

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Iowa



Elimination of all staff at **Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge** will force recovery programs for imperiled species to grind to a halt.



National wildlife refuges are better known for their wildlife than their cultural resources, yet they are considerable. Consider the 1865 Steamboat Bertrand collection at DeSoto Refuge, where the half-a-million artifacts need professional conservation treatment. The items were recovered from the hold of the steamboat that sank April 1, 1865, carrying 250 to 450 tons of cargo, including whiskey and gold. Conserving such items is a first step. DeSoto Refuge wants to develop a plan to connect visitors emotionally and intellectually with the cultural and natural heritage of the area.



Desoto National Wildlife Refuge, Iowa

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

In Iowa alone, 50 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf.

Iowa is home to spectacular natural resources including six national wildlife refuges and one wetland management district. These refuges are national treasures, providing vital habitat to migratory birds and other wildlife. On DeSoto Wildlife Refuge alone, more than half a million waterfowl rest and feed during their annual migration. Each year, nearly 2 million visitors enjoy hiking, birding, environmental education, hunting and fishing on Iowa's refuges and wetland management district.

In 2008, more than 1.9 million visitors enjoyed hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and hunting and fishing on Iowa refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Iowa may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Iowa wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that exceed \$15.2 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 40 additional positions. Those include 14 wildlife biologists, 11 guides and educators, and 11 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Iowa 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 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
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The Nature Conservancy
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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 **De Soto National Wildlife Refuge** in Iowa, for every dollar appropriated to the refuge budget, over \$4 are generated in expenditures to the local economy. Visitor spending totaled over \$2.8 million, generated 52 jobs, \$1 million in employment income and \$364,000 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.