

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Montana



Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge has long faced the challenging of managing noxious weeds. The refuge hopes to restore 110 acres of native mixed prairie-grassland to benefit migratory birds and other upland wildlife such as white-tailed deer, pheasant and harriers. The project will be coordinated with conservation efforts already taking place in the Bitterroot Valley and will include work with local and state agencies, schools and the Bitterroot Audubon Society.



National Bison Range NWR, Moiese, MT

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

In Montana alone, 92 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf

Montana is home to spectacular natural resources, including over 20 national wildlife refuges. These refuges are national treasures, providing habitat for Elk, Pronghorn, Bighorn Sheep, Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Bald Eagles.

In 2008, more than **530,000 visitors** enjoyed hiking, bird watching, environmental education, hunting and fishing on Montana wildlife refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Montana may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Montana wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$219 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 97 additional positions. Those include 58 wildlife biologists, 11 guides and educators, and 24 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Montana 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
Wildlife Forever
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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 **Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge** in Montana, for every dollar spent on the refuge's budget, \$8.66 are generated in recreational expenditures to the local economy. Recreational visitor spending totaled over \$14 million, generated 232 jobs, more than \$4.2 million in employment income and over \$2 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.