**Submitted by [name], [title], [institutional affiliation]**

*March 17, 2023*

Written Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives

Appropriations Subcommittee on

Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Concerning Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations for the

United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Friends of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, which was formed in \_\_\_\_ to support the \_\_\_\_\_\_ National Wildlife Refuge. We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on the FY 2024 Interior Appropriations bill. We request that this subcommittee allocate $1.5 billion in funding for National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance under the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. This includes $560 million to address the growing staffing shortage across the Refuge System, as well as accounts for the addition of new refuge units, increased programmatic needs and visitation levels, and rising inflation since FY 2010.

*\*Paragraph about the refuge and your Friends group.*

*\*Why the refuge is important to your community, and what the Friends group does to support the refuge and the community.*

The Refuge System is facing a staffing crisis that threatens its ability to protect biodiversity and provide recreational opportunities for all. Increased funding needs paired with insufficient budgets has resulted in a Refuge System that is quickly eroding in habitat management and an ability to even keep refuges open. Additional funding is necessary for the Refuge System to effectively fulfill its conservation mission, provide opportunities for wildlife dependent recreation, and connect communities to nature.

The $503 million appropriated to the Refuge System in FY 2010 is worth nearly $700 million today, yet actual funding in FY 2023 was $541 million–a mere .64 cents per acre. The failure to offset the impacts of inflation has led to unsustainably low staffing levels and lost capacity. Over 800 permanent positions have been lost since FY2011–an enormous 25% loss in capacity. Much of the Refuge System is virtually unprotected due to the lack of law enforcement officers, with some officers covering entire states and refuge units hours away from one another. Several much-needed positions like these are eliminated every year as congressional appropriations lag behind inflation and actual funding needs. This also impacts refuge volunteer groups like ours, as many volunteer programs–critical for the operation and maintenance of refuges–are being cut back or eliminated entirely due to a lack of supervision from full-time professional staff. We urge the subcommittee to do everything possible to bridge this inflation gap and provide the necessary additional funding to adequately staff the Refuge System.

This additional funding would greatly impact our refuge. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ NWR would be able to *(hire more staff), (restore X wetlands), (build out our environmental education programs) (etc).*

*\*\*Anything further you want to say.*

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, the (President, Secretary, etc) of the Friends of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.