

Refuge Visitor Services

Program Elements	FY 2005 Actual ¹	FY 2006 Enacted	FY 2007			Change From 2006 (+/-)
			Fixed Costs & Related Changes (+/-)	Program Changes (+/-)	Budget Request	
Refuge Visitor Services	[58,700]	58,887	+1,041	+1,319 ^a	61,247	+2,360
<i>FTE</i>	[697]	700	-	-	700	-
Visitor Facility Enhancements	[1,972]	985	-	-985	-	-985
<i>FTE</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Volunteers	[746]	735	-	-	735	-
<i>FTE</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Challenge Cost Share	[1,386]	1,426	-	+1,876	3,302	+1,876
<i>FTE</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Refuge Visitor Services	[62,805]	62,033	1,041	2,210	65,284	+3,251
<i>FTE</i>	[697]	700	-	-	700	-

¹ Congress approved a new budget structure for the National Wildlife Refuge System beginning in FY 2006. FY 2005 funding and FTE are shown here in the new budget structure for comparison purposes only, and do not reflect actual expenditures in the new budget structure.

^a Includes +1,388 program change and -69 program management savings.

Summary of FY 2007 Programmatic Changes for Refuge Visitor Services

Request Component	Amount	FTE
Programmatic Changes		
• Refuge Visitor Services	+1,388	
• Visitor Facility Enhancements	-985	
• Challenge Cost Share	+1,876	
• Program Management Savings	-69	
TOTAL, Program Changes	+2,210	
Related Program Changes		
Add New Sites to Refuge Recreation Fee Program	+550	
Total Program and Related Account Changes for Refuge Visitor Services	2,760	

Justification of FY 2007 Program Changes

The FY 2007 budget request for Refuge Visitor Services is \$65,284,000 and 700 FTE, a net program increase of \$2,210,000 and 0 FTE from the 2006 enacted level.

Refuge Visitor Services (+\$1,388,000) Of the total requested increase, \$403,000 will support achievement of strategic goals including creating opportunities for local citizens in Friends organizations to promote community conservation stewardship programs on refuges and adjacent lands and performing scientific studies on prospective cultural resource sites. Projects will bring better quality wildlife dependent recreation to communities, strengthen community bonds through wildlife conservation and environmental education partnership initiatives, and protect cultural resources. Between 7 and 15 high priority projects will be funded across the National Wildlife Refuge System, serving diverse communities of citizens.

With the remaining increase of \$985,000, the Service will target projects aimed at small visitor-centered facilities in 28 communities so that visitors may better learn about wildlife on their local refuge. These low-cost construction projects such as boat docks, boardwalks, piers, blinds, and observation towers reach more community members with greater efficiency and decreased operational and maintenance costs than large visitor facility projects. They increase the quality of visitors' wildlife experiences, which directly affects visitors' willingness to volunteer. Such projects also help manage the impact of public use on natural resources by steering people away from sensitive areas.

Challenge Cost Share Projects (+\$1,876,000) An increase in Challenge Cost Share funding, along with a 1:1 matching ratio from community partners, will support projects that increase the rewards of programs for visitors and leverage volunteer contributions. The refuge system fulfills the vision established through the Secretary's "4Cs" philosophy – conservation through communication, consultation and cooperation - through implementation of CCS. The requested increase would support 20 community partnerships and raise a minimum of \$1,876,000 in private matching funds. Cost-shared projects that welcome and orient visitors, promote appreciation of wildlife through photography and strategic communications, and provide quality recreation opportunities contribute to the program's performance measures to increase volunteer contributions and complete of cost-shared projects on wildlife refuges.

Visitor Facility Enhancements (-\$985,000) In FY 2006, Congress provided unrequested funds for refuge Visitor Facility Enhancements (VFEs). These are small construction projects such as docks, boat launches, interpretive signs, kiosks, piers, observation towers, boardwalks, and trails that allow visitors to experience refuges in a more meaningful and efficient manner (as opposed to costly visitor centers). The FY 2007 budget does not continue funding this project, however. The Service continues to fulfill the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 by prioritizing part of its general program increase to address visitor facility needs.

Program Management Savings (-\$69,000) To enable the Service to address its highest priorities during constrained fiscal times, the Service proposes reducing program administrative funding by \$1,980,000. Using Activity Based Cost information and other budgetary analyses the Service anticipates achieving a savings of \$69,000 in Refuge Visitor Services. These savings will be realized by streamlining program administrative support activities.

Add New Sites to Refuge Recreation Fee Program (+\$550,000) - The 2002 and 2004 national visitor satisfaction surveys of the refuge system showed that the majority of visitors are satisfied with the amount of fees paid currently, and a recent market analysis of current fee structures does not support an increase in fees. After reviewing the results of these surveys, the Service intends to bring in more sites rather than raise existing fees. The Service does not need additional authorizing language to take this action, since the recreation fee program is authorized through 2014 by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act passed in 2004. The Service plans to bring in 60 new sites to the existing program for an estimated total of \$550,000 in increased revenue.

Program Performance Change Table

Total Performance Change		+3 refuges with a cost-shared project			
	A	B	C	D=B+C	E
Overall Performance Changes from 2006 to 2007					
Measure	2006 Enacted Performance	2007 Base Performance	2007 Impact of Program Change on Performance	2007 Budget Request Performance	Out-year Impact of 2007 Program Change on Performance
29.1.5.1 # of refuges completing at least 1 cost-shared project with a partner (BUR)	353	353	+3	356	0
<p>Column B: The performance level expected to be achieved absent the program change (i.e., at the 2006 request level plus/minus funded fixed cost/related changes); this would reflect, for example, the impact of prior year funding changes, management efficiencies, absorption of fixed costs, and trend impacts.</p> <p>Column E: The out-year impact is the change in performance level expected in 2008 and Beyond of ONLY the requested program budget change; it does <u>not</u> include the impact of receiving these funds again in a subsequent outyear.</p>					

Program Overview

The Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 defines wildlife-dependent recreation as a prominent and important goal for the refuge system. The Act recognizes the importance of a close connection between wildlife resources and the American character, and the need to conserve America’s wildlife for future generations. It supports DOI strategies to provide access to wildlife refuges for recreation where compatible and to promote and enhance quality recreation opportunities. The refuge system embraces the Act and weaves its mandates into our daily work to provide greater access to refuge system lands when appropriate.

The refuge system’s priority public uses include the “Big 6”: hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, wildlife observation, environmental education, and interpretation. Beyond these opportunities, Visitor Services programs include recreation fees, cultural and historical resource interpretation, the accessibility program, volunteer and Friends programs, community partnerships, special use permits, concessions management and a host of other activities designed to efficiently and effectively manage visitor services. Visitor services also include creating quality experiences through adequate staff, signs, and brochures; supplying safe and accessible facilities; and managing recreation fees in a manner that provides the government with a fair return on investments and visitors with exceptional value for fees paid.

Local communities that have the ability to enjoy quality wildlife-dependent recreational experiences in the “wild” often carry that experience to the next level – a personal commitment and involvement in meeting the refuge system’s mission. Of the almost 40 million people who visited refuges in FY 2005, more than 2.3 million came to hunt, 7 million to fish, and 25 million to observe wildlife from trails, observation towers, decks, and platforms. In addition, 5 million came to photograph wildlife, while almost one million participated in on-site and off-site environmental education activities. Moreover, more than 28 million were involved in an interpretative program, which included 15.8 million who took advantage of our visitor centers and exhibits.

The focus under this subactivity is to welcome and orient refuge system visitors, support volunteer initiatives, and conserve cultural and archaeological resources. Under this subactivity, the refuge system

will ensure the provision of wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities where compatible. Visitor Services Program elements include:

- **Refuge Visitor Services.** This category includes the salary and base funding that supports recreational activities, with preference given to wildlife-dependent recreation as required by the *Refuge Improvement Act of 1997*. The refuge system provides wildlife-dependent recreation to the extent that it does not compromise the accomplishment of the primary purpose of the station; non-wildlife dependent recreation (e.g., swimming, recreational boating) is discouraged to the extent it compromises accomplishment of wildlife-oriented objectives. Interpretive activities include talks, tours, staffed exhibits, and demonstrations. Environmental education involves structured classroom activities, as well as hands-on exposure to wildlife and natural resource issues. Professional workshops to learn bird watching, natural resource management, land stewardship, or wildlife recovery and management are also included. Teacher workshops, which are particularly effective at reaching out to local school districts, provide a service that teachers can then relay to their students.
- **Visitor Facility Enhancements.** This program element includes the development, rehabilitation, or increase in facilities that support public use at our refuges. Parking areas at trailheads, wildlife observation platforms, kiosks, interpretive signs and displays, trails and boardwalks, and information desks are all examples of such enhancements.
- **Volunteers.** This program element encompasses activities provided for by the *Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 1998*. Volunteers accomplish nearly 20 percent of the work performed on refuges. More than 200 organized support groups, or Friends groups, assist refuges in meeting public use and natural resource management goals. Managing a good volunteer program requires an investment in developing projects and activities suitable for volunteers; maintaining communication and an organizational framework to ensure people with the right skills and capability are on the right job; and finally, volunteers are trained and outfitted with the proper gear to do a quality job in a safe manner.
- **Cost Sharing Partnerships.** This program element includes activities with partners that are recreational and educational, or in other ways involving the public. The part of the Challenge Cost Share program that includes recreational activities and public celebrations is under this program element.

The Visitor Services Program aligns closely with the DOI and refuge system strategic goals. The program uses its four elements to achieve the key strategic goals to:

- Welcome and orient visitors,
- Provide quality wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities,
- Facilitate partnerships and cooperative projects to engage other conservation agencies, volunteers, Friends and partners in the Refuge System's mission, and
- Ensure that unique cultural and historic resources are protected, used and interpreted as specified by authorizing legislation and policies.

Welcome and orient visitors. Under this element, the refuge system clearly identifies all wildlife refuges that are open to the public, and ensures that visitors understand who we are and what we do. Standards for the appearance of field stations are to be unique to the refuge system and consistently applied so that a brand identity is reinforced. This sort of branding will help the public distinguish between the Service, including the refuge system, and other land management entities. This identity can

be heightened through clear and accurate signage, brochures, interpretive materials, uniforms, adequate and accessible recreational facilities, and knowledgeable staff or volunteers available to answer questions and describe the role of the individual refuge within the context of the refuge system's mission.

Provide quality wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities. Opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (wildlife observation, hunting, fishing, nature photography, interpretation, and environmental education) are provided and evaluated by visitor satisfaction surveys to ensure that we offer quality experiences to enjoy and appreciate America's wild lands and their associated fish, wildlife and plants. When those recreational activities are managed according to the principles of sound fish and wildlife management and administration on national wildlife refuges, they engender stewardship and a conservation ethic within the public.

Quality environmental education programs depend on qualified teachers who understand the state education systems, science, and the community within which they work. Quality environmental education engages the public in, and increases community support for, the conservation mission of the refuge system; it makes fish, wildlife and wildlife habitat relevant, meaningful, and accessible to the American public, teachers, students and their families; and it focuses on refuges serving as "outdoor classrooms." The small facility program supports the development, rehabilitation, and construction of facilities such as parking areas at trailheads, wildlife observation platforms, kiosks and others which are key to environmental education.

Facilitate partnerships and cooperative projects to engage other conservation agencies, volunteers, Friends and partners in the Refuge System's mission and to provide the public and partners with opportunities to participate directly in the achievement of the Refuge System's mission.

- Support for volunteers and Friends is provided through on-site training, mentoring, workshops, and awards.
- The Challenge Cost Share Program includes partnerships that promote quality recreational programs, support public conservation events, and convey conservation messages through communication with the public.

Ensure that unique cultural and historic resources are protected, used and interpreted as specified by authorizing legislation and policies. The refuge system protects tens of thousands of cultural and historic sites. The refuge system has identified more than 20,000 archaeological and historical sites within its borders to date, with more yet to be discovered. Refuge system museum collections consist of approximately 5 million objects maintained on loan to more than 200 non-federal repositories, such as qualified museums and academic institutions, for scientific study and long-term care.

2007 Program Performance Estimates

The 2007 budget request for the Refuge Visitor Services subactivity is \$65,284,000 and 700 FTE. The refuge system will welcome nearly 40 million visitors to enjoy priority public uses including educational and interpretive programs, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography. During 2007, funding available within this subactivity will be used to develop recreational programs and uphold customer satisfaction rates, which are currently over 80 percent. The refuge system will maintain this level of satisfaction by providing effective training courses for outdoor recreation planners, and by introducing visitors to the refuge system through kids' fishing events and waterfowl hunting clinics.

Funding under this subactivity will also support more than 32,000 volunteers that contribute more than 1.2 million hours to conservation and recreation programs within the refuge system. The refuge system

will continue to support training programs for volunteer coordinators and provide support for refuges working with groups of local supporters commonly referred to as Friends groups.

The refuge system will improve its services and performance under this subactivity by developing Friends groups, recreation programs, and standards for refuge signage. By updating the Service's sign manual and implementing the suggested improvements, the refuge system will improve its effectiveness in terms of welcoming and orienting visitors to refuges. Improved signage and facilities will increase the ease of navigation within refuges and improve customer satisfaction rates.

2006 Planned Program Performance

Welcome and orient visitors: Ensure that all national wildlife refuge units that are open to the public are clearly identified and that visitors clearly understand who we are and what we do.

- Following up the highly successful Fishing Guide, a new *Your Guide to Hunting on National Wildlife Refuges* will be completed.

Facilitate partnerships and cooperative projects to engage other conservation agencies, volunteers, Friends and partners in the Refuge System's mission. Provide the public and partners with opportunities to participate directly in the achievement of the Refuge System's mission

- A series of five Regional Friends workshops presented throughout the country will provide more than 250 Friends and Service personnel with opportunities to learn about the Refuge System's priorities and strengthen their organizations and partnerships. The workshops focused on the new refuge system strategic plan to highlight the opportunities for Friends to contribute to the mission of the NWRS and plan strategically for their organization's future.

A refuge system Friends policy team will develop the first Service Manual Friends Policy. National level policy and procedures will promote consistency on a number of issues related to refuge system partnership building efforts with Friends organizations.

Provide quality wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities.

- The refuge system is distributing and promoting the *Delivering Visitor Services Special Report*. The report offers a number of refuge visitor services projects that illustrate how to build partnerships and deliver quality wildlife dependent recreation and cultural resources programs.
- The Service's recreation fee team is developing implementation guidance. The team is focusing on internal Service policy for the recreation fee program, introducing the use of business plans for fee sites and clarifying annual report needs.
- The refuge system is responding to the Office of the Inspector General's recommendations in its report *Department of the Interior Concessions Management*. The working group supports recommendations concerning program improvements, best practices, and other issues.
- Funds provided in FY 2006 for Visitor Facility Enhancements will be used to complete approximately 75 VFE projects.

Ensure that unique cultural and historic resources are protected, used and interpreted as specified by authorizing legislation and policies.

Collaborating with the Army Corps of Engineers, the Service is assessing the condition of non-Federal museum repositories housing Service collections to respond to DOI standards addressing the management of museum property.

2005 Program Performance Accomplishments

Welcome and orient visitors: Ensure that all national wildlife refuge units that are open to the public are clearly identified and that visitors clearly understand who we are and what we do.

- The refuge system completed Phase I of the Service's sign initiative and launched Phase II, which will develop a new sign system and protocol, including signs to help welcome and orient visitors.
- To help the public understand the mission and programs of the Refuge System, a new initiative was launched to offer news ideas and news stories to the media through a bimonthly tip sheet. Also, feature stories highlighting wildlife-dependent recreation were included in the bimonthly *Refuge Update* newsletter.

A final report on the most recent refuge system visitor satisfaction survey was completed. With approximately 50 refuges participating, the results indicated that 95% of refuge visitors indicated satisfaction with the quality of refuge recreation programs, facilities, staff and volunteers.

- **Provide quality wildlife-dependent recreation and education opportunities.**



Reconstruction of Cathlapotle plank house. Ridaefield NWR.

- 18 National Recreation Trails on refuges were designated by the Secretary of the Interior, including The Oaks to Wetlands Trail on the Ridgefield NWR in Washington that helps visitors experience wetlands, native plants, fishing opportunities, and interpretation of the Cathlapotle archaeological site associated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition

- The Service published the 2005 *Banking on Nature Report: The Economic Benefits to*

Local Communities by National Wildlife Refuges, which indicates that the Refuge System generated nationally nearly \$1.4 billion and 22,000 jobs in local communities related to wildlife-dependent recreation programs.

- Thirty-five refuges benefited from the Refuge System's environmental education grants program, *The Nature of Learning*, bringing the total number of refuges who have benefited from this program to 106. The grants are used to build community-based environmental education programs. One example is the partnership with El Museo del Pueblo (Museum of the People) and Sweetwater Marsh NWR, which will provide outdoor learning experiences to Latino community students in San Diego.

The Service participated in Departmental teams to develop recreation fee implementation guidance for the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA).

Facilitate partnerships and cooperative projects to engage other conservation agencies, volunteers, Friends and partners in the refuge system's mission. Provide the public and partners with opportunities to participate directly in the achievement of the refuge system's mission.

- In 2005, refuge funds supported 295 Challenge Cost Share projects with 752 partners. These projects were located in 45 states and in Puerto Rico.
- Nine new refuge Friends organizations were established in 2005, including ones at Red River NWR in Louisiana and Supawna Meadows NWR in New Jersey.
- The 2005 National *Friends in Action Conference* drew a record number of Friends and Service personnel to Washington, DC. The conference hosted more than 300 Friends and Refuge personnel and offered more than a dozen educational workshops. Secretary Norton was the keynote speaker.
- A new Director's Order, "Working with Friends Organization and Cooperating/Interpretive Association Sales Outlets and Book Stores," was signed. The Director's Order provides guidance including insurance requirements, audits, and the appropriate type of partnership agreement.

Over 34,000 volunteers donated more than 1.3 million hours valued at a little over 25 million dollars. For example, volunteers at Imperial NWR contributed over 500 hours to build a new wheelchair accessible observation tower near the refuge's visitor center.

Ensure that unique cultural and historic resources are protected, used and interpreted as specified by authorizing legislation and policies.

- The Service completed a national report responding to the President's *Preserve America* Executive Order, highlighting efforts to protect and interpret historic sites throughout the refuge system. The report focused on a number of sites that benefited from community and state partnerships and efforts to use historic sites in visitor services programs. Projects ranged from historic sites open for visitors and being maintained by Friends groups to interpreted archaeological sites that offer unique insights into long-term habitat and landscape changes.

Historic cabins were restored and made available to visitors and scholars on the Kenai NWR in Alaska. These historic cabins were also, documented by historians and archaeologists who will study their historic importance.

Performance Overview
(cost information in thousands)

Measure	2005 Plan	2005 Actual	Change from 2005 Plan	2006 Enacted	2006 Change from 2005 Actual	2007 Request	2007 Change from 2006
16.3.2.1 Cultural and natural heritage facilities are in good/fair condition as measured by the FCI (PART) (Refuges) (SP)	0.152 13,430,905/ 88,633,348	0.136 13,956,038/ 102,362,406	-0.016 +525,133/ +13,729,058	0.137 13,956,038/ 102,239,241	+0.001 0/ -123,165	0.137 13,956,038/ 102,239,241	0.000
16.2 % of cultural properties in FWS inventory that are in good condition (SP)	3% 538/ 16,187	14% 2,250/ 16,241	+8% +1,712/ +54	16% 2,247/ 14,347	+2% +3/ -1,894	16% 2,247/ 14,347	0%
19.1.1 % of visitors are satisfied with the wildlife dependent recreation or education opportunities provided (BUR)	85%	85%	0	85%	0	85%	0%
19.2.1 % of visitors are satisfied with the quality of experience (Refuges) (SP)	85%	85%	0	85%	0	85%	0%
19.2.3 Customer satisfaction with value for fee paid (SP)	85%	92%	+7%	85%	-7%	85%	0%
20.1.1 The following % of refuges/WMDs are open to priority NWRS recreation activities (applies within constraints of compatibility standard): hunting – x%, fishing –x%, wildlife observation and photography – x%, environmental education-x%, and interpretation-x%, and other recreational uses-x% (PART) (Refuges)	Est baseline * see individual pieces below	63% * see individual pieces below	n/a * see individual pieces below	61% * see individual pieces below	-2% * see individual pieces below	61% * see individual pieces below	0% * see individual pieces below
20.1.1.1 % of refuges/WMDs that have quality hunting programs, where hunting is compatible (BUR)	Est baseline	71% 253/ 358	n/a	71% 262/ 367	0% +9/ +9	71% 261/ 367	0% -1

Measure	2005 Plan	2005 Actual	Change from 2005 Plan	2006 Enacted	2006 Change from 2005 Actual	2007 Request	2007 Change from 2006
20.1.1.2 % of refuges/WMDs that have quality fishing programs, where fishing is compatible (BUR)	Est baseline	54% 189/ 351	n/a	56% 198/ 355	+2% +9/ +4	56% 198/ 355	0%
20.1.1.3 % of refuges/WMDs that have quality wildlife observation programs, where wildlife observation is compatible (BUR)	Est baseline	63% 297/ 468	n/a	65% 307/ 471	+2% +10/ +3	65% 305/ 471	0% -2
20.1.1.4 % of refuges/WMDs that have quality environmental education programs, where interpretation is compatible (BUR)	Est baseline	64% 232/ 360	n/a	67% 240/ 360	+3% +8	67% 240/ 360	0%
20.1.1.5 % of refuges/WMDs with quality interpretative programs that adequately interpret key resources and issues, where interpretation is compatible (BUR)	Est baseline	62% 252/ 409	n/a	64% 258/ 403	+2% +6/ -6	64% 257/ 403	0% -1
20.1.1.6 % of refuges/WMDs open to other recreational uses, where recreational uses are compatible (BUR)	Est baseline	est baseline	n/a	46% 267/ 582	n/a	46% 266/ 582	0% -1
20.1.5.1 Number of visitors served by facilitated programs (Refuges) (SP)	12,820,798	9,788,224	-3,032,574	8,652,482	-1,135,742	8,652,482	0
29.1.11 % of recreation areas with community partnerships (Refuges) (SP)	42% 239/ 573	49% 278/ 573	+7% +39	52% 291/ 564	+3% +13/ -9	52% 291/ 564	0%
29.1.2 # volunteer hours are annually contributed (BUR)	1,124,983	1,284,009	159,026	1,271,647	-12,362	1,264,927	-6,720
29.1.3 # of individuals annually provide volunteer assistance (BUR)	29,000	34,034	5,034	32,402	-1,632	32,231	-171

Measure	2005 Plan	2005 Actual	Change from 2005 Plan	2006 Enacted	2006 Change from 2005 Actual	2007 Request	2007 Change from 2006
29.1.4.% of refuges/WMDs with Community Partnerships/Friends Groups (Refuges) (SP)	43% 210/ 487	51% 249/ 487	+8% +39	55% 268/ 485	+4% +19/ -2	55% 267/ 485	0% -1
29.1.5.1 # of refuges completing at least 1 cost-shared project with a partner (BUR)	261	261	0	353	92	356	3