

Submitted by [name], [title], [institutional affiliation]

[date]

Written Testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Concerning Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the
National Wildlife Refuge System

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of _____, which was formed in _____ to support the _____ National Wildlife Refuge. *[or, “I am submitting this testimony as a volunteer at _____ National Wildlife Refuge in CITY, STATE.”]* We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Interior Appropriations bill. We request Congress to allocate \$602.3 million in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance account under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

**Paragraph about the refuge and your Friends group.*

**Why the refuge is important to your community, and what the Friends group does to support the refuge and the community.*

Since 2010 the Refuge System has added 21 new refuge units, 549 million submerged marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 68 million annual visitors—an increase of 47 percent since FY2011. While these additions have enhanced the Refuge System and benefited the communities around these refuges, this growth has also put more pressure on the already stressed and underfunded Refuge System.

Funding for the Refuge System has only increased by 4.7% since FY2010 to \$527 million, or \$5.55 per land acre. When accounting for total land and water acres, the Refuge System budget is a mere .62¢ per acre. Considering the level of inflation, annual fixed costs, and increased needs of the Refuge System since FY2010, the Refuge System budget has effectively decreased.

The number of full-time employees (FTEs)—already a fraction of the other comparable federal land agencies at ~2,500 FTEs—has decreased by 16% since FY2010. This has made it difficult for the Refuge System to manage its vast network of lands and waters and to fulfill its mission of conserving wildlife and habitats. The insufficient funding and capacity impacts are felt System-wide, impacting conservation planning, wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, and maintenance. No refuges are fully staffed, and more than half of refuges have zero staff on site. Multiple refuges have been closed to the public and are completely unmanaged. Many employees must manage multiple wildlife refuge units, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles per day. Many volunteer programs have also been cut back or eliminated due to a lack of supervision from professional FTEs or necessary infrastructure.

***Anything further you want to say.*

We urge Congress to prioritize the Refuge System and address these overarching funding challenges to ensure that the USFWS is equipped to effectively manage the wildlife, habitat, programs, and visitorship that rely on the health and integrity of the Refuge System. Ultimately, the Refuge System needs at least \$2.2 billion in annual appropriations to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature. The President's FY2025 Budget Request of \$602.3 million is an important step towards that goal.

Thank you for considering our request of \$602.3 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System in FY2025. Please feel free to contact _____, the (President, Secretary, etc) of the Friends of _____ at _____.