

CAPITOL COMMENTS

Focusing On The Bigger Picture



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It has been fashionable to chastise members of Congress for their apparently polarized views of major wildlife and natural resource issues. In practice, polarization among organizations that claim to be committed to the future of wildlife and habitats has been equally visible, and nonproductive. Recent successes by diverse organizations focusing on issues of common concern have again displayed the value of working together, and the futility of separate, polarized approaches.

For more than a decade various organizations and inter-

ests tugged and pulled over the future of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Years of intensive discussions and negotiations led to drafts of legislation that somehow couldn't pull a winner together. Perceived threats of refuge closure to public hunting fueled one advocacy approach; perceived threats to the integrity of biological resources and non-recreational values of refuges and their wildlife fueled another.

The result was a confused public and Congress, which stalled attempts to improve refuge management for fish and wildlife, habitats and people.

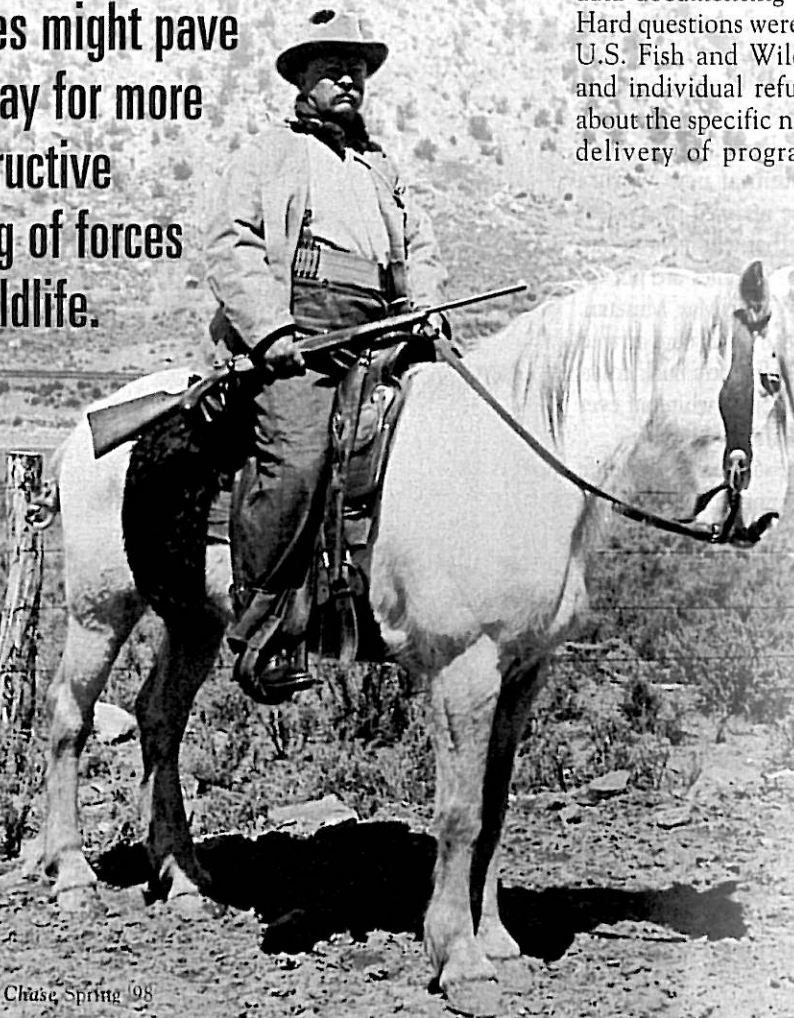
A breakthrough occurred in 1995 when a variety of interest groups listened to assessments of unmet needs for operating and maintaining national wildlife refuges. They examined a growing body of systematically gathered data documenting those needs. Hard questions were asked of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and individual refuge managers about the specific needs, and the delivery of programs to both

wildlife and the public. It became clear that collection of this information, refuge by refuge, state by state, for the more than 500 national wildlife refuges presented a strong case. In fact, the National Wildlife Refuge System has the strongest and best documented case for its needs of any of the federal land management agencies.

Armed with that information, the previously polarized groups joined together to form the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE). This alliance developed a single focus, to work together to see that adequate funding was provided to operate and manage our national wildlife refuges so that they can meet the needs of wildlife, their habitats and people. No one pretended that there weren't differences over individual ideas of what refuges were for, but the funding issue had highest priority. CARE members realized that no group's interest would be satisfied, whether they were a hunter, a bird watcher, or both, unless refuges were effectively managed. This realization produced a powerful unity of purpose within the group.

In response to questions raised at congressional hearings and in contacts with members of Congress, CARE developed a specific plan for restoring the effectiveness of national wildlife refuges during a six-year period, ending in 2003, the one hundredth year since President Roosevelt established the first national wildlife refuge. This plan, "Restoring America's Wildlife Legacy," calls for gradual increase in funding to meet the basic needs of staffing, operating, restoring and maintaining the National Wildlife Refuge System. This was not the "Cadillac plan" to build all the visitor centers and provide all the public use facilities we might want, but

One can imagine Theodore Roosevelt watching with interest, wondering whether actions taken for wildlife refuges might pave the way for more constructive joining of forces for wildlife.



rather, a plan to assure that each of the refuges could manage the habitats and produce the wildlife that it was originally established to do.

A lot of hard work by a variety of organizations spanned a full three years before significant success was achieved. CARE developed a case that demonstrated both the needs and likely returns to the people of that area for each state. Marketing the plan, providing members of Congress and the Administration the firm data upon which the plan was based, and demonstrating the strength and commitment of the variety of groups comprising CARE had a strong impact. Even in a time of fiscal austerity, Congress was very receptive and liberal and conservative members alike responded positively to the need for additional funding.

A clear asset to the CARE effort has been a mechanism to assure fiscal accountability. The Fish and Wildlife Service has provided convincing data to demonstrate refuge needs. For the first time, refuge-by-refuge plans for fixing things were documented in budget requests to Congress. Members of CARE are visiting refuges to verify that the funds are getting to refuges to do the work as expected. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jamie Clark and her staff have committed to continuing the open process of documenting needs and progress. This cooperative spirit will help the CARE effort, sustain positive congressional interest, and assure a brighter future for national wildlife refuges.

The result for 1998 is a \$41 million increase in the operating and maintenance budget for the national wildlife refuges. It represents the largest increase in more than 20 years. This matched the amount needed in the first year of CARE's six-year

plan. Members of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus from both sides of the aisle stepped forward, led by Representatives Don Young, John Tanner, John Dingell, Jim Saxton, Randy Cunningham, Saxby Chamblis and others in the House. In the Senate, Senators Dirk Kempthorne, Bob Graham, and others provided their support. Key appropriations chairmen—Bob Livingston and Ralph Regula in the House and Ted Stevens and Slade Gorton in the Senate—allocated funds that were needed.

At the same time that CARE work was unifying groups over the operation and maintenance funding issues for refuges, there was still polarization on refuge legislation. Early in 1997, Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt brought a small group of organizations together to seek a compromise. These included the National Audubon Society, Wildlife Management Institute, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and Wildlife Legislative Fund of America. Joining the discussions were staff representing Representatives Don Young, John Dingell, George Miller, and Senator Bob Graham. In a series of meetings

during two months' time, the group proposed a compromise to the legislation that finally brought agreement.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, proposed by Congressman Don Young, chairman of the House Resources Committee (a Boone and Crockett Club member) and other House leaders, was supported by Secretary Babbitt and the Clinton Administration. Leadership by Senators Dirk Kempthorne and Bob Graham moved the bill with few changes, and it was eventually affirmed almost unanimously in both the House and Senate. Without going into all of the details, the legislation put management of habitats

COOPERATIVE ALLIANCE FOR REFUGE ENHANCEMENT

American Fisheries Society
 American Sportfishing Association
 Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
 Defenders of Wildlife
 Ducks Unlimited
 Izaak Walton League of America
 International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
 National Audubon Society
 National Wildlife Federation
 National Rifle Association of America
 National Wildlife Refuge Association
 Safari Club International
 Trout Unlimited
 The Wilderness Society
 The Wildlife Legislative Fund of America
 The Wildlife Management Institute
 The Wildlife Society

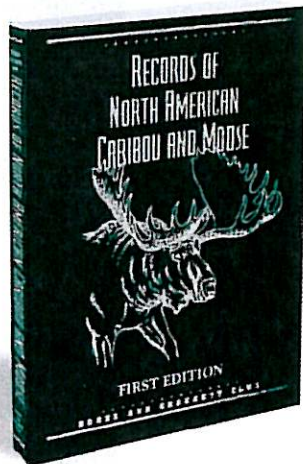
RESOURCES TO MANAGE PUBLIC LANDS

	FY1997 O&M Budget (\$ millions)	FTEs	Acres (millions)	\$/Acre	Acres/FTE
National Parks	1,154,611	17,305	80.7	14.31	4,663
National Forests	1,274,781	18,141	191.0	6.67	10,529
Bureau of Land Man.	514,341	6,879	270.0	1.90	39,250
Refuge System	178,140	2,306	92.6	1.92	40,156

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for fish and wildlife first, but then clearly spelled out priorities for recreational and other human uses of those resources. After more than a decade of controversy, the needs of wildlife on national wildlife refuges are provided for, as are those of hunters and other resource users.

There was some synergy in the outcomes of these two separate efforts, which is the point of this story. By setting aside differences and getting hard information on the issues, organizations defused the spurious arguments between them, focused on the real issue, found common ground, and achieved positive results for themselves as well as for the refuge system.

efforts to become more effective. This is a lesson that serves well whether one is a working employee or member of a wildlife organization, or a member of Congress. The CARE effort is proceeding into the second year of implementing the plan with the firm challenge of getting broader support for restoring the refuge system by the year 2003. To be truly effective, this effort cannot be a single-year appropriations "fix," but one that must focus on achieving a longer term purpose. The plan advanced by CARE must find a champion -- perhaps a leader in the Congress who believes the benefits to wildlife and the

REFUGE ACREAGE AND UNITS AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 1997

	Number	Number of Acres
Refuges	512	90.1 million
Wetland Management Districts	38	2.5 million
Coordination Areas	50	.3 million
Total National Wildlife Refuge System		92.9 million

283 refuges are open to hunting
276 refuges are open to fishing
30 million visitors per year

Three successes came out of this: 1) a working relationship among groups that had not commonly worked together; 2) more money to operate and maintain national wildlife refuges; and in a separate but related outcome 3) legislation establishing the purpose of refuges. Above all, this cooperative approach got results when other approaches were failing.

This was not a mysterious outcome by amorphous organizations, but rather, accommodations by individuals representing the organizations who didn't give up pursuit of what they needed to serve their interests, but learned enough and became wise enough to join

American people are worth taking this effort to completion.

The model presented by CARE is being explored in discussions concerning endangered species, wetlands, managing our public lands for timber or grazing and directing a larger proportion of the federal budget to managing natural resources. Success will depend upon those involved focusing on the big picture and not missing "the forest for the trees." One can imagine Theodore Roosevelt watching with interest, wondering whether actions taken for wildlife refuges might pave the way for more constructive joining of forces for wildlife. ▲▲▲