Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2007

The Honorable Norman Dicks
Chairman,
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
  Subcommittee
Appropriations Committee
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
  Subcommittee
Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dicks and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

As Members of Congress with strong interest in our nation's National Wildlife Refuges, we write in strong support of our National Wildlife Refuge System. As you move to develop the FY 2008 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request a funding level of $451.5 million for Refuge System operations and maintenance to help meet the immense challenges faced by refuges today.

America is blessed with an astounding diversity and abundance of wildlife, and the Refuge System has been the core of our commitment to maintaining this American treasure for over a century. With a refuge in every state, nearly 40 million Americans enjoy visiting the Refuge System each year, and their recreation dollars generate billions of dollars of economic activity. Ten years ago, Congress affirmed America's commitment to strengthen this conservation network with the passage of the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. Today, however, years of accumulating debts are driving the Refuge System to the brink of collapse.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a diverse coalition of 21 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations that represent a national constituency numbering more than 5 million, recommends increases to Refuge operations and maintenance to reach a level of nearly $1 billion by 2013. In honor of the tenth anniversary of the Refuge Improvement Act, we recommend a modest investment of $451.5 million for Refuge System operations and maintenance accounts for FY 2008.
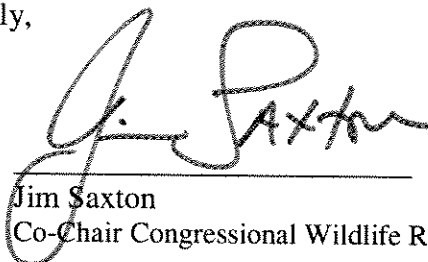
This amount reflects Congress' investment in the Refuge System for its centennial in FY 2004, adjusted for inflation. The FY 2004 level, $391.5 million was the high point for the refuge operations and maintenance accounts. Since the centennial, budgets have declined, yet the System needs a $15 million increase each year just to keep pace with inflation and fixed costs – this amount does not even address the existing maintenance backlog or other programmatic needs. Our FY 2008 recommendation simply adds $15 million to the FY 2004 level for each year since that time.

If we do not begin to address the challenges facing our Refuge System, we fear the national network of wildlife conservation lands envisioned by the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act will never come to pass. We stand ready to work with you to ensure this important federal land system is protected for the American public and future generations.

Sincerely,

Ron Kind
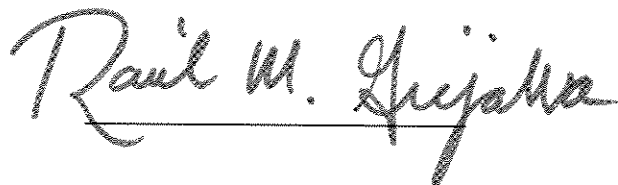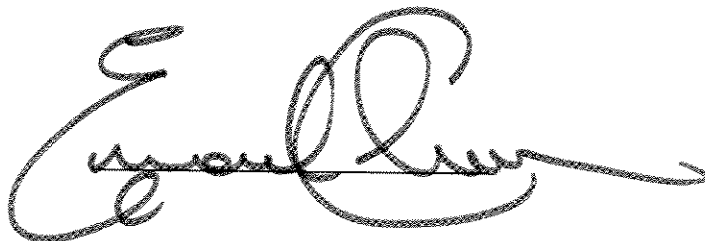Co-Chair Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus

Jim Saxton
Co-Chair Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus

Mike Thompson
Co-Chair Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus

Michael Castle
Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus Co-Chair

cc:
The Honorable David Obey, Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee

Edward J. Markey

Dale E. Kildee

Don J. Ose

Pete DeFazio

Rick Boucher

Eliot L. Engel

George Miller

Donald M. Payne

Robert Wexler

Gary L. Ackerman

Wayne T. Gilchrest

Jim Moran

Earl Blumenauer

Jim Oberstar

Matsui

Tom Davis

Rob Andrews   Chris Van Hollen

Sander Levin   Michael H. Michaud

Billy Long   Mazie K. Hirono

Henry E. Brown   (signature)

Christopher Shays   Tom Allen

Jim McDermott   Todd R. Platts

Rush Holt   John B. Larson

Lois Capps   Jim McGovern

Wm. Lacy Clay

Christopher P. Carney

Madeleine Z. Bordallo

Ed Perlmutter

Chris Van

Mike Ross

Jay Inslee

Jim Cooper

Mike Ross

Dan Boren

Frank Pallone, Jr.

Neil Abercrombie

Mark Udall

Stephanie Herseth

Jim Marshall

Keith Ellison (signature)

Bruce Braley (signature)

Steve Cohen (signature)

Don Young (signature)

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