

# Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council

September 19, 2023

Martha Williams  
Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Williams:

The Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council is writing today to recommend that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service utilize funding from the Restore our Parks (ROPA) provision in the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) to invest in badly needed infrastructure improvements for the betterment of waterfowl habitat on our Nation's National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs).

As you know, the sporting and conservation community unified around passage of the GAOA. This was due, in part, to the fact that all stakeholders recognized the dire straits of our outdoor recreation and conservation infrastructure. Indeed, the condition of many NWRs were central to our concerns about conservation infrastructure. In fact, it was work by partners in consultation with Refuge staff that helped make the case for ROPA funding. This work generated a list of priority infrastructure needs, specifically related to wetland and waterfowl habitat management, which was compelling for key authors of the GAOA and resulted in ROPA's inclusion in the final legislative text.

As you know, there is a long and storied linkage between the Refuge system and wetlands-many of our most recognized and historic refuges are closely associated with continentally important wetland and waterfowl habitat. Yet, a significant number of these refuges have had their ecological function compromised by hurricanes, aging or degraded infrastructure, water delivery limitations and other causes. These stressors are coming during a time when one could argue that the role of these key waterfowl staging, breeding and wintering landscapes, is more reliant than ever on these infrastructure assets.

We all recognize that there is an incredible backlog of infrastructure and deferred maintenance needs across the whole spectrum of the Refuge system programming. We are also wholly cognizant of the significant reductions in staff capacity that has occurred over the last decade. Yet, we recognize Congress has provided an opportunity to make gains in our capability to enhance habitat and recreational values on our Refuges and we believe the present time is crucial.

CHAIR  
Collin O'Mara

VICE CHAIR  
John Devney

## MEMBERS

Colin Beck

Ryan Busse

Jeffrey Crane

Michael Crowder

George Dunklin, Jr.

Bethany Erb

Daniel Forster

Cole Mannix

Lucas Martinez

Lydia Parker

Joel Pedersen

Land Tawney

Keith Tidball

Lauren Ward

Joel Webster

Designated Federal Officer

**Douglas Hobbs**  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
5275 Leesburg Pike, MS:OC  
Falls Church, Virginia 22041  
P 703-358-2336

As the ROPA authorization will sunset next year, we are optimistic that we can advocate for continuing or perhaps permanent funding authorizations to sustain more of this work into the future. However, understanding and documenting meaningful progress will be central to this effort. Therefore, the Council recommends that you prioritize investments in the management infrastructure necessary to sustain habitat and subsequent enjoyment of our treasured migratory birds.

We would appreciate a response to this recommendation, as well as an update from appropriate staff on the plan to deliver significant ROPA investments for enhanced wetland management in Refuge system planning and budgets for the coming year prior to our next Council meeting, the date to be determined.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. Should you have questions or need more information regarding this matter, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council's Designated Federal Officer, at [doug\\_hobbs@fws.gov](mailto:doug_hobbs@fws.gov) or (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,



Collin O'Mara  
Chair



John Devney  
Vice Chair

Cc: HWCC members  
Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Fish and Wildlife and Parks, DOI  
Cynthia Martinez, Chief – National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Matthew Huggler, Acting Assistant Director – Office of Communications, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service