

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Nebraska



Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge was established to recover fish and wildlife habitat in and along the Missouri River. The refuge plans to partner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to restore shallow water spawning habitats for such native species as the endangered pallid sturgeon.



Along the river, Boyer Chute Refuge restored nearly 2,700 acres of grassland. Most of this acreage will be re-seeded with a greater variety of seeds to make this habitat more valuable for all grassland-dependent species.



Common Moorhen, Nebraska

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

In Nebraska alone, 35 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf

Nebraska is home to spectacular natural resources including six national wildlife refuges and one wetland management district. Parts of the refuge land in Nebraska was designated as Wilderness to reverse the devastating effects of the Missouri River's massive navigational development a half a century ago. Today, these wildlife refuges provide habitat for countless mammals, birds, reptiles and fish.

In **2008**, more than **242,000 visitors** enjoyed hiking, bird watching, environmental education, hunting and fishing on Nebraska wildlife refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Nebraska may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Nebraska wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$23 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 32 additional positions. Those include 15 wildlife biologists, 6 guides and educators, and 10 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Nebraska 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
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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 **Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge** in Nebraska, for every dollar spent on the refuge budget, \$4.60 are generated in expenditures to the local economy. About \$750,000 in local tax revenues are generated by visitor spending.

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.