

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2405

February 5, 2026

The Honorable Brian Nesvik
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Nesvik:

I am writing to call your attention to the following language included in Senate Report 119-46, which directs the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to carry out works of improvement at two important national wildlife refuges in Mississippi. It carries the same weight as language included in the joint explanatory statement accompanying division C of the Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment Appropriations Act, 2026 (Public Law 119-74).

Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge Complex.—The Mathews Brake and Yazoo National Wildlife Refuges within the Complex were established to provide habitat for wintering waterfowl and resident wildlife. The Committee is concerned these important refuges no longer meet their intended purpose due to lack of adequate management and invasive aquatic plants, such as water hyacinth. Within available funds, the Committee directs the Service to implement measures to restore, enhance, and better manage habitat for waterfowl and wildlife on the refuges, and urges the Service to partner with local landowners and nonprofit conservation organizations to meet this objective.

The Mathews Brake and Yazoo National Wildlife Refuges are located in the heart of the Mississippi Flyway, and are managed as part of the larger Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Historically, they have provided thousands of acres of prime waterfowl habitat and attracted millions of migrating ducks each fall and winter. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case due to the lack of proper maintenance and management, and failure to implement Habitat Management Plans. Water levels have not been maintained to proper depths, available water has been overrun by invasive aquatic plants, and basic infrastructure, such as pumps and levees, have fallen into disrepair. This has resulted in declines in habitat, duck populations, sportsmen, and harvest numbers, which reverses the conservation success stories previously associated with these refuges.

The recently-enacted fiscal year 2026 appropriations measure provides the Service robust funding for Resource Management and the National Wildlife Refuge System. Further, private landowners and respected nonprofit conservation organizations are eager to partner with the Service and contribute to refuge improvements, and the Service has such authority. For instance, the Refuge Enhancement/Infrastructure Partnerships Initiative (16 U.S.C. § 742f(d)) authorizes

the Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with state and local agencies, nonprofits, as well as private individuals to promote the stewardship of resources on refuges through habitat maintenance and restoration, and to support the operation and maintenance of refuges through constructing, operating, maintaining, or improving the facilities and services of a refuge.

These refuges were established to provide for the wintering needs of ducks and geese in the Mississippi Flyway. I am confident the Service has the financial resources and statutory authority to carry out the congressional directive outlined in the language I have referenced. I respectfully request that you work with me on this effort going forward so that the Mathews Brake and Yazoo National Wildlife Refuges can again achieve their maximum potential with respect to attracting and holding large numbers of migratory waterfowl.

Sincerely,



CINDY HYDE-SMITH
United States Senator

cc:

Dave Miko, Acting Deputy Director for Operations
Brett Hunter, Deputy Chief, Refuges, USFWS Southeast Regional Office
Brett Moule, Project Leader, Theodore Roosevelt NWR Complex