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## 2016 Federal Budget Boosts Refuge System



President Obama's proposed 2016 budget (which is pending congressional review) provides for much-needed increases for the US FWS and the refuge system. No one knows if the increase will survive the congressional budget battles to come, but at least it indicates that the President recognizes the importance of providing adequate funding to maintain and expand this vital resource.

The following article is provided by Martha Nudel, chief of the Communications Branch of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the system's publication *Friends Newswire*.

### **President Requests \$1.6 Billion in Fiscal Year 2016 for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

The President's Fiscal Year 2016 discretionary budget request supports \$1.6 billion in programs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an increase of \$135.7 million over the 2015 enacted level.

"Investing in the conservation of our wildlife and habitat resources results in myriad health and economic benefits to U.S. communities," said Service Director Dan Ashe. "Investing in the next American generation is also critical, so we are creating new ways to engage young audiences in outdoor experiences, both on wildlife refuges and partner lands. With 80 percent of the U.S. population currently residing in urban communities, helping urban dwellers to rediscover the outdoors is a priority for the Service."

This budget invests in the science-based conservation and restoration of land, water and native species on a landscape scale, considering the impacts of a changing climate; expansion and improvement of recreational opportunities — such as hunting, fishing and wildlife watching — for all Americans, including urban populations; increased efforts to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, which is an international crisis; and the operation and maintenance of public lands.

**America's Great Outdoors** – This initiative, a Service priority, seeks to empower all Americans to share the benefits of the outdoors, and leave a healthy, vibrant outdoor legacy for generations to come. In 2016, a total of \$1.5 billion in current funding is proposed for the Service as part of the Administration's initiative to reconnect Americans to the outdoors while developing a landscape level understanding of a changing climate. This includes \$1.3 billion for Service operations, an increase of \$119.2 million over the 2015 enacted level.



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A critical component of America's Great Outdoors is the **National Wildlife Refuge System**. Funding for the operation and maintenance of the Refuge System is requested at \$508.2 million, an increase of \$34 million above the 2015 enacted level. Included in that increase is an additional \$5 million for the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, which will extend opportunities to engage more urban youth and adults.

The budget also requests \$108.3 million for grant programs administered by the Service that support America's Great Outdoors goals. Programs such as the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants are an important source of funds for the conservation and improvement of a range of wildlife and the landscapes on which they depend.

**Land Acquisition** – The 2016 Federal Land Acquisition program builds on efforts started in 2011 to strategically invest in the highest priority conservation areas through better coordination among Department of the Interior agencies and the U.S. Forest Service. This budget includes \$164.8 million for federal land acquisition, composed of \$58.5 million in current funding and \$106.3 million in proposed permanent funding. The budget provides an overall increase of \$117.2 million above the 2015 enacted level. An emphasis on the use of these funds is to work with willing landowners to secure public access to places to recreate, hunt and fish.

**Cooperative Recovery** – Species recovery is another important Service priority addressed in this budget. For 2016, the President requests a total of \$10.7 million, an increase of \$4.8 million over the enacted level, for cooperative recovery. The focus will be on implementing recovery actions for species nearing delisting or reclassification from endangered to threatened, and actions that are urgently needed for critically endangered species.

**Ecological Services** – The budget includes \$258.2 million to conserve, protect and enhance listed and at-risk wildlife and their habitats, an increase of \$32.3 million compared with the 2015 enacted level. These increases include a \$4 million program increase to support conservation of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem, which extends across 11 states in the intermountain West. Conservation of this vast area requires a collaborative effort unprecedented in geographic scope and magnitude. To achieve sustainable conservation success for this ecosystem, the Service has identified priority needs for basic scientific expertise, technical assistance for on-the-ground support, and internal and external coordination, and partnership building with western states, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and other partners.

Additionally, the budget request contains a \$4 million increase to ensure appropriate design and quick approval of important restoration projects that will be occurring in the Gulf of Mexico region in the near future. The Gulf of Mexico Watershed spans 31 states and is critical to the health and vitality of our nation's natural and economic resources. The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill dramatically increased the urgency of the Service's work in the Gulf and our leadership responsibilities. Over the course of the next decade, billions of dollars in settlement funds, Clean Water Act penalties and Natural Resource Damage Assessment restitution will be directed toward projects to study and restore wildlife habitat in the Gulf of Mexico region. The Service is in high demand to provide technical assistance and environmental clearances for these projects, and this funding will ensure that this demand can be met.

To learn more about the President's FY 2016 budget request for the Department of the Interior, visit: [www.doi.gov/budget](http://www.doi.gov/budget).