



# Strategic Growth

## *Getting it Right*

Spanning more than 150 million acres, the National Wildlife Refuge System is the nation's largest and most diverse collection of public lands and water dedicated to wildlife conservation. The Refuge System has a storied history of conserving iconic and critical habitats across America.

Today, faced with outsized challenges – from climate change and other environmental stressors to human demands on the environment – the Refuge System must prioritize and focus its strategic growth scope to ensure that lands and waters with the greatest conservation value are protected on behalf of the American people.

*Waterfowl are among the three conservation priorities of the draft Strategic Growth Policy*



### Is Acquisition Sustainable?

How the Refuge System has added lands in the past is not sustainable in the future. The numbers tell the story:

- In the last 50 years, more than \$2 billion has been spent to acquire nearly 2.5 million acres. On average, nearly 500,000 acres have been purchased each decade since 1980.
- It would take 37-101 years to complete acquisition of fee-title land if 50,000 acres were purchased each year. It would take 44-75 years to complete purchases at the same level for refuges composed only of easement acres.
- Based on average costs per acre in different parts of the country, it would take \$3.7 billion-\$24.5 billion to complete acquisition of fee-title lands; \$655 million--\$2.8 billion to acquire easement-protected lands.

### Legacy of Conservation

The Refuge System historically has conserved two major groups of species: migratory birds; and threatened and endangered species in addition to wetlands:

**Migratory birds** have been a Refuge System focus since the 1903 establishment of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. Migratory birds find breeding, migration and wintering habitat, with 76 percent of all wildlife refuges including the phrase or word “migratory birds” or “bird” in their establishment purposes statements.

Nearly one-fifth of all wildlife refuges, or 106 units, list the **Endangered Species Act** as one of their land acquisition authorities. The Refuge Annual Performance Plan in 2013 showed that more than 200 wildlife refuges reported implementing 2,037 recovery actions for threatened or endangered species.

The Refuge System has more than 24 million acres of **wetlands**, including waterfowl production areas.

### Draft Strategic Growth Policy

In providing guidance for the growth of the Refuge System, the draft strategy focuses protection on priority conservation features so limited resources will bring the greatest contributions to conservation.

The draft policy identifies three conservation priorities:

- threatened and endangered species
- migratory birds of conservation concern
- waterfowl

It requires that the Refuge System use the best available science, biological

planning and conservation design to identify priority conservation areas within existing refuge boundaries; to expand existing wildlife refuges; and to establish new refuges -- all while contributing toward measurable conservation targets. The draft policy also seeks to ensure implementation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's vision to fully engage partners in the growth of the Refuge System and to manage for sustainable landscapes.

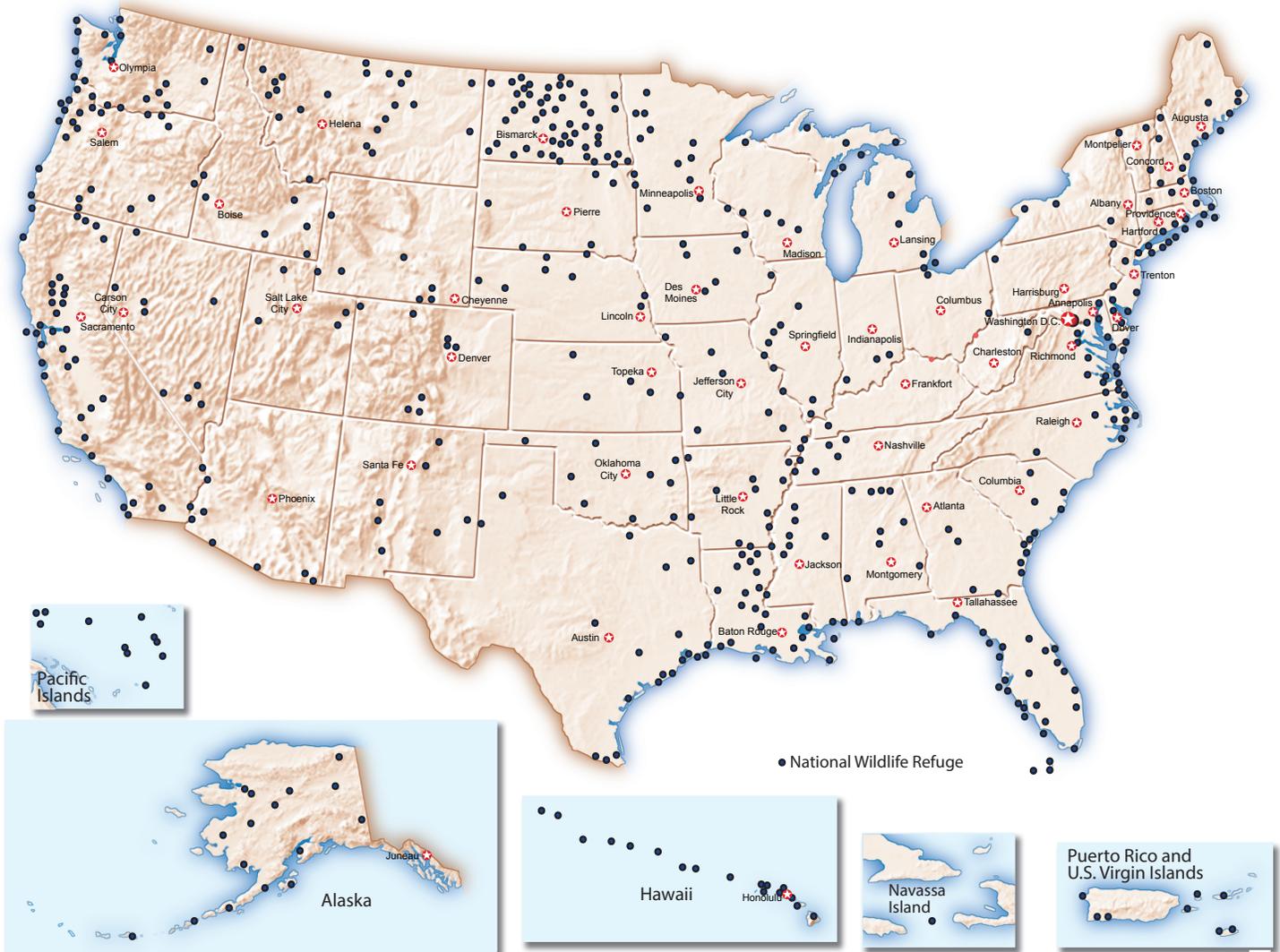
**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
<http://www.fws.gov>

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*Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, AK*



Original base map from Tibor G. Toth (TOTHGRAPHIX.COM)