

CASE, National Wildlife Refuge Association, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Team Rubicon Partner for Operator Training and Erosion Abatement at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge

Project highlights the benefits of public and private entities working together to accomplish community improvement and skills training.

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[CASE Construction Equipment](#), the [National Wildlife Refuge Association](#), the [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) and [Team Rubicon](#) teamed up for an equipment operator training and erosion abatement project at the [Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Los Fresnos, Texas. The project achieved two primary goals: Certify equipment operators with Team Rubicon to work on national wildlife refuges, and perform much-needed erosion control at Laguna Atascosa, which sits on 97,000 acres bordering the Gulf of Mexico.

CASE provided six machines to the effort – three full-sized [excavators](#) and three [skid steers](#) – and Team Rubicon brought in 18 operators from across the U.S. for the training.

For CASE, the project is an extension of its [Dire States](#) infrastructure advocacy and awareness campaign.

“Public parks and recreational areas are a critical and often overlooked part of American infrastructure,” says Brian Weisbaum, project manager – Dire States, CASE. “Refuges and green spaces like Laguna Atascosa are important for wildlife habitat preservation while also bringing in billions of dollars nationally to the American economy via tourism and support.”

“Our hope is that this project serves as an example for ways that private organizations such as CASE can work with public entities and nonprofits to improve important community infrastructure such as the National Wildlife Refuge System.”

“This partnership could not have come together at a better time,” said Jared Brandwein, director of conservation programs for the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “We identified a wildlife refuge in need of help completing a conservation project, and CASE and Team Rubicon stepped up to volunteer their time, equipment and people-power to get it done. The fact that the Refuge System could also provide training to Team Rubicon’s disaster volunteers makes this partnership even more meaningful.”

For Team Rubicon – an organization that unites the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders to rapidly deploy emergency response teams for disaster relief – the training preps their members for operating heavy equipment in the field and makes them eligible to assist the National Wildlife Refuge System on future projects.

“For our team, this kind of training partnership with the Refuge System is invaluable,” says Jason Ferguson, deputy director of training and exercise, Team Rubicon. “Whether hurricane, earthquake, or



flood response, the ability to safely operate heavy machinery bolsters our disaster relief efforts in communities across the country. This partnership also allows us to engage our members through service projects to mitigate known environmental hazards and lessen the impact of future disasters.”

Operator training was performed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in conjunction with the National Wildlife Refuge Association and CASE, and covered everything from basic operation to the latest in engine technology, controls and equipment management. Projects tackled included re-building a boat launch, culvert installation and hauling stone for other erosion control efforts on the refuge.

“Completing this training certifies a new wave of volunteers with Team Rubicon who will be able to operate equipment within the Refuge System,” says John Blitch, national heavy equipment coordinator with U.S. Fish and Wildlife. “We’re grateful to Team Rubicon for providing that manpower and to CASE for providing the equipment that helped make this training possible.”

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