of a time-honored rite of passage for youth at refuges like Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee in Mississippi, Wichita Mountains in Oklahoma and Montezuma in upstate New York.



Popular programs such as this youth hunt at the Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR in Mississippi (above) and youth fishing derby in Georgia (right) could be halted or drastically scaled back.

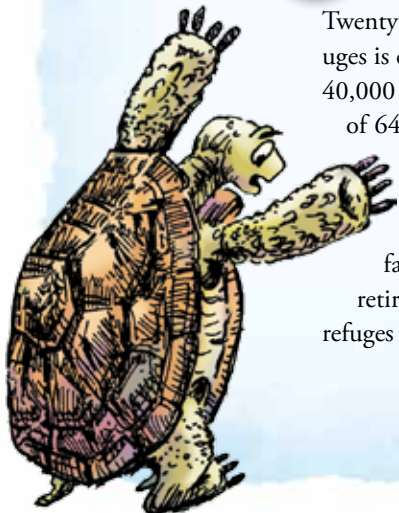


## 3 Volunteers Turned Away

Twenty percent of the work done on the nation's refuges is carried out by a dedicated corps of more than 40,000 volunteers. But that work — the equivalent of 648 full-time employees — can't be done if the staff needed to train and oversee those individuals are forced to take on other duties or even eliminated. The Refuge System may face turning away even more offers of help as retiring Baby Boomers look for national wildlife refuges where they can lend a hand.



Volunteers at the National Elk Refuge in Wyoming contribute the equivalent of 7.8 full-time employees annually, increasing the refuge's capacity by nearly 75%.

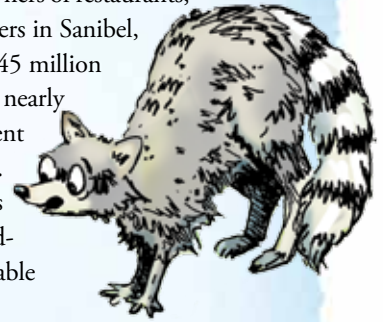




Ninety percent of the guests at The Alamo Inn are birders from all over the world who come to visit the national wildlife refuges in south Texas. Closed refuges mean closed doors for the inn.

## 4 Lost Revenue in Local Economies

Want to know how important refuges are to local economies? Just ask the owners of restaurants, hotels and gas stations in Chincoteague, Virginia, or the guides and outfitters in Sanibel, Florida, or the Chamber of Commerce for McAllen, Texas. The estimated 45 million people that visit refuges each year contribute more than \$4.2 billion and nearly 35,000 jobs to local economies, and economists estimate that every 1 percent reduction in refuge visitation would cut economic activity by \$16.9 million. Small businesses thrive because people flock to refuges for recreation. As fewer visitors are received and recreational access is restricted due to cut budgets, communities like Chincoteague, Sanibel and McAllen will lose valuable revenue, making it even harder to climb out of the Great Recession.



## 5 Increased Poaching, Vandalism and Drug Smuggling

If you encountered a crime on federal land — poaching, drug smuggling or vandalism — you would expect that your report of the incident would result in the presence of law enforcement, right? Wrong. If refuges sustain a 10% cut, your call may reach a number that is no longer in service. Federal Wildlife Officers on refuges number fewer than they did 12 years ago, yet the System has grown by over 50 million acres and serious offenses are on the rise. With a current force of just 287, when 845 are needed, and further reductions possible with Sequestration, officers will be unable to protect themselves, let alone wildlife and the public.



Budget cuts threaten the ability of Federal Wildlife Officers to assist Border Patrol at places like the Cabeza Prieta NWR along the Arizona border with Mexico.



## 6 Angry Bird-ers: Lost Opportunities for Birding and Wildlife Watching

Ever wonder what 30 million angry birders look like? Well, we just might find out if refuges like Laguna Atascosa in South Texas — which alone draws more than 200,000 wildlife watchers each year — are forced to turn them away. Unfortunately, birders showing up to fill in their “Life List” with crested caracaras and i’iwis may have to make do with the photographs in their field guide.

Birding events, like the Festival of the Cranes held at Bosque del Apache NWR in New Mexico every November, draw thousands of visitors and are a boon to local economies. Under-staffed refuges may not be able to support such festivals in the future.

## 7 Spread of Invasive Species

From rock snot to fish that walk on land, our refuges are under invasion by aliens — but not from other galaxies. Millions of acres of refuge lands are overrun with non-native, invasive plants and animals like the out-of-control Burmese pythons in south Florida. Controlling invasive outbreaks is not just about protecting native wildlife — it’s an economic issue for nearby landowners. Camas NWR in eastern Idaho works with state agencies and local landowners to control invasive plants that threaten agricultural land and vital habitat on the refuge for sage grouse — work that is absolutely critical to keeping this bird from being added to the endangered species list. But with Sequestration, it may be projects like these that the Refuge System is pulling, not the invasives.



Camas NWR in Idaho must be ever vigilant to stop outbreaks of invasive weeds in habitat critically important to sage grouse recovery.



## Halted Habitat Restoration and Fire Management

You might think that less fire is a good thing — but not necessarily for the Refuge System. Fire is one of the most important management tools that refuges have for maintaining and restoring healthy habitat. If hit with a 10% cut, refuges may be forced to let fuel build up — an unwanted side effect that could result in catastrophic fires later. As scarce dollars are used to combat massive fires in the west, fewer funds are available for management at refuges like Florida Panther NWR, where fire is an essential tool in restoring habitat for the endangered Florida panther.



In 2011, a lack of resources to do the amount of needed prescribed burning at Alligator River NWR in North Carolina led to a catastrophic fire that burned more than 45,000 acres on the refuge and adjacent lands, burning deep into the soil and costing almost \$15 million to contain.



Hurricane Sandy hammered coastal refuges such as Edwin B. Forsythe in New Jersey. From the dikes and roads that have been severely damaged to the wetlands that are now littered with debris from homes and boats, the storm caused millions in damages to the Refuge System.



## 9 Delayed Response to Hurricane and Natural Disaster Devastation

Mother Nature just hasn't gotten the memo — we're trying to emerge from the Great Recession, but she keeps hammering the Refuge System with floods, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, and even a tsunami! Fixing the damage incurred by these disasters comes with a hefty price tag. From 2005-2011, the Refuge System sustained \$693 million in damages from natural disasters, but Congress only provided \$254 million in emergency funding — the difference adding to the backlog of operations and maintenance needs. Without supplemental funding from Congress, refuges are unable to do necessary repairs unless they divert funding from other important work — creating a ripple effect that will be compounded with Sequestration cuts.

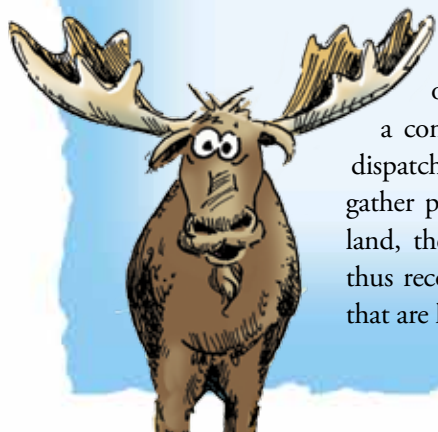


## 10 Termination of the Inventory and Monitoring Program

“Take your Best Guess” is coming to a refuge near you if the System's newly established, and desperately needed, Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) Program is hamstrung by slashed budgets before it can get off the ground. Habitats are changing and only a robust program to monitor those changes can help managers make educated decisions and help wildlife adapt. At the time of the BP oil spill in the Gulf, not one of the 35 refuges in the oil's path had a complete inventory. If the FWS had not dispatched resources from around the nation to gather priority baseline data before oil reached land, there would be no way to measure and thus recoup the full cost of damaged resources that are held in trust for the American people.



The Refuge System's I&M Program is currently working to identify future habitat needs for endangered whooping cranes. The data will help determine where to invest limited conservation dollars.





The Refuge System simply does not have the financial reserves to withstand the nearly 10% cut that would occur with Sequestration or any additional cuts should annual appropriations fall short.

Throughout America's history, there has been a tug of war over precious federal dollars to pay for our society's needs. From infrastructure and national defense to social services and education to the inherently American value of public land, we have grappled with the size of each slice of pie for our numerous and diverse interests.

Conservation funding — and particularly funding for wildlife conservation and the National Wildlife Refuge System — has always been in the crosshairs. But throughout our history, conservation-minded individuals from all walks of life and from all parts of the political spectrum have realized that investments in the conservation and health of our fellow planet inhabitants is in our own, human, best interest.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement urges Congress to ensure a future for America's wildlife heritage and fully fund our National Wildlife Refuge System.



### A Special Note:

This report's cover illustration by Sharon K. Schafer, was modeled after Pulitzer-Prize winning cartoonist J.N. "Ding" Darling's 1936 "Nobody's Constituents". Darling was a Republican who worked for a Democrat during the Great Depression, heading the U.S. Biological Survey, the forerunner of today's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He was responsible for the creation of the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, aka the Duck Stamp, which has added almost 8 million acres to the Refuge System, and also drew the iconic Blue Goose, the symbol of all National Wildlife Refuge System lands and waters. The fiscal challenges Darling faced were not unlike those we face today and we hope Congress will follow in his footsteps in recognizing that protecting our natural resources and wildlife is a benefit to the American people.

**CARE's member organizations are available to provide further information about their programs and their ongoing commitment to protecting and funding refuges.**

**American Birding Association**

Jeffrey Gordon  
719-884-8226  
jgordon@aba.org

**American Fisheries Society**

Kevin Lynch  
301-897-8616 x. 215  
klynch@fisheries.org

**American Sportfishing Association**

Libby Yranski  
703-519-9691 x.244  
lyranski@asafishing.org

**Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies**

Mark Humpert  
202-624-3637  
MHumpert@fishwildlife.org

**Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation**

Gary Kania  
202-543-6850 x. 16  
garyk@sportsmenslink.org

**Defenders of Wildlife**

Julie Kates  
202-682-9400  
jkates@defenders.org

**Ducks Unlimited, Inc.**

Caroline Garrett  
202-347-1530  
cgarrett@ducks.org

**Izaak Walton League of America**

Scott Kovarovics  
301-548-0150 x. 223  
skovarovics@iwla.org

**Marine Conservation Institute**

Emily Douce  
202-546-5346  
Emily.Douce@Marine-Conservation.org

**National Audubon Society**

Mike Daulton  
202-861-2242  
mdaulton@audubon.org

**National Rifle Association**

Susan Recce  
703-267-1541  
srecce@nrahq.org

**National Wildlife Federation**

Bentley Johnson  
202-797-6826  
johnsonb@nwf.org

**National Wildlife Refuge Association**

Desiree Sorenson-Groves  
202-290-5593  
dgroves@refugeassociation.org

**Safari Club International**

Nelson Freeman  
202-543-8733  
nfreeman@safariclub.org

**The Corps Network**

Mary Ellen Ardouny  
202-737-6272  
mardouny@corpsnetwork.org

**The Nature Conservancy**

Christie McGregor  
(703) 841-4527  
cmcgregor@TNC.ORG

**The Wilderness Society**

Alan Rowsome  
202-429-2643  
Alan\_Rowsome@twc.org

**The Wildlife Society**

Laura Bies  
301-897-9770  
laura@wildlife.org

**Trout Unlimited**

Steve Moyer  
703-522-0200  
smoyer@tu.org

**U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance**

Bill Horn  
202-659-5800  
whorn@dc.bhb.com

**Wildlife Forever**

Doug Grann  
763-253-0222  
Info@WildlifeForever.org

**Wildlife Management Institute**

Steve Williams  
717-677-4480  
swilliams@wildlifemgt.org



5335 Wisconsin Ave. • Suite 521 • Washington, DC 20015

Phone: 202.290.5593 • [www.FundRefuges.org](http://www.FundRefuges.org)

