

Senators Paul S. Sarbanes (D-MD) and Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD), along with Congressmen Steny Hoyer (MD-5) and Ben Cardin (MD-3), are urging the Department of the Interior to provide \$350,000 in emergency funding to repair damages incurred from the recent heavy snow to buildings at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and Refuge.

In a letter to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Gale Norton, the four federal legislators, wrote:

“The February 11, 2006 snow storm caused major damage to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center’s endangered species captive propagation complex. The heavy snow destroyed the overhead netting that is used to keep breeding whooping cranes and sandhill cranes in their pens and the cranes escaped. 105 of 110 flight-netted pens were severely damaged. According to PWRC officials, all the whooping cranes have been recaptured but a number of sandhill cranes are still at large. Wildlife experts inform us that impacts to the breeding population of the endangered whooping cranes can be severe and that the flight netted pens must be replaced immediately to have any chance of preventing a disruption of the breeding season and Patuxent’s programs, which are critical to restoring the whooping crane populations in the wild. The snow storm also damaged the power system at Patuxent Research Refuge, leaving the entire complex without power and underscoring concerns which we have been raising for several years about the conditions of the infrastructure at Patuxent.”

The legislators also noted that the Department of the Interior, as requested by the Congress, is scheduled to submit a “facilities and budget plan by not later than March 1, 2006, which identifies the priorities, schedule, funding requirements, phasing options and agencies responsible for the repair, rehabilitation or replacement of facilities, buildings and associated infrastructure at the Center and Refuge.”

The legislators have been strong advocates in pressing the Department of the Interior to address both the short and long-term needs for the decaying structures at the world renowned wildlife research facility in Laurel.

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