

Restoring Our Refuges: A Plan for Rhode Island



At **Sachuest National Wildlife Refuge**, budget and staffing shortfalls have resulted in closure of the visitor center during the week in winter. Public education programs will also be curtailed during the winter months.



Budget cuts have forced the closure of the public contact station at **Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge**, where people come to learn about the threatened Piping Plover and many other species.



Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge

The National Refuge System struggles to meet its wildlife conservation mission

In Rhode Island, 22 mission-critical projects sit unfunded

Rhode Island is home to five national wildlife refuges, which provide breeding, stop-over and wintering habitat for millions of migratory birds. Refuges in Rhode Island provide vital habitat for many at-risk wildlife species, including Least Terns and the federally threatened Piping Plover.

In **2008**, more than **462,000 visitors** enjoy hiking, birding, wildlife photography, environmental education, and fishing on Rhode Island refuges.

Yet, national wildlife refuges in Rhode Island may not be able to continue protecting wildlife and offering world-class recreation. Rhode Island wildlife refuges are saddled with deferred operations and maintenance projects that total more than \$3.3 million.

Today, the state's wildlife refuges need at least 23 additional positions. Those include 10 wildlife biologists, 8 guides and educators, and 1 essential maintenance and enforcement personnel. Without these people, Rhode Island 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



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 **Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge** in Rhode Island, for every dollar spent on the refuge budget, \$6.25 are generated in expenditures to the local economy. About \$214,000 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.