

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Tennessee



Chickasaw National Wildlife Refuge includes the largest block of bottomland hardwood forest in Tennessee – important wintering and stop-over lands for mallards and other waterfowl. As many as 250,000 waterfowl have been seen at peak times, including black ducks, gadwall, pintail, teal, widgeon and hooded merganser.



The refuge is seeking to **restore 856 acres** of bottomland hardwood forest to benefit waterfowl and increase opportunities for hunting, wildlife photography and birding, bringing economic benefits from increased tourism.



Photo by Clayton Ferrell

Northern pintail; Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge

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

In Tennessee alone, 48 mission-critical projects sit on the shelf

Tennessee is home to 7 National Wildlife Refuges encompassing over 120,000 acres. These refuges provide vital breeding and migratory habitat for nearly 300 bird species, 51 mammals and 89 species of reptiles and amphibians. Each winter, Tennessee refuges provide sanctuary for 750,000 ducks and geese, including two-thirds of all American black ducks found in the state and 10% of the entire U.S. population.

In **2008**, more than **890,500 visitors** enjoyed hiking, bird watching, environmental education, hunting and fishing on Tennessee wildlife refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Tennessee may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Tennessee wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$87.9 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 46 additional positions. Those include 20 wildlife biologists, 7 guides and educators, and 16 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Tennessee 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
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National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association of America
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
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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 **Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge**, for every \$1 appropriated to the refuge budget, over \$12 are generated in expenditures to the local economy. Visitor spending totaled over \$12 million, generating 145 jobs, nearly \$3.2 million in employment income and \$1.2 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.