

I Want to Hear from You

By Cynthia Martinez

Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

Hundreds of national wildlife refuges celebrated National Wildlife Refuge Week during October with festivals, open houses and other special events that attracted crowds and introduced wildlife refuges to new audiences. And I bet that a host of those Refuge Week events were possible only with the help of Refuge Friends organizations.

We are so lucky to have Friends throughout the Refuge System. I've believed that for a very long time.

When I was project leader at Desert Refuge Complex in Nevada in 2010, I made creation of a Friends group a priority – and for good reason: There is no better advocate for a wildlife refuge than a well-oiled Friends organization.

Desert Refuge Complex had lots of supporting organizations in the greater Las Vegas Valley. But there were reasons that we needed our own Friends group.

A wonderful woman named Jennifer Vincent was the face of the book store, which we ran out of a small contact station at Desert Refuge. She was just raring to help with more projects. So she began keeping a list of people who were passionate about the Refuge Complex, which includes four wildlife refuges. From that list and with a good deal of staff work, we found the folks who were most passionate about Desert, Ash Meadows, Moapa and Pahrangat refuges.

The Friends of Desert Refuge Complex has been extraordinary. They help with the annual Carp Rodeo, a terrific fishing event that brings in kids and families from every corner of the community. Among the Friends other outstanding accomplishments: They worked with the Outside Las Vegas Foundation to help fund an environmental education program that brings inner city kids to camp at Desert Refuge. They have worked with the University of Nevada at Las Vegas to fund field trips to all four refuges.

And they helped fund the grand opening ceremonies of visitor centers at three of the four refuges.

The Friends of Desert Refuge Complex are extraordinary by any measure. And in so many ways, they are just like Friends organizations across the country.

They are a dedicated and creative bunch of people. They are always available to help. And Friends are a reliable gauge of what will work – and what won't work – in a community.

As we celebrate the Refuge System in bigger and better ways every year, I know that dozens and dozens of events – during Refuge Week and throughout the year – are successful due to the muscle and inspiration of Friends organizations.

Thank you for sharing your passion and energy with us and our visitors at these special places we call national wildlife refuges. Tell us how we can help you help your national wildlife refuge even more. Write to me at Chief_National_Wildlife-Refuge@fws.gov.