

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES.

Designating the week beginning on October 13, 2024, as “National Wildlife Refuge Week”.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. COONS submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on _____

RESOLUTION

Designating the week beginning on October 13, 2024, as “National Wildlife Refuge Week”.

Whereas the United States Fish and Wildlife Service administers the National Wildlife Refuge System to conserve, manage, and, where appropriate, restore fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of current and future generations;

Whereas, in 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established the first national wildlife refuge on Pelican Island in Florida;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System is administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and has grown to include 572 national wildlife refuges, 38 wetland management districts, and 5 marine national monu-

ments with units located in every State and territory of the United States;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses more than 850,000,000 acres of unique habitats and ecosystems, including tropical and boreal forests, wetlands, deserts, grasslands, arctic tundras, remote islands, and marine areas, and spans 12 time zones from the United States Virgin Islands to Guam;

Whereas national wildlife refuges support approximately 800 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 1,100 species of fish;

Whereas national wildlife refuges provide protection to more than 380 threatened species and endangered species;

Whereas more than 65 national wildlife refuges were established to conserve species considered to be threatened or endangered under Federal standards, including the American crocodile, California condor, Devil's Hole pupfish, and Antioch Dunes evening primrose;

Whereas national wildlife refuges are the primary Federal lands that support waterfowl habitat;

Whereas, since 1934, the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund has generated more than \$2,000,000,000 and enabled the conservation of more than 6,300,000 acres of habitat for waterfowl and numerous other species in the National Wildlife Refuge System;

Whereas national wildlife refuges protect and conserve climate-resilient habitats that support biodiversity and provide nature-based solutions;

Whereas more than 180 national wildlife refuges conserve marine, coastal, and Great Lakes habitats, helping to protect communities by reducing the risk of storm-surge

flooding, especially in low-lying floodplain and coastal areas;

Whereas many national wildlife refuges are managed to reduce wildfire risk by thinning overgrown forests and removing invasive species;

Whereas meaningful engagement and proactive collaboration with Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, Alaska Native organizations, and the Native Hawaiian community is an integral aspect of the co-stewardship of our shared natural resources, including National Wildlife Refuge System lands and waters;

Whereas important cultural and historic resources are protected on national wildlife refuges, including—

(1) archaeological sites detailing the lives of Native Americans and early colonists at Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia;

(2) World War II sites in the Pacific, from Attu in Alaska to Midway Atoll in the Hawaiian Islands; and

(3) the remains of the home of the father of Harriet Tubman at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Maryland;

Whereas Tribal consultation is a cornerstone of historic preservation on national wildlife refuges where cultural resources and traditional sacred spaces are important to Native American Tribes, including Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada, where the Nuwuvi people finalized a plan with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to respect and showcase ancient petroglyphs;

Whereas national wildlife refuges use a range of management tools, including fire management, invasive species control, water management, wildlife health assessments, inventory

and monitoring species, facility condition assessments, 5-year infrastructure project plans, and other tools to conserve habitat and ensure opportunities for public access and recreation;

Whereas national wildlife refuges are important recreational and tourism destinations in communities across the United States, and offer a variety of recreational opportunities, including sustainable hunting and fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System receives more than 68,000,000 annual visits which—

- (1) generate more than \$3,200,000,000 for local economies; and
- (2) support 41,000 jobs;

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge System hosts nearly 42,000,000 annual birding and wildlife observation visits;

Whereas national wildlife refuges are important to local businesses and gateway communities;

Whereas, for every dollar appropriated to the National Wildlife Refuge System, an average of approximately 5 dollars is returned to local economies;

Whereas 436 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System have hunting programs and 378 units have fishing programs which support, respectively, more than 2,600,000 hunting visits and more than 8,600,000 fishing visits annually;

Whereas national wildlife refuges provide an important opportunity for children to discover and gain a greater appreciation for the natural world;

Whereas, in fiscal year 2023, more than 23,000 volunteers contributed approximately 900,000 volunteer hours in national wildlife refuges, which is equal to the number of hours worked by 550 full-time employees;

Whereas approximately 180 national wildlife refuge “Friends” organizations provide additional volunteer labor and serve as an important link between national wildlife refuges and local communities;

Whereas 101 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System are within 25 miles of population centers of 250,000 people or more;

Whereas, through the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service works to dismantle barriers that have blocked underserved communities from full and equal participation in outdoor recreation and wildlife conservation;

Whereas the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program fosters strong new conservation coalitions, educates and employs youth, engages communities, builds trust in government, and connects individuals with nature;

Whereas national wildlife refuges provide opportunities for people from all backgrounds to explore, connect with, and preserve the natural heritage of the United States;

Whereas, since 1995, national wildlife refuges across the United States have held festivals, educational programs, guided tours, and other events to celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week during the second full week of October;

Whereas the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has designated the week beginning on October 13, 2024, as National Wildlife Refuge Week; and

Whereas the designation of National Wildlife Refuge Week by the Senate would recognize more than a century of conservation in the United States, raise awareness about the importance of wildlife and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and celebrate the myriad recreational opportunities available for the enjoyment of this network of protected lands: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) designates the week beginning on October
3 13, 2024, as “National Wildlife Refuge Week”;

4 (2) encourages the observance of National Wild-
5 life Refuge Week with appropriate events and activi-
6 ties;

7 (3) recognizes the importance of national wild-
8 life refuges to wildlife conservation, the protection of
9 imperiled species and ecosystems, and wildlife-de-
10 pendent recreational uses;

11 (4) acknowledges the importance of national
12 wildlife refuges for their recreational opportunities
13 and contribution to local economies across the
14 United States;

15 (5) identifies the significance of national wild-
16 life refuges in advancing the traditions of wildlife ob-
17 servation, photography, and interpretation, as well
18 as environmental education;

1 (6) finds that national wildlife refuges play a
2 vital role in securing the hunting and fishing herit-
3 age of the United States for future generations;

4 (7) recognizes the important work of urban na-
5 tional wildlife refuges in welcoming racially and eth-
6 nically diverse urban communities that were long ex-
7 cluded, including work—

8 (A) to foster strong new conservation coali-
9 tions;

10 (B) to provide education and employment
11 opportunities to youth;

12 (C) to improve communities;

13 (D) to build trust in government; and

14 (E) to connect individuals with nature;

15 (8) recognizes the commitment of the National
16 Wildlife Refuge System to engagement, relation-
17 ships, knowledge-sharing, and co-stewardship of Na-
18 tional Wildlife Refuge System lands and waters with
19 Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, Alaska Native
20 organizations, and the Native Hawaiian community;

21 (9) acknowledges the role of national wildlife
22 refuges in conserving waterfowl and waterfowl habi-
23 tat under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C.
24 703 et seq.);

1 (10) reaffirms the support of the Senate for
2 wildlife conservation and the National Wildlife Ref-
3 uge System; and
4 (11) expresses the intent of the Senate—
5 (A) to continue working to conserve wild-
6 life; and
7 (B) to support the management by the
8 United States Fish and Wildlife Service of the
9 National Wildlife Refuge System for current
10 and future generations.