

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Texas



Laguna Atacosa Refuge, home to the larger of the two breeding ocelot populations in the United States, is ready to conduct remote monitoring of the endangered cats with GPS collars and aerial radio telemetry. Ocelots are at high risk of extirpation from the U.S. Fewer than 100 individuals are known to remain. GPS collars were once considered too heavy for the animals, but now may well be a viable alternative to standard ground telemetry in trying to identify the corridors the cats use to travel between the refuge and other protected areas.



Laguna Atacosa National Wildlife Refuge

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

In Texas alone, 102 mission-critical projects remain unfunded

Texas is home to spectacular natural resources, including 21 national wildlife refuges. These refuges are national treasures and protect ecosystems as diverse as pristine wetlands, coastal marsh, native prairie and deserts, which support countless species of birds, mammals, fish, and reptiles. Many federally endangered species rely on refuges in Texas, including Whooping cranes and Attwater prairie chickens.

In **2008**, more than **1 million visitors** enjoyed hiking, bird watching, environmental education, hunting and fishing on Texas wildlife refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Texas may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Texas wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$97.8 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 89 additional positions. Those include 33 wildlife biologists, 16 guides and educators, and 33 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Texas 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 **Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge** in Texas, for every \$1 spent on the refuge's budget, nearly \$20 are generated in recreational expenditures to the local economy. Recreational visitor spending totaled over \$5 million, generated 490 jobs, nearly \$14 million in employment income and over \$650,000 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.