

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Mississippi



Feral hogs are causing an insurmountable problem at **Hillside National Wildlife Refuge**. There, more than 750 hogs are making it difficult for refuge staff to manage wetland areas for ducks and bottomland hardwood for a variety of species. The hogs are eating the food that should be available for wintering ducks. Further, some hogs have tested positive for infections that can be transmitted to other animals and ultimately may affect human health. The refuge is planning on working with the USDA's Wildlife Services to control the population.



Cypress Swamp, St. Catherine Creek NWR

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

In Mississippi alone, 83 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf

Mississippi's 15 National Wildlife Refuges provide essential habitat for millions of migratory birds and wintering waterfowl. In addition, Mississippi refuges provide critical habitat for endangered Mississippi Sandhill cranes, Red-cockaded woodpeckers, and Gopher tortoises. Eleven refuges contain bottomland hardwood forest, an increasingly-rare ecosystem that supports over 250 species of neotropical birds and at-risk species including freshwater mussels, Wood storks, Bald eagles and Black bears.

In **2008**, more than **343,000 visitors** enjoyed hiking, bird watching, environmental education, hunting and fishing on Mississippi wildlife refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Mississippi may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Mississippi wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$50 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 73 additional positions. Those include 31 wildlife biologists, 6 guides and educators, and 30 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Mississippi 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.

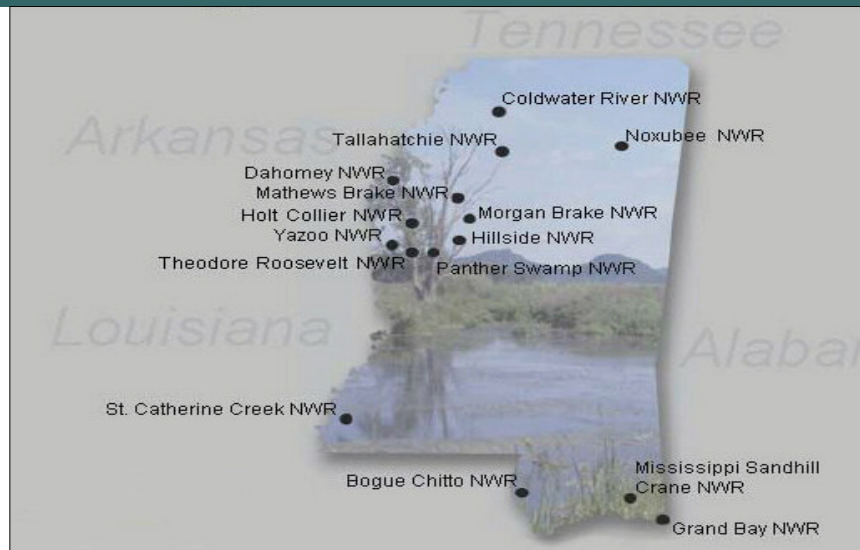
About C.A.R.E.

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
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
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
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute

1901 Pennsylvania Avenue NW,
Suite 407
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202.333.9075
Fax: 202.333.9077

[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 the **Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge Complex** in Mississippi, visitor spending generated \$1.4 million in local economic activity. Statewide, refuge visitors returned an estimated \$37 million to the local economies.

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.