Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2009

The Honorable Norman Dicks, Chairman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson, Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Dicks and Ranking Member Simpson:

As Members of Congress who value our nation's magnificent wildlife and outdoor heritage, we write to thank you for your past support of our National Wildlife Refuge System and to respectfully request your support for funding the Refuge System at $514 million in the FY 2010 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

In order to overcome decades of inadequate funding and accumulating challenges, an analysis developed by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement entitled, "*Restoring America's Wildlife Legacy,*" identified that the annual operations and maintenance budget for the Refuge System should total $765 million by FY 2013. We agree and believe that gradual increments to reach this level over the five-year period require funding the Refuge System at $514 million in FY 2010. Such funding will ensure the Refuge System will be able to properly administer its nearly 150 million acres, host educational nature programs for schoolchildren, restore degraded wildlife habitat, and much more. Without additional increases the Refuge System will face the loss of another 250 jobs, after already eliminating 300 jobs over the last few years.

Through your leadership the Refuge System's operations and maintenance budget received much needed funding increases in FY 2008 and FY 2009. The FY 2008 funding increase and the FY 2009 funding level of $462.8 million are a significant step in restoring the commitment first made to America's wildlife by Teddy Roosevelt more than 100 years ago. However, even these increases fall below the inflation-adjusted FY 2004 level, the high water mark for the Refuge System at its centennial.

Each year, rising fixed costs erode the funding provided – the Refuge System needs an increase of at least $15 million each year just to break even. Though the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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(FWS) has implemented cost saving measures, the Refuge System has reached a tipping point. To address the funding shortfall, FWS announced over a year ago a massive downsizing plan for the Refuge System that if fully implemented would result in a devastating 20 percent cut in staff. Scores of refuges will be completely de-staffed, significant acreage will be remotely managed by distantly located staff, and services to the public and wildlife will be significantly cut, including loss of law enforcement, hunting and fishing programs, invasive species control, species restoration, and environmental education and other public use programs. Many of these dramatic cuts have already occurred, but we can still avoid the worst of the downsizing by increasing the budget now.

Similarly, the recently enacted economic recovery package will allow FWS to create jobs and help stimulate local economies while reducing the $3.5 billion backlog of mission critical projects. However, economic recovery funds are designed to finance specific, short-term projects. To ensure the Refuge System can meet accumulating challenges, we believe it is important to ensure adequate, constant and sustained funding through the appropriations process. With an appropriation of $514 million in FY 2010 we can continue that commitment and reinvigorate our 549 wildlife refuges.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is our nation's wildlife trust. America is blessed with an astounding diversity and abundance of wildlife, and the Refuge System forms the core of our commitment to maintaining this American treasure for generations. Over 40 million Americans enjoy visiting the Refuge System each year, and their travel and recreation generates $1.7 billion in sales to regional economies, and creates more than 27,000 jobs and $543 million in employment income. Our Refuge System is the premiere wildlife system in the world, yet years of accumulating debts are putting this national treasure at risk.

We hope you will join us in support of $514 million for the Refuge System in FY 2010 to ensure this important federal lands system is maintained for the American public. Again, thank you for your leadership in supporting and safeguarding our National Wildlife Refuge System.

Sincerely,

Mike Castle

Michael N. Castle
Wildlife Refuge Caucus Co-Chair

Mike Thompson

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Wildlife Refuge Caucus Co-Chair

Frank A. LoBiondo

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Wildlife Refuge Caucus Co-Chair

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