

**Written Testimony of William G Durkin, President
Friends of Rachel Carson NWR
In Support of Funding for Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, Maine
Land and Water Conservation Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Betty McCollum, Chair
The Honorable David Joyce, Ranking Member**

January 29, 2020

Ms. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee, I am Bill Durkin, President of The Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Biddeford, Maine. I have been a member of the Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge since 1989, the group was founded in 1987; we are a small group supporting the refuge in Southern Maine. I have given numerous written statements over the years and we really appreciate your support in the past. This year, our refuge is not requesting any appropriations directly for Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge; this is a request for general FY21 general funding of the National Wildlife Refuge System of \$586M. Within that budget, this year we ask to appropriate \$283M for Wildlife and Habitat Management Projects. There was great news last year with the reauthorization of the Land, Water and Conservation Fund, but we need to have LWCF permanent and dedicated at \$900M annually. With that in mind, I request \$41M for Land Acquisition Projects. I thank you all for your consideration.

The Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge is named in honor of one of the nation's foremost and forward-thinking biologists. After arriving in Maine in 1946 as an aquatic biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rachel Carson became entranced with Maine's coastal habitat, leading her to write the international best-seller *The Sea Around Us*. This landmark study, in combination with her other writings, *The Edge of the Sea* and *Silent Spring*, led Rachel Carson to become an advocate on behalf of this nation's vast coastal habitat and the wildlife that depends on it. Her legacy lives on today at the refuge that bears her name and is dedicated to the permanent protection of the salt marshes and estuaries of the southern Maine coast. The refuge was established in 1966 to preserve migratory bird habitat and waterfowl migration along southern Maine's coastal estuaries. There are 11 refuge divisions in 12 municipalities protecting approximately 5,690 acres within a 14,800 acre acquisition zone.

Consisting of meandering tidal creeks, coastal upland, sandy dunes, salt ponds, marsh, and productive wetlands, the Rachel Carson NWR provides critical nesting and feeding habitat for the threatened piping plover and a variety of migratory waterfowl, and serves as a nursery for many shellfish and finfish. Located along the Atlantic flyway, the refuge serves as an important stopover point for migratory birds. Previous years' appropriations have allowed the USFWS to conserve several properties within the refuge. In 2019, the refuge had approximately 280,000 visitors utilizing the established foot trails and

wildlife observation overlooks. Many have also kayaked and canoe up the tidal rivers and streams along the refuge's coastline. The biodiversity of the refuge is due to its location where the sandy mid-Atlantic coast meets the rocky Maine coast and where the northern and southern forest types converge. The majority of the state's population resides in southern Maine within close proximity to refuge lands. The refuge has a very high number of neighbors (abutters) which makes the available land for acquisition very high in value and demand.

There is great news at Rachel Carson NWR with the acquisition of a 15 acre parcel with buildings where we plan to create a refuge administration housing , a brand new visitor center and possibly a Friends office space. This center will showcase the work of the National Wildlife Refuges and the legacy of Rachel Carson. Support is needed to fully develop the potential of this 15 acre site for conducting environmental education , nature interpretation and public outreach events. The refuge welcomes close to 300,000 visitors each year - with the opening of this new visitor contact facility scheduled for 2022, the number of visitors to the refuge could easily double.

The Friends play an important role in supporting the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge mission. We work to educate Maine's U.S. Congressional and State legislature about the importance of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge to wildlife habitat, coastal resilience, tourism, and future generations. We support Refuge staff by volunteering with trail maintenance, greenhouse activities, administrative work, and visitor services. We engage the towns and communities that surround the Refuge through mailings, meetings, events, and a future conservation-themed book group. We fundraise and apply for grants so that we can assist with hiring Refuge interns, purchase equipment, or support research projects. We support acquisition funding and refuge operations and engage in environmental education and outreach programs.

Salt Marsh Restoration at Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge is a critical and ongoing project. Our East Coast salt marshes provide abundant services to our coastal communities – protection from floods and storm surges, economic benefits from tourism to local businesses, and support of commercial and recreational fisheries through natural nurseries and production of baitfish. These salt marshes also provide habitat for both abundant and rare wildlife species.

Unfortunately, as many of you know, our coastal salt marshes are threatened by increased storm severity and sea level rise. We now also understand that past human alterations on these marshes are making them more susceptible to degradation and collapse.

At Rachel Carson NWR, we have the privilege of protecting and managing over 3,800 acres of coastal marsh. But we're leveraging lessons learned through our research and demonstration program to go beyond our boundaries. By spearheading collaborative approaches with state and local officials, federal agencies, NGOs, universities and small businesses, we are developing and implementing innovative salt marsh restoration techniques. We share results throughout New England and the mid-Atlantic. The innovations piloted here are becoming the backbone to new restoration efforts across the region.

Time is tight though. Because of tide cycles, the next ten years are critical to increase the resiliency of our coastal marshes and for saving the at-risk-species that rely on them. We're working hard to do this as efficiently and as effectively as possible. But we need continued support for the programs and funding opportunities that support this work (FWS Refuges, NFWF, Coastal Wetland Resilience Fund, North America Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA), Land and Water Conservation Fund, North East Climate Adaptation Science Center, NOAA NMFS Restoration Center, USGS).

**** 1. We request an overall FY21 funding level of \$586.M for the Operations and Maintenance budget of the National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. All of the refuges are in dire need of staffing and upkeep . In our North Atlantic-Appalachian Region Refuge Division (Region 1), we have lost 70 Refuge positions in the last 10 years. Overall there is 5.6M visitors to the 75 Refuges in Region 1, encompassing Maine to Virginia and west to Kentucky. Refuges provide unparalleled opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife and educate children about the environment. Without increased funding for refuges, wildlife conservation and public recreation opportunities will be jeopardized. This funding will help our Refuge System and the communities near refuges. Every dollar appropriated to the Refuge System returns an average of \$4.87 to local economies. Wildlife refuges generate approximately 35,000 jobs and \$2.5 billion in economic output each year. National Wildlife Refuges provide the American public (and foreign visitors) with \$33 billion dollars worth of clean water and other environmental benefits (clean air and a cool climate as examples)..

**** 2. We request to appropriate \$283M for Wildlife and Habitat Management Projects within the O & M budget. These monies will support restorations of salt marshes; removal and controlling invasive species; recovering rare species; continue fire management programs, restoring cultivated land to it's original habitat ; and much more with the single goal of conserving and restoring the nation's fish and wildlife habitat.

**** 3. We request \$41M for Land Acquisition Projects for the below Refuges:

\$10 million for Everglades Headwaters NWR and Conservation Area (FL);

\$6 million for Silvio O. Conte NFWR (CT, NH, VT, MA);

\$3 million for Cache River NWR (AR);

\$2 million for Bear River Watershed Conservation Area (WY, ID, UT);

\$2 million for Blackwater NWR (MD);

\$2 million for Clarks River NWR (KY);

\$8 million for Hakalau Forest NWR (HI); and

\$8 million for the Dakota Grasslands Conservation Area (ND, SD)

In addition, The Land and Water Conservation Fund needs to be permanently funded at the \$900M amount annually. I have been advocating for this for over 2 decades to Congress and we finally have LWCF permanently authorize but now need to have the amount permanent at \$900M. As you all are aware , HR 3195, the *Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act* is pending and we need your continued support with great conservation tool. It is hard to believe when Congress created LWCF in 1964 that here in 2020 we would still be at protecting the funds that protect our lands in all 50 states. Please make it Permanent.

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement." This quote is from Rachel Carson's *A Sense of Wonder* (1965), again, whose name Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge bears in southern coastal Maine. Each of our National refuges has a unique story and history behind the name but they basically all serve one purpose - Protect Wildlife Habitat. With that "wonder and excitement", I Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony in support of Our National Wildlife Refuges.