



American Birding Association • American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association • Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation • Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited, Inc. • Izaak Walton League of America
Marine Conservation Institute • National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association • 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

April 15, 2021

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

On behalf of our 23 organizations dedicated to wildlife conservation and public lands, we welcome you to the Department of the Interior! We look forward to working together over the next four years to deliver effective conservation for wildlife populations across the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Our coalition, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement or CARE, was formed in 1995 with one purpose: increase funding for the Refuge System Operations and Maintenance Fund. Our coalition brings together diverse constituents and interests to advocate with one voice on behalf of larger budgets for the Refuge System.

The Refuge System is like none other, in terms of habitat protection, ecosystem services, and recreational opportunities. The System forms a network of 568 wildlife refuges, in every state, that harbors 513 endangered and threatened species — nearly one third of total listed species — on at least 444 refuges. Refuge lands and waters are expressly managed to conserve and restore fish, wildlife and plants, and their habitats, thereby offering one of the highest levels of federal land protection.

The Service's urban refuges program provides an opportunity distinct from other public lands designations to increase access to nature for underserved populations. Your former district contains one of the System's designated urban refuges, Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, which brings diverse communities to learn about wildlife conservation and habitat preservation just south of Albuquerque. The Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, around the banks of the Missouri River in Montana, provides incredible hunting opportunities on its more than 1.1 million acres. And the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in south Georgia is one of the

world's largest freshwater wetland sites and the largest refuge east of the continental divide at a half million acres.

Refuge managers do not have what they need to protect these American resources. Federal wildlife officers are in short supply, with staffing levels at 22% of full funding. Half of refuges have no staff on site, and make do with occasional visits from complex staff. Only 6 of the 14 designated urban refuges currently receive the additional, promised funding. And habitat is not maintained at levels to provide the necessary habitat for the innumerable species that call national wildlife refuges home.

CARE is asking that you support funding of \$600 million in the FY 2022 President's Budget Request for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance, a \$97 million boost. This amount is vital to retaining staffing positions and filling positions lost over the last decade, protecting threatened and endangered species, supporting recreation programs, and addressing a myriad of maintenance issues, such as prescribed fire, refuge roads, erosion, and invasive species.

We appreciate your attention on this issue as you begin your second week at the Department of the Interior. We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss the issues brought up above, and look forward to meeting you. The contact to set up a meeting is Caroline Brouwer, at the National Wildlife Refuge Association, cbrouwer@refugeassociation.org.

Sincerely,

The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement

cc: Shannon Estenoz, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
Martha Williams, Principal Deputy Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Cynthia Martinez, Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System