

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Illinois



Decreasing carbon footprints and conserving energy are on the minds of today's refuge managers. The Savanna unit of Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is ready to install energy conserving devices in four administrative building. They include geo-thermal heating and cooling, tankless water heaters, and high-efficiency lighting. The measure will not only reduce annual operating costs, but also cut dependency on fossil fuels.



Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge is currently without a biologist. The loss will hinder management of the 100 acres of moist-soil and cropland that serves as habitat for Canada geese and many other migratory birds.



Great Egret--Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge, Illinois

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

In Illinois alone, 61 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf.

Illinois' 11 National Wildlife Refuges provide essential habitat to millions of migratory birds and federally endangered species like the Piping plover and Winged mapleleaf mussel. Some Illinois refuges contain bottomland hardwood forest, an increasingly-rare ecosystem that supports over 250 species of neotropical birds and at-risk species including Wood storks, Bald eagles and Black bears.

In 2008, more than 1.12 million visitors enjoyed hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and hunting and fishing on Illinois refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Illinois may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Illinois wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that exceed \$84 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 54 additional positions. Those include 17 wildlife biologists, 9 guides and educators, and 23 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Illinois 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
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National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association of America
National Wildlife Federation
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[www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/
CareHome.html](http://www.FundRefuges.org/CARE/CareHome.html)



Saddled with declining purchasing power and a \$84,084,335 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.
- For National Wildlife Refuges near the Great Lakes (IA, IL, IN, MN, MI, OH, WI), the total economic activity generated by refuge visitor spending in 2004 was nearly \$260,000. Net economic value of visitor activities, including hunting, fishing, and non-consumptive uses was nearly \$175,000.

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.