

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Florida



As a consequence of budget cuts, **Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge** has lost a park ranger, a maintenance position, and a bio technician. If cuts continue, environmental education programs will cease and visitor center services will decline.



Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge is the Western Hemisphere's most critical nesting site for sea turtles. With the aid of a biological team or a university, the refuge seeks to conduct systematic sea turtle surveys to determine the effects of climate change, sea level rise and beach erosion on sea turtle nesting.



Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, Florida

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

In Florida alone, 184 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf.

Florida is home to spectacular natural resources including 28 National Wildlife Refuges. These wildlife refuges are national treasures and provide habitat to endangered manatees, Sea Turtles, Wood Storks and many other species. Florida's refuges encompass diverse ecosystems including wetlands, oak and pine forests, barrier islands, estuaries, mangroves and cypress swamps.

In 2008, more than 3.8 million visitors enjoyed hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and hunting and fishing on Florida refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Florida may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Florida wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that exceed \$221 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 167 additional positions. Those include 72 wildlife biologists, 27 guides and educators, and 46 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Florida 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 **J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge** in Florida, for every \$1 spent on the refuge's budget, almost \$30 are generated in recreational expenditures in the local economy. Recreational visitor spending totaled over \$47 million, generated 490 jobs, nearly \$14 million in employment income and over \$5 million in tax revenue.

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.