

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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Subcommittee on Energy and Water  
Development and Related Agencies

Subcommittee on Defense

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science, and Related Agencies



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October 23, 2020

The Honorable David L. Bernhardt  
Secretary of The Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

Our region was proud to welcome you to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge (ONWR) in May of 2019. It was no accident that you chose Ottawa to highlight the key partnership between sportsman and our refuge system. The Ottawa refuge is the crown jewel of the Lake Erie necklace. However, the site faces significant deferred maintenance needs. Therefore, I respectfully request that pursuant to the Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. No: 116-152), you prioritize major deferred maintenance projects in FY 21 for the ONWR.

The ONWR is responsible for conservation, restoration, enhancement, and protection, with only 10 full-time employees managing over 11,000 acres of land. The refuge works in partnership with the Union Sportsmen's Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, National Environmental Education Foundation, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The refuge also contains vital wetlands that filter out pollutants from water that eventually enters Lake Erie and serves as the last remnant of the great black swamp, which used to cover 1,500 square miles. Despite major challenges with COVID, this small refuge received over 359,000 visitors last year alone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Each fall (with the exception of this year due to COVID,) ONWR works with Ducks Unlimited, ODNR Division of Wildlife, Winous Point Marsh Conservancy, Ottawa Soil & Water Conservation District, Ohio Waterfowl Association, Lake Erie Waterfowlers, and the local Friends group to present the Youth Waterfowl Hunting Workshop. This helps to recruit a new generation of waterfowlers to conservation as they explore various activities (identification, calling, decoys, cooking waterfowl, firearm/boat safety, laws, gear, etc) and ultimately have their first waterfowl hunt with trusted guides and accompanying adults. Ducks Unlimited has also helped with land acquisition and restoration through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative which allows the refuge to expand hunting opportunities. Please see the attached letter from Ducks Unlimited discussing the importance of deferred maintenance projects at the site.

However, continued public participation at the site is hindered by deferred maintenance challenges.

In particular, I would like to make you aware of two backlogged deferred maintenance projects that will not be taken up until 2025. The first is the repair of Darby Lakefront Levee erosion. The second is the rehabilitation of a levee on moist soil. Together, these projects require \$1.2 million and are critical for maintaining the continuity of the ONWR. Given the urgency, these projects should be included in the Department of Interior Fiscal Year 2021 deferred maintenance project submission. These deferred maintenance projects at the ONWR will enable hunters and anglers to continue enjoying the unique ecological resources you saw first-hand when you visited in 2019. Thank you in advance for your consideration and careful review of these deferred maintenance projects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcy Kaptur". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marcy Kaptur  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

*x Enclosure, Letter from Ducks Unlimited Re: Deferred Maintenance*