# [***CONGRESS REJECTS LEGISLATION THAT THREATENS DESERT REFUGE***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:61H4-3HX1-DYTH-G31Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

The following information was ***released by Defenders of Wildlife***:

Today's passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) by the U.S. Senate is an important victory for Desert National Wildlife Refuge and the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The military requested a land expansion onto Desert and other wildlife refuges in Nevada, but Congress has rejected its request.

Leading up to this moment wasn't easy. A battle over the fate of more than 1 million acres of land in Nevada designated and protected as national wildlife refuges has been waging for several years.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill have been considering proposals from the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy to promote a military takeover, remove land protections and allow destructive activities that would endanger Desert, Fallon and Stillwater national wildlife refuges. National wildlife refuges and other public lands across the nation have been under attack during the Trump administration, including Desert National Wildlife Refuge, which is the largest federal refuge in the lower 48 states.

"The passage of the FY21 NDAA conference report is a huge victory for wildlife refuges and public lands in Nevada, and for imperiled species like the desert bighorn sheep and desert tortoise that call these places home," said Jim Lyons, vice president of landscape conservation of Defenders of Wildlife.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only system of public lands dedicated to the conservation of wildlife. Refuges protect America's wildlife, fish and plants, ensuring these important habitats and the wildlife that depend on them are around for generations to come. From conservation and protection of species to education and economic benefits for local communities, wildlife refuges play an invaluable role in our nation. Recognizing that wildlife urgently needs and deserves protection from further land fragmentation and degradation, a broad range of supporters from across this country came together to defend wildlife in Desert refuge.

Together, conservationists, tribal leaders and environmental organizations tirelessly defended wildlife in Desert refuge and the lands surrounding Fallon refuge, their habitat and our nation's cultural history against further expansion of military use on public lands specifically designated for wildlife.

Desert refuge's 1.6 million acres provide important habitat for hundreds of other bird, mammal, reptile, and fish species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has managed approximately 1.4 million acres of the refuge as de facto wilderness since 1974. Notably, the lands are home to ancient plants, animals, petroglyphs and other sites of immeasurable cultural and historical value to local indigenous ***tribes***.

Despite these incomparable values, wildlife biologists, local ***tribes*** and members of the public have largely been unable to access large swaths of the refugedue to the broken management regime of the Air Force and other agencies. In addition to rejecting a takeover, the NDAA created an Interagency Committee and an Intergovernmental Executive Committee at Desert. This addition will bring together the FWS, Air Force, Nevada's natural resource agencies and each ***tribe*** near the refugewith stated goals of facilitating coordination, information sharing and public access. While not a full solution, these bodies should help improve wildlife management and critically inadequate access.

"Defenders of Wildlife is thankful for the support from Rep. Horsford and the Nevada delegation in defending wildlife in the Desert refuge, their habitat and our nation's cultural history." said Lyons.

Refuges protect America's wildlife, fish and plants, ensuring these important habitats and the wildlife that depend on them are around for generations to come.

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With over 1.8 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come.

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