



**American Birding Association ♦ American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association ♦ Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation ♦ Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited ♦ Izaak Walton League of America
Marine Conservation Institute ♦ 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 ♦ Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited ♦ U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Wildlife Forever ♦ Wildlife Management Institute**

May 17, 2019

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairwoman, Interior Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member, Interior Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

On behalf of our millions of members, thank you for the significant increase for the Refuge System Operations and Maintenance Fund in your FY 2020 Interior Appropriations bill. The proposed \$514 million would be a new high for the Refuge System, and we appreciate your leadership in making this budget item a priority.

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, or CARE, is a coalition of 23 wildlife conservation, hunting, fishing, marine, and outdoor-recreation-based organizations that was created in 1995 in response to declining funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Our sole mission is to advocate for increases in funding for the System.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is made up of 567 units covering 95 million land acres and 740 million acres of submerged land and water across all 50 states and 5 U.S. territories. Last year, 55.8 million visitors hiked, hunted, fished, participated in environmental education, and wildlife watched on refuges, a new high. The total economic output from recreation visits on refuges now totals \$3 billion, with 43,000 jobs supported.

Unfortunately, consistently low budgets since FY 2010 have put these lands at risk. Over half of refuges are currently unstaffed, federal wildlife officers are stretched far too thin, and staffing is so low that refuge managers are making difficult choices such as eliminating all biological or maintenance work on their refuge or ending their environmental education program. These lands belong to us all, and we must step up and fund them adequately. With the release of your FY 2020 bill, this budget line is moving in the right direction.

Thank you again, and please reach out to any of our organizations if you have any questions, or to our CARE coordinator, Caroline Brouwer, at 202-420-9625 or cbrouwer@refugeassociation.org. We look forward to working with you to ensure your \$514 million allocation is enacted into law.

Sincerely,

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement