



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Urban Refuge Program of the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area



2016 Report:
**Strengthening
Relationships**

Cover art created by
Simone Carsey, a volunteer for
Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge
and student at Southridge High School in
Beaverton, OR.

Building upon the many relationships that marked the first year of the Urban Refuge Program in 2015, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) continued to engage the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area in 2016 through its four local National Wildlife Refuges: Tualatin River, Ridgefield, Steigerwald Lake, and Wapato Lake.

Pivotal to the success of these unique places within the landscape of public lands are our Friends groups — Friends of Tualatin River Refuge, Friends of Ridgefield Refuge, and the Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards — who have joined us in this journey to engage an ever-changing community in relevant and meaningful ways.

As we continue to calibrate the compass of the Urban Refuge Program and adjust to lessons learned, we invite you to take a journey through our engagement at these beautiful refuges, in vibrant neighborhoods, and with growing community coalitions.

National Wildlife Refuges

natural places to build community



National Wildlife Refuges hold a special place among public lands. They have an expressed purpose to manage and restore lands for the benefit of wildlife and their habitats, *and* provide opportunities for people to learn about and engage with nature. Refuges simultaneously offer a view to the past, present, and future of the human relationship to the natural world.

We are fortunate to have four examples of this relationship in the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area. As “urban” refuges — a designation due to their proximity to over 2.2 million people — they stand as flagships to a larger system of lands that provide homes to thriving and struggling species. These refuges exist within cities whose populations could be described much the same way. Urban refuges are places from which we can tell the story of how critical nature is to our daily lives, and places from which we can listen and engage to ensure we are aware of and relevant to the needs of the community.

What We've Learned

Honoring the **character** and **needs** of **individual neighborhoods** and **organizations** is crucial to creating authentic, meaningful engagement. Avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach gets us closer to our goal to build awareness of the need for **healthy ecosystems** for **wildlife** and **people**.

Implication: Neighborhood connections begin with listening for opportunities to address a need, like our work with fishing events “I’m Hooked” and “Celebration of Wild Steelhead.”

What We've Learned

Immersed in **ever-changing communities**, we must keep **ears trained** to perceptions of **cultural relevance** in the refuge experience.

Implication: Cultural trainings and community input to the Ridgefield Community Nature Center design have sought balance between the Refuge System mission and visitor needs.

The Urban Refuge Program

The launch of the Urban Refuge Program two years ago has brought an **increased level of coordination** among these refuges and their Friends groups. As a result, we are sharing a **rich and consistent story** of nature across the region and demonstrating the value of the USFWS and refuges to the community in a complete and coordinated way.

There is **much we have learned** about working with the community through this Program, some of the **lessons you'll find on this page**. Like the wildlife we care so deeply for, we continue to **learn** and **adapt** to our complex and changing environment.



Find a Refuge Today!

National Wildlife Refuges are sanctuaries for **plants and animals**, and offer **people** a change of pace from the frenzy and challenges of modern, daily life. You'll find one any direction from the Portland-Vancouver core.

- Tualatin River* - Hwy 99W in Sherwood, OR
- Ridgefield* - Just off I-5 in Ridgefield, WA
- Steigerwald Lake* - Hwy 14 in Washougal, WA
- Wapato Lake* - Hwy 47 in Gaston, OR

What We've Learned

Special skills are needed to mutually benefit the USFWS and our community partners in our shared urban work — namely **diversity, equity, and inclusion** training; **urban youth development**; and modern, **multi-media capabilities**.

Implication: We are integrating these skills at our refuges by creating a learning environment among staff, volunteers, and partners. We are developing new communication products and messages that are culturally relevant and delivered in ways that appeal to modern audiences.

Guiding Values

The Urban Refuge Program is largely shaped by the USFWS **Urban Standards of Excellence**, chief among them:



Know and relate to our surrounding community



Be an authentic community asset, on and off the refuges

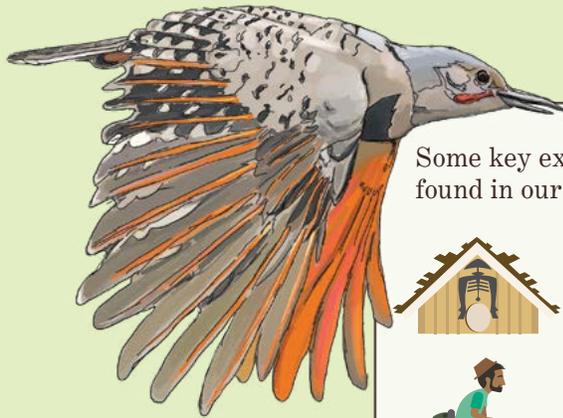


Honor different perspectives on nature by creating stepping stones of engagement



Build enduring partnerships to create and reach common goals

2016 Highlights



Some key examples of how we're applying these guiding values can be found in our 2016 community engagement efforts, where we:



Expanded staff and volunteer understanding and appreciation of modern, thriving indigenous cultures through education workshops.



Ensured hikers with disabilities have the information they need to have an enjoyable experience at our urban refuges through a collaboration with Access Recreation.



Connected with the community in their local neighborhoods and parks, sponsoring and bringing activities to several community events.



Grew and strengthened volunteer and Friends groups by adding volunteer coordination capacity at Steigerwald Lake Refuge and supporting the development of a modern brand for the Friends of Tualatin River Refuge.



Supported the development of a new collaboration-focused website for The Intertwine Alliance, a coalition of 160+ public, private and nonprofit organizations working to integrate nature more deeply into the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region.



Used technology to help the community see nature as part of their everyday lives with the beta launch of the Daycation Mobile App, a collaborative effort among many partners of The Intertwine Alliance.

What We've Learned

Supporting the work of **coalitions** builds **capacity** in the community, leading to greater progress and sustainability of **shared goals**.

Implication: We've leveraged our finite resources to support dozens of partners coming to the table around many aspects of urban nature, including community health, equity and inclusion, and conservation education.



Read on to learn more about these and other projects

Connecting in Neighborhoods



Hooked on Nature Through Fishing

The power of fishing to connect kids — and grown-ups — to the outdoors is evident in the gleaming faces of children hauling in their first catch and the adults saying, “It’s my turn.” Inner-city fishing opportunities aren’t abundant in Portland, but that doesn’t stop visionary partners from casting a line with kids anywhere they can find a small pond or some open grass.

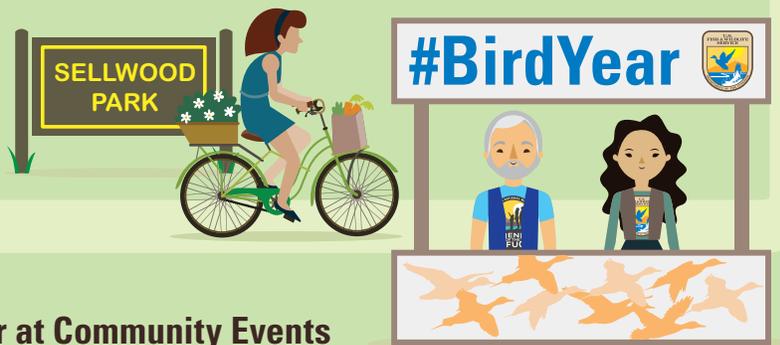
In that spirit, we continued to support [Soul River’s](#) Celebration of Wild Steelhead, a park-based event in North Portland that introduces kids to fly fishing. Year after year, it grows in attendance and partnerships. In 2016, we also got on board (or should we say outboard) with I’m Hooked Inc.’s 28-year-strong [I’m Hooked](#) event at Henry Hagg Lake that, through tremendous volunteer support, gets kids from the city out on the lake in boats to try and land that first big catch.



Gills and Gears in Portland Parks

[Sunday Parkways](#), a Portland staple that draws thousands for a bicycle ride in the city, connected fun-seeking pedalers to clean water by celebrating the return of salmon to SE Portland.

USFWS joined the Salmon Celebration by highlighting a lesser-known fish species, bringing a display of live lamprey and info about USFWS’s role in the restoration of [Crystal Springs Creek](#). Through engaging conversations, we reinforced the value of a community-driven, self-sustaining model for watershed stewardship that creates a healthy, vibrant area for people and wildlife.



A #BirdYear at Community Events

To spread the word about birds in 2016, we went to local parks and festivals. In celebration of the Migratory Bird Treaty Centennial, staff and volunteers connected with thousands of area residents with free bird-themed tote bags that kids and families could color to their liking. Events included:

- Vancouver’s [National Get Outdoors Day](#) at Fort Vancouver National Historic Park
- [Oregon Museum of Science and Industry’s](#) Career Days
- Tualatin River Refuge’s [Bird Festival](#)
- Ridgefield Refuge’s [BirdFest and Bluegrass](#)

3,200

Bird Treaty Centennial bags colored at events throughout the community. The bag activity promoted conversation between area families and the USFWS.

600

Pairs of eyes getting a look at live Pacific lamprey during a Portland bicycling event. This culturally significant fish is a great ambassador of clean streams and the community partnerships that make and keep them that way.



Connecting Through Conservation Education

Urban refuges connect with thousands of school-aged youth every year. As we engage new parts of the community, staff and volunteers are growing and innovating their education programs. Highlights from 2016 include:

- Indigenous culture workshops, hosted by the [Friends of Tualatin River Refuge](#), for community educators, volunteers, and staff. Guided primarily by local indigenous leaders, over 40 participants increased their knowledge and ability to use appropriate teaching resources honoring Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- Horizon Christian Middle School's Robotics Team visiting Tualatin River Refuge to learn about the relationship between people and wildlife. The team later started a condor conservation fund through their online gaming community as part of the [First® Lego® League Challenge](#).

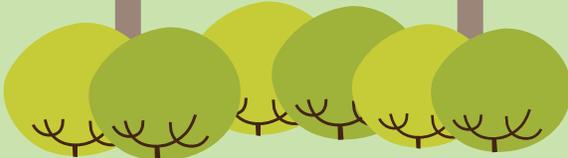
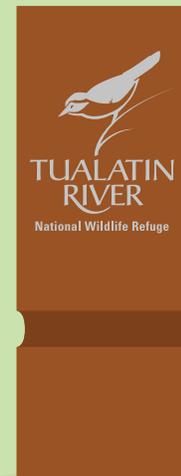
Welcoming All to Refuges



Sharing the Stories of Tualatin River Refuge

At urban refuges, we not only do high-quality conservation work, we also share the “why” of that work with a large, diverse audience. Here are some 2016 highlights:

- New [wildlife cameras](#) showed online visitors sights of beaver, deer, coyote, and an elusive bobcat.
- The story of fire as a land management tool was shared during the Refuge's first [prescribed fire](#). Strategic media outreach brought local news crews to the event while visitors safely watched via social media and on-site viewing.



Welcoming in Relevant Ways

A collaboration with Univision and NE Portland partners Club Aves and [Hacienda Community Development Corp](#) led to a transcanted [video announcement](#) of Ridgefield Refuge and its annual BirdFest and Bluegrass event in October.

Transcreation involves not only language relevancy, but visual and cultural relevancy. The video, featuring a Club Aves family exploring the Refuge with a USFWS guide, aired over 70 times on Univision reaching over 400,000 local viewers.

375,000

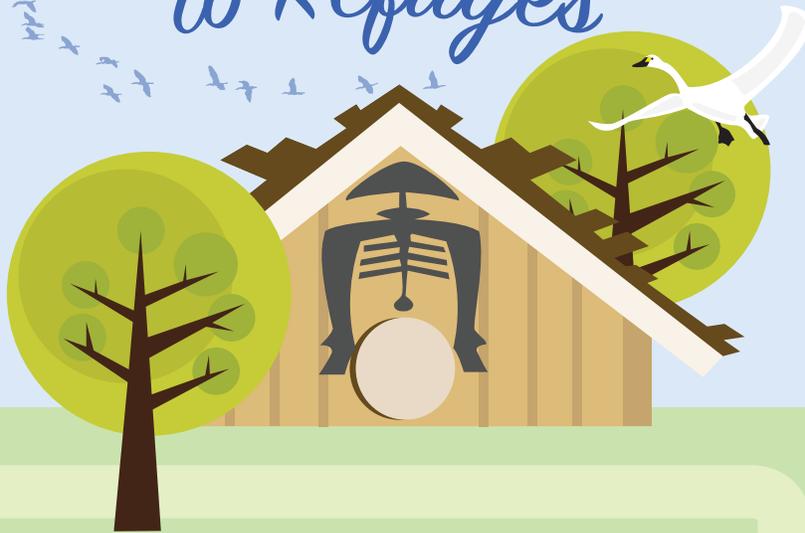
Visitors to the four urban refuges in 2016, including over 43,000 participants in special events and interpretation and education programs.

850

Visitors to the 20th Bird Festival at Tualatin River Refuge, including many new families from the local Latino community, due to relevant community outreach and event activities.



Welcoming All to Refuges



Community Nature Center at Ridgefield Refuge

A new community asset for the Portland-Vancouver region is being planned at [Ridgefield Refuge](#). With the guiding principles of the Urban Standards of Excellence, refuge staff and the [Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge](#) embarked on a public input campaign to ensure the Center adds appropriate value to the community. This input has helped shape the focus of the Center around four core areas: community, culture, education, and nature.



Volunteering at Steigerwald Lake Refuge

As the metro area grows eastward, Steigerwald Lake Refuge is no longer a hidden treasure. Like many urban refuges, fulfilling its full potential as a community asset can only happen with the sustained dedication of volunteers.

In 2016, [Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards](#) hired a volunteer coordinator who facilitated 3,600 volunteer hours and reached 3,500 people through the Trail Stewards program, habitat restoration, outreach, and environmental education. New and expanding relationships with 35 diverse community organizations, such as [Vancouver Police Activities League](#) and 54°40' Brewing Company, are the result.

500

The average number of students engaged every year by each of the 40 educators participating in indigenous culture workshops at Tualatin River Refuge. That's a potential 20,000 students gaining exposure to local indigenous culture and Traditional Ecological Knowledge through this group.

Deepening Cultural Connections

Ridgefield Refuge's Cathlapotle Plankhouse, a living Chinookan-Indian dwelling, is an icon of the Refuge's archaeological record and honors the continued presence of indigenous people and their stewardship of the land.

With the help of many Native partners, including Title VII Indian Education School Programs, [Native American Youth and Family Center](#), Portland State University's [Indigenous Nations Studies Program](#), [Clark College](#), and local Tribes, the Refuge is supporting natural and cultural education throughout many layers of the indigenous community. By the time we welcome guests to the Refuge and the Plankhouse, they have a deeper sense of place and better understanding of the landscape.



Trails for All

A local organization that provides trail information to hikers with disabilities, [Access Recreation](#) selected Tualatin River and Steigerwald Lake Refuges as sites to add to their growing collection of featured opportunities.

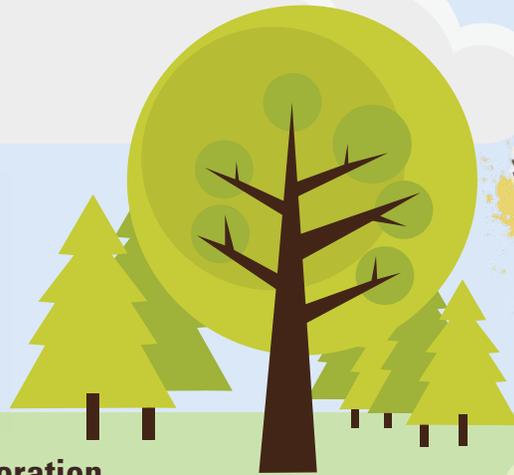
Access Recreation worked with refuge staff to document the experience of visiting each refuge, including recreation amenities, trail characteristics, and wayfinding. Often, hikers with disabilities are considered in outdoor recreation, but not directly consulted or marketed to. Access Recreation is helping enrich everyone's experience at our refuges and beyond. See the results at [acesstrails.org](#)



7

Miles of urban wildlife refuge trails evaluated and promoted to hikers with disabilities thanks to a collaboration between the refuges and Access Recreation.

Working with Coalitions



Supporting Online Collaboration

One of the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area's largest conservation coalitions, [The Intertwine Alliance](#), launched a new website with financial and technical support from the USFWS. The site supports over 160 local non-profits, government agencies, and private businesses in their collaborative work around parks, trails and natural areas. Key features creating positive impact in the community include:

- The [Intertwine Project Network](#) where partners can recruit help and coordinate efforts on local initiatives.
- The [Outside Voice](#) blog that shares partner stories and perspectives.
- An [interactive map](#) of the complete system of parks, trails, and natural areas in the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area.



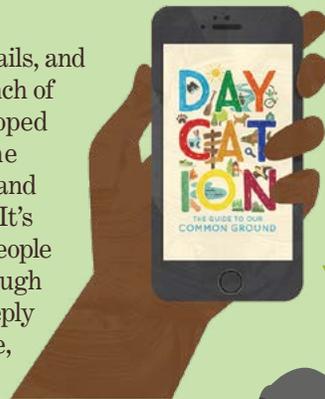
Creating a Birds-eye View

The USFWS spread its wings in 2016, celebrating the [Migratory Bird Treaty Centennial](#) by sponsoring two aspiring Latino conservation professionals — later dubbed the [BirdTrippers](#) — on an epic tour of the Pacific Flyway. The program was led by the USFWS Migratory Bird program in Portland, but quickly grew to a coalition of international proportions, attracting partners Environment Canada, Environment for the Americas, Audubon Society, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management.

The journey took the BirdTrippers from San Diego, CA to Anchorage, AK, but like a flock of migrating geese, they made many stops in-between. Visiting urban wildlife refuges was a big part of the trip and our Portland-Vancouver Refuges played host to the travelers. The USFWS also lent communication and design expertise to develop the BirdTrippers brand and establish the social media presence they used extensively to share their adventure.

We All Deserve a Daycation

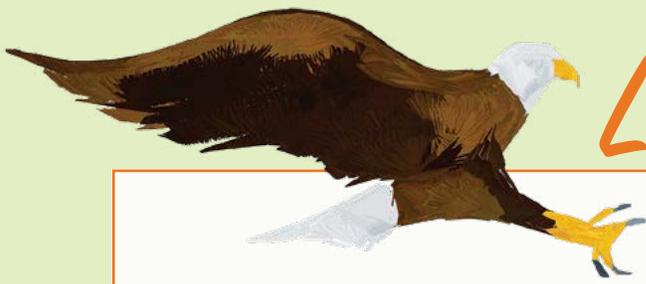
Exploring the impressive collection of nearby parks, trails, and waterways got a lot smarter in 2016 with the beta launch of the [Daycation Mobile App](#). Daycation, a concept developed by partners of The Intertwine Alliance, asks the community to take their favorite things to do outside and turn them into adventures that are shared in the app. It's equal parts activity finder and social engagement for people to share their views on nature with each other. Through the Urban Refuge Program, the USFWS has been deeply engaged with getting the app to the beta testing phase, and planning a large public launch in 2017.



31 Collaborative community projects are hosted on the new Intertwine Alliance website, a shared resource that received funding and technical support through the Urban Refuge Program.

3,500 Miles traveled by the BirdTrippers. Their epic journey from San Diego to Anchorage resulted in thousands of people connecting to the USFWS, wildlife refuges, and birds online, in schools, and at events.





Looking Ahead

In 2016, we concluded what we consider the launch phase of the Urban Refuge Program. We've initiated or completed the bulk of what we committed to in the proposal that brought the Program's resources to the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area in 2015. Two years later — through trial and error, lots of earnest two-way communication with the community, and making adjustments as needed — we are finding what is working for us and the people we serve. As we move forward, here's some of what we see on the horizon:

- A strategic planning effort, incorporating what we continue to hear and learn from the community, to solidify the overarching goals of the Urban Refuge Program and develop a flexible and reliable structure for forging new partnerships and making future program decisions.
- Supporting a growing coalition of partners interested in the greening of community schoolyards.
- Joining and lifting the efforts of community coalitions, like the Youth Mentoring Collaborative, who are working on youth employment in nature.
- Ensuring youth have a voice in sharing their perspectives on nature by helping to launch a youth engagement program around the Daycation Mobile App.

Learn more about the refuges

bit.ly/RidgefieldNWR

bit.ly/SteigerwaldLake

bit.ly/TualatinRiver

bit.ly/WapatoLake

Follow us on Facebook

[Portland-Vancouver National Wildlife Refuges](#)

*Learn more about the national USFWS
Urban Wildlife Conservation Program*

fws.gov/urban

The Portland-Vancouver Urban Refuge Program staff
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The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Cover Artwork

Simone Carsey – Beaverton, OR

This year's cover artwork comes from Simone Carsey, a student at Beaverton's Southridge High School and participant at The CENTER, a coalition-led hub for child and youth creativity, education, and engagement in North Portland. Simone participated in The CENTER's WeLead program that trains high school students to lead community conversations about challenging issues. Her creative eye, innovative digital style and love of birds is a beautiful addition to the Urban Refuge Program.

The CENTER is a collaborative partner of the USFWS
Learn more about The CENTER at bit.ly/TheCENTER

