

# Conserving the Future

## WILDLIFE REFUGES & THE NEXT GENERATION

### TALKING POINTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last articulated a vision for the Refuge System in a report called “Fulfilling the Promise” in the late 1990’s. Crafted on the heels of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, *Promises* has served the Refuge System well for more than a decade.

But, America has undergone some profound changes since 1998. The Refuge System then spanned less than 100 million acres, and today conserves about 150 million acres in 553 national wildlife refuges and 38 Wetland Management Districts.

Then, we had about 270 million people in the U.S. Today, our population is more than 308 million.

America has become a more urbanized country – with more fragmented habitat and less connections to the land. More than 50 million people live in the Northeast corridor alone – just to give you a sense of how densely populated some parts of our nation are.

America is facing a host of conservation challenges. Worldwide temperatures are increasing, and precipitation and weather patterns are changing. The effects of accelerating climate change can be seen on refuges: loss of marshes from sea level rise. Lakes and ponds are drying. We’ve seen fall migration delayed.

Climate change demands that conservation professionals – and our partners – consider a future in which ecosystems and species assemblages will change dramatically.

The Service recognized that the Refuge System must keep pace with an America that is changing in so many ways. We knew that the time had come to update a vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

So, last summer, the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association launched what will be a year-long process – called “Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation” – to build a new, bold strategic vision for the Refuge System.

The start of vision building began with five Core Teams – composed of about 70 Service employees – focused around issues regarding conservation planning and design, conservation delivery, conservation science, relevance to a changing America, and leadership and organizational excellence.

Since July 2010, these five teams have been working on draft vision reports that were consolidated into a single draft vision document that is now available online at [www.AmericasWildlife.org](http://www.AmericasWildlife.org).

We hope that you personally are already involved. But if you are not – the time to start is now. And we believe we have made it easy for you.

Thanks to the enormous help of the Refuge Association, a terrific website has been created at [www.AmericasWildlife.org](http://www.AmericasWildlife.org).



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If you have not joined the social network on the website, please go to America's Wildlife.org to become part of the conversation that is ongoing – and fascinating.

Once you get on the website you will find the draft vision document. There, you can comment directly on sections of the draft vision document until Earth Day, April 22, 2011.

Another fascinating element of the America's Wildlife.org Web site is the section called "Your Bold Ideas." Here's a place where people can go wild intellectually. There is no idea that is too far off the grid. There is no bold idea that we are rejecting outright. If you have a suggestion, put it out there for others to consider. Or take a look at the bold ideas – including those from the draft vision – that others have submitted.

After public comments are collected on the draft vision by Earth Day and analyzed and discussed by the Core Teams, the vision will go to top leaders in the Service. A vision document reflecting your comments and ideas will be published in July 2011.

The vision process will culminate in Madison, Wisconsin, in mid-July, when about 1,200 people will gather to consider and ratify the vision at the *Conserving the Future* Conference. We are assembling speakers now. We will use cutting edge technology to make sure that Service employees, refuge Friends and other partners who are not in Madison July 10th through 15th will, nonetheless feel as though they are.

Everyone is invited to participate online in the conference plenary sessions and discussions.

We are planning some events at the conference that are designed especially to make younger people aware of the Service and the Refuge System – and how they can fit in and contribute.

This new vision will guide the Refuge System for the next decade or so. But more importantly, "Conserving the Future" is a public dialogue from which we will have a stronger and more vibrant Refuge System.

We urge you to make your voices heard at America's Wildlife.org. We're waiting for your bold ideas.

