



Wherever Refuge Friends gather, innovation and enthusiasm thrive...

Dear Friend or Refuge Manager,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association invite you to join us at the Marriot Wardman Park Hotel in Washington D.C., February 21-23, for the 2009 National Wildlife Refuge System Friends Conference: Friends Unite!

A forum to energize Friends and build lasting relationships, this conference marks our fifth national gathering for Friends and Fish and Wildlife Service representatives to share new ideas and time-tested strategies with peers from around the country. For the first time this year, we hope to have at least one representative from EVERY Friends organization in the Refuge System attend the conference!

This conference could not come at a better time. 2009 will usher in a new Administration and Congress who will grapple with enormous conservation challenges in the upcoming years. Our national wildlife refuges are canaries in the coal mine when it comes to pressing issues like climate change, competition for water and combating invasive species. Fortunately, Friends have always risen to the occasion during hard times. The urgent issues facing refuges today will require all that Friends have to offer.

We chose the theme for the 2009 Friends Conference – Friends Unite! – to reflect the great need for committed wildlife and refuge supporters to come together and work toward our shared goal of securing America’s wildlife heritage for future generations. The conference will offer dynamic sessions on a range of timely topics, from organizational and program development to key trends and issues that impact the work of Friends organizations and all refuges and resources beyond their boundaries.

On Sunday night, you can help the NWRA and FWS honor the Friends Organization and Volunteer of the Year at a gala dinner recognizing their extraordinary accomplishments.

Friends: Please work with your refuge manager to identify at least one person from your organization to register for the conference. Within our budget and planning constraints, we want to ensure the broadest participation among all Friends organizations throughout the country. While we are not placing up-front restrictions on the number of representatives per organization who may register, we ask that your organization prioritize who might benefit most by participating in the conference.

Costs: For Refuge Friends, the Fish and Wildlife Service will provide travel stipends of up to \$500 per individual to two representatives from each Friends organization. The stipend can cover airfare, parking, mileage, cab fare or other expenses related to getting to and from the conference. Once in D.C., the Fish and Wildlife Service will also cover your hotel accommodations and some meals during the conference. For Service personnel, you will need to cover your travel expenses; however, your accommodations and some meals will be paid for. There is NO registration fee.

Register by December 19, 2008: Registering is fast and easy! Friends and Service personnel should go to <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/Friends2009/> for more details about the conference and to register.

We are thrilled to host you at what promises to be an outstanding conference. This is the single, best chance to meet with your colleagues from across the country to exchange ideas, news and viewpoints. You will leave D.C. with an abundance of ideas, resources, new contacts and vigor to further your invaluable support for refuges.

Questions? Contact Trevor Needham at the FWS (Trevor_Needham@fws.gov or 703-358-2392) or Desiree Sorenson-Groves at the NWRA (dgroves@refugeassociation.org or 202-333-9075 x23).

We look forward to seeing you there!



James W. Kurth
Acting Assistant Director
National Wildlife Refuge System



Evan Hirsche
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