



NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION  
2012 Annual Report

# Protecting America's Wildlife

 National  
Wildlife Refuge  
Association  
[refugeassociation.org](http://refugeassociation.org)

"Whether protecting desert springs for the tiny pupfish or expansive sage steppe for pronghorn and sage-grouse, NWRA excels at bringing together agencies, partners and funding sources to make a tremendous difference for American wildlife conservation."

*Denise Joines, Wilburforce Foundation*

## Sagebrush Steppe Rangewide Conservation Strategy

*Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and Colorado*

NWRA is helping the FWS develop a coordinated approach to halt the steady course toward the Endangered Species list currently facing greater sage-grouse, once a ubiquitous game bird of the West. By pulling together sage-grouse experts from multiple federal and state agencies, we can ensure the highest return devoted to sagebrush habitat conservation in the 11-state range of the greater sage-grouse.

In 2012, NWRA coordinated closely with agency leadership on sage-grouse issues and began work in several landscapes of critical importance to sage-grouse breeding and rearing, such as the Malheur-Hart-Sheldon high-desert region of southeastern Oregon and northern Nevada. With more than one million acres already under refuge management in three refuge units, this is a place where partnerships between FWS, other agencies and NGOs can make a difference for sage-grouse. NWRA is working with the Wilburforce Foundation as well as a group of NGOs, agency partners and landowners to begin building a common vision and strategy for striking a management balance in this traditional western ranching landscape.



Stephen Ting/FWS

## Bear River Watershed — Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Bear Lake and Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuges

*Utah, Wyoming and Idaho*

After following a 400-mile course through three states, the Bear River opens up into a broad delta of marshlands and forms the largest source of freshwater to the Great Salt Lake. In 2012, NWRA worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to advance the concept of creating a new Conservation Area in the Bear River Watershed that would span the watershed's three states, two FWS Regions, and three existing refuges. Over the past

year, NWRA worked with landowners and community members to solicit local feedback on a draft proposal to promote the use of conservation easements to protect water quality, water quantity, wildlife habitat and migration corridors in this critical region where the Southern Rockies meet the Great Basin.



Grebe family | Bear River NWR, UT | Jon and Kimberly Hyde and Sultze

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# The National Wildlife Refuge Association Begins a New Era

With this annual report, NWRA honors a year of significant accomplishments made possible by the past 11 years of substantial organizational growth. We also look forward to an exciting future as we transition to an increased focus on continuing to turn our “beyond the boundaries” vision into wide-reaching conservation results.

In 2001, Evan Hirsche took the reins as NWRA’s president and energized the organization around the linked priorities of a powerful grassroots constituency of refuge Friends volunteers, strong advocacy for Refuge System budgets, and defending the Refuge System against harmful legislation and policy. From 2001 to 2012, the National Wildlife Refuge Association trained thousands of refuge Friends volunteers and led more than 4,000 to Capitol Hill, where they developed a powerful voice as advocates for the world’s largest network of conservation lands and waters. By leveraging the grassroots voices of Friends with the strength of national advocacy groups, NWRA played a central role in securing more than \$1 billion in funding for the Refuge System and for related U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation programs, while also taking a stand against damaging proposals to precious places such as Alaska’s Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

In 2005, NWRA began putting policy, grassroots action, and dollars to work on the ground to demonstrate the catalytic role that refuges can play in wildlife conservation at the landscape scale by working “beyond refuge boundaries” and fostering creative partnerships. NWRA’s Beyond the Boundaries Initiative has helped to bring the Refuge System and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service together with other federal agencies, state agencies, nonprofit groups, user-groups, business interests, and especially private landowners, to accomplish pragmatic conservation results. This new paradigm of setting landscape conservation goals to be accomplished through creative partnerships was enthusiastically adopted in both the Refuge System’s 2011 Conserving the Future vision and in the President’s America’s Great Outdoors Initiative. In 2012, NWRA celebrated two great Beyond the Boundaries milestones with the creation of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area in central Florida and the designation of the Connecticut River Watershed as America’s first National Blueway.

It is fitting, then, that David Houghton, the founder of our Beyond the Boundaries initiative, is now stepping into the role of NWRA’s president. For more than a dozen years, David has been a vital part of the NWRA team — as a volunteer Regional Representative, a member of the Board, a consultant, and since 2010 as our Vice President for Conservation Programs. David brings extraordinary vision, passion, and commitment to the NWRA, the Refuge System and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and his experience is perfectly matched with the demands of today’s multi-faceted conservation challenges and opportunities.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association has been fortunate to have such depth in leadership and expertise over the past decade. As we enter a new conservation era, it is a credit to both Evan and David that the NWRA has become the effective and influential group it is today!

*NWRA Board of Directors*

## Our Mission

*To conserve America’s wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect and enhance the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.*

## Beyond the Boundaries—2012 Focus Areas



“...our natural resources are so closely connected that they should be coordinated and should be treated as part of one coherent plan and not in haphazard and piecemeal fashion.”

*President Theodore Roosevelt*

## The New Conservation Paradigm

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has a long history of working through effective partnerships. In fact, 2012 marks the 25th anniversary of Partners for Fish and Wildlife, a program specifically designed to bring federal resources to private landowners to accomplish mutually beneficial habitat conservation on private land. More recently, the FWS has played a central role in developing Landscape Conservation Collaboratives (LCCs), a framework for bringing together states, Tribes, Federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, universities and other groups to collaborate on shared science-based conservation objectives.

In its Conserving the Future vision for the 21st Century, the Refuge System places extra emphasis on collaboration and partnerships, emphasizing the need to work “Beyond the Boundaries,” a term coined by NWRA’s 2005 Beyond the Boundaries report. As the Refuge System increasingly looks at small areas of core habitat as part of conservation landscapes, it is advancing its conservation mission by coordinating land ownership, conservation easements, and agreements with other federal agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Department of Defense, or with state fish and game departments, state parks, state water agencies, local municipalities, private landowners and conservation NGOs.

**The NWRA serves as a bridge between government, non-profit and private sector partners.**

As a non-governmental organization with long experience working closely with the FWS, the NWRA has become a bridge between the agency and a range of NGO and private sector partners, helping craft a vision, build multi-layered funding strategies, and foster a supportive political environment. Because refuges attract such a diverse group of supporters — conservationists and ecologists, hunters and anglers, birders and hikers, and many more — NWRA represents a broad spectrum of interests and is well-positioned as a facilitator for the benefit of refuges. The following pages illustrate how NWRA is working hand-in-hand with the FWS and its multitude of public and private partners to turn vision into conservation reality.

