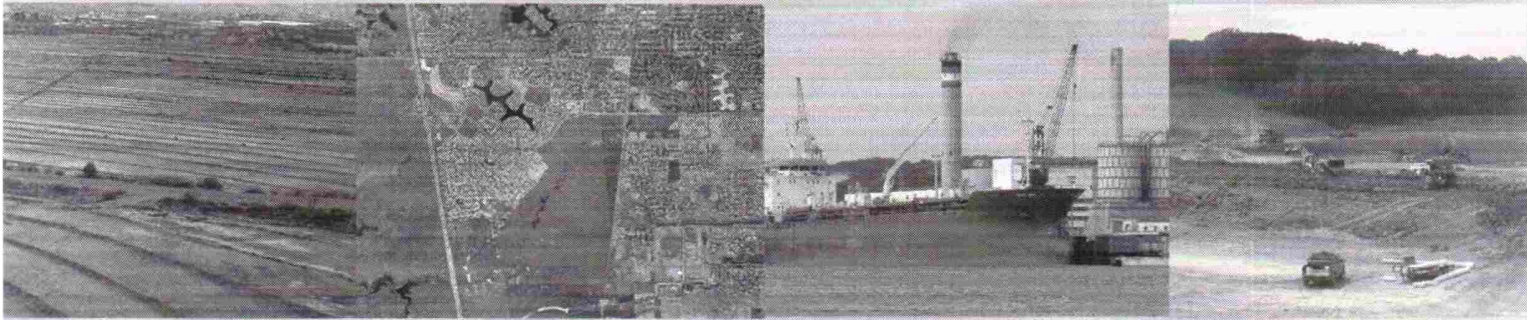


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STATE OF THE SYSTEM

An Annual Report On the Threats to
the National Wildlife Refuge System



2005 FOCUS:

Beyond the Boundaries

Featuring the top six threatened and top six rescued refuges

Unless we act now to protect lands and waters
surrounding our nation's refuges,
we may lose our magnificent wildlife heritage





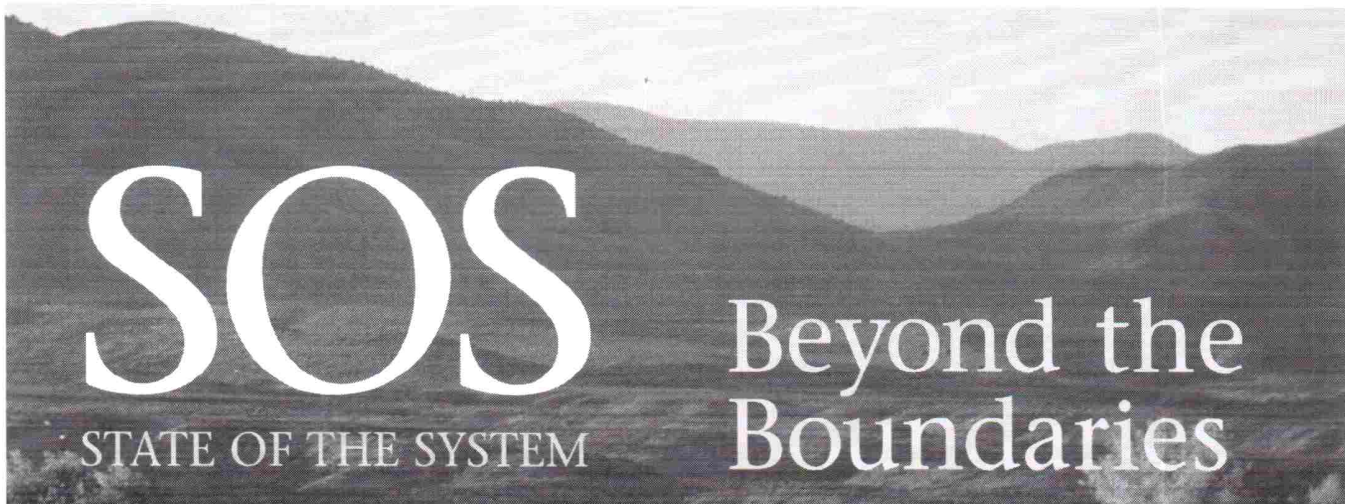
The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) is to protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, lands and waters set aside by the American people to protect our diverse wildlife heritage.

The NWRA works with decision-makers in Washington, DC, to help the Refuge System better fulfill its wildlife conservation mission. We promote community support for refuges by providing the more than 160 refuge Friends volunteer organizations with the tools, information and resources to make a difference. And we work to educate the public about the importance of protecting Teddy Roosevelt's unique conservation legacy.

Our diverse national membership includes current and retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service professionals, members of refuge Friends organizations, refuge volunteers and other conservation-minded citizens.

To learn more about the NWRA or become a member, please visit our website at www.refugenet.org, or write:

National Wildlife Refuge Association
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Washington, DC 20007



Our National Wildlife Refuge System is under siege. While refuge professionals and tens of thousands of refuge volunteers and more than 160 Friends groups work to ensure that each of the 545 refuges across the country is managed to secure the needs of America's wildlife, threats from beyond refuge borders—inappropri-

ate development, competing water interests, mining and fossil fuels extraction, military maneuvers and other harmful activities—threaten to jeopardize the very future of these conservation gems.

This report highlights recent research that reveals the magnitude of these threats, and uses stories from six individual refuges to tell the story. In addition, we review six refuges that have turned threats into opportunity; refuges that are now better off having developed creative partnerships with adjacent landowners and galvanized the support of surrounding communities.

Finally, we offer five recommendations to Congress and the Bush Administration that, while strengthening the conservation mission of our national wildlife refuges, aid in the broader conservation of species on private, state and other federal lands, a vital requirement if we are to conserve our wildlife heritage for the benefit of future generations of Americans.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association urges Congress and the Administration to implement or support the following measures to ensure the long-term integrity of our national wildlife refuges:

- 1) Strengthen incentives for private landowners to practice conservation through more funding of federal programs that reward landowners for habitat protection.
- 2) In partnership with states and private landowners, conduct a thorough evaluation of habitat conservation needs on lands and waters that are adjacent to refuges and that connect refuges and other conservation areas.
- 3) Allocate adequate funding for direct land purchase to add high-priority habitat to the Refuge System.
- 4) Allocate adequate funding for state wildlife grants which will help to conserve important wildlife habitat outside refuge boundaries: at least \$85 million next year.
- 5) Implement strategies to protect fragile coastal and island refuges from the devastation of shipwrecks and oil spills.

Please see the closing section of this report for more information.

2005's Top 6 Threatened Refuges

Stone Lakes NWR, CA	9
Alaska Maritime NWR, AK	10
Desert NWR Complex, NV	11
Pocosin Lakes NWR, NC	12
Horicon NWR, WI	13
White River NWR, AR	14

2005's Top 6 Rescued Refuges

Sacramento NWR Complex, CA	16
Minnesota Valley NWR, MN	17
Lake Umbagog NWR, NH	18
Tensas River NWR, LA	19
Red Rock Lakes NWR, MT	20
Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR, TX	21

2005'S TOP 6 THREATENED REFUGES

*Refuge at the Crossroads***Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge**

Near Sacramento, California

Current area: 6,200 acres

Authorized final area: 17,600 acres

6,000 visitors annually

Located in the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta and the 100-year floodplain, the Stone Lakes NWR provides vital feeding and resting grounds for migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway and protects habitats that are rapidly disappearing in California's Central Valley: grasslands, wetlands, riparian, oak forest, and agricultural lands. In the 10 years since the refuge was established, nearby Sacramento and its surrounding counties have grown at staggering rates—up to 20 percent annually. As what was once open country around the refuge lands fills with tract houses and strip malls, Stone Lakes NWR is struggling to



New housing development runs right up to the Stone Lakes NWR boundary. The land to the left of the road is the refuge. | Photo by Evan Hirsche

connect its isolated parcels and acquire its planned total acreage of 17,600 acres.

Developers have already bought up lands within the approved refuge boundaries, and one 460-acre subdivision was built within the boundary in 1999. And now this frenzied development has reached the refuge doorstep: the newly incorporated city of Elk Grove—the second-fastest growing city in the United States among cities of 100,000 people or more—directly abuts the refuge's eastern border. More development at the gates means the refuge will confront diminished water quality, invasive plants and other human-caused disturbance.

More people also means more refuge visitation. Refuge manager Tom Harvey welcomes the interest in the refuge, but the demand for access “creates a tension between restoring habitats and allowing wildlife to rediscover these new areas versus opening them to visitors.” When habitats have been restored, wildlife usage has increased.

There are “glimmers of hope,” says Harvey, in the onslaught of development. Some area farmers who opposed establishing the refuge now appreciate its utility as a buffer between agricultural lands and urban encroachment. (One of the most vocal opponents subsequently sold his farmland to the refuge.) In fact, traditional farming practices on the lands around the refuge benefit species such as the Swainson's hawk, greater sandhill crane, and many other migratory birds. Still, Stone Lakes has its work cut out as development closes in on this key migratory and wildlife corridor.



Subdivisions in Elk Grove, California, encroach on Stone Lakes NWR. The development below the curved road was built within the refuge acquisition boundary. | Photo by USFWS