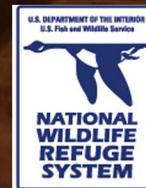
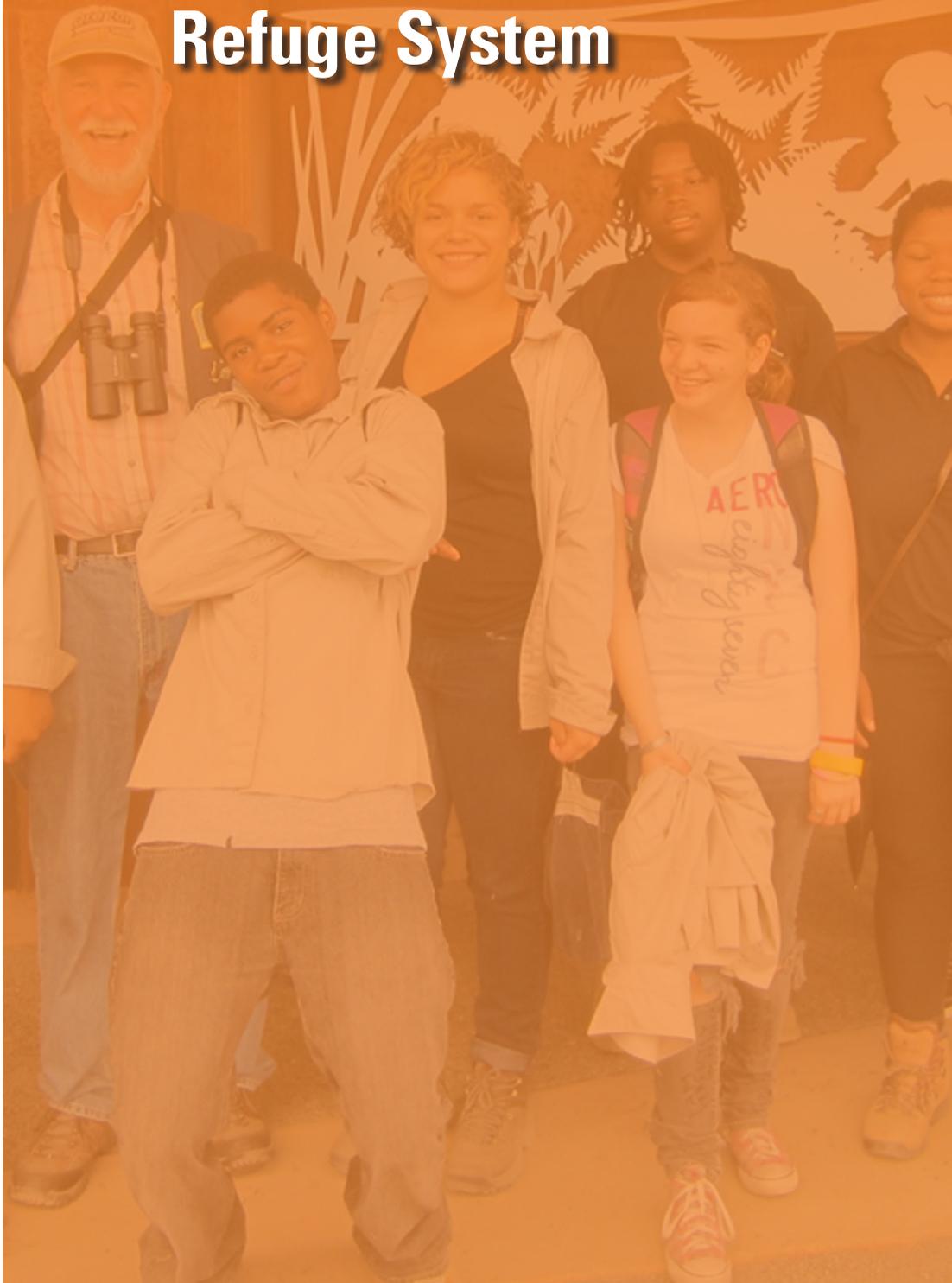


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Volunteer and Partner Involvement in the National Wildlife Refuge System



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I. Executive Summary

This plan describes actions to enhance the effectiveness of volunteer programs, Friends organizations, and community partnerships at national wildlife refuges (refuges), wetland management districts (districts), and other field stations (fish hatcheries and ecological services offices) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). It fulfills the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer Improvement Act of 2010 requirement to prepare a national strategy for the coordination and utilization of volunteers, as well as related recommendations from the *2011 Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* vision document.

An overview of the development and current status of volunteerism, Friends organizations, and community partnerships within the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is provided. Throughout the history of the Refuge System, citizen volunteers have been helping accomplish refuge missions; today, more than 41,000 volunteers at refuges across the country contribute an astounding 1.5 million hours of work each year. Currently about 230 Friends

organizations actively support almost 300 National Wildlife Refuges across the country. Continuing to effectively engage growing numbers of volunteers, Friends and community partners to promote shared stewardship of resources will result in improved conservation of important natural resources for wildlife and people on refuges and “beyond the boundaries” in communities throughout the country.

Current trends in volunteerism and the challenges and opportunities that refuges, districts and other field stations have in working with these volunteers and community partners are also discussed. The increasing number of retirees, an increased interest in incorporating volunteer activities in travel and vacations and increasing engagement of youth in volunteering all present great opportunities to increase volunteerism on refuges and other Service field stations. A survey of refuge managers found almost all had volunteers and greatly valued their work. It also found that many managers feel they do not have adequate resources to provide the guidance volunteers need and

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the attention they deserve.

The final section provides recommendations on how to improve volunteerism and community involvement throughout the Refuge System and other Service field offices. These recommendations are listed as strategies and objectives organized under four goals:

- 1) Increase volunteer management capacity at field stations;
- 2) Connect with and engage more of and a wider cross section of the American public;
- 3) Encourage and support active and vibrant Friends partnerships; and
- 4) Encourage and support other active and vibrant community partnerships.

In developing this strategic plan, we recognize that successful community partnership programs do not come about without extensive dedication to communication, collaboration, and relationship building among interested individuals. This is directly evidenced in our volunteer program where refuges with staff fully dedicated to engaging volunteers have 6 ½ times as many volunteer hours contributed as do other refuges.

Therefore, one objective in this plan is to provide more full-time volunteer coordinators, generally at refuges with over 200,000 visits per year. Other objectives and strategies focus on web-based applications to reduce administrative tasks related to volunteer management and to provide easily accessible information on volunteers and partnerships. The Service would also use the web and new media options to increase outreach to more tech-savvy potential volunteers. Organized citizen-science programs are encouraged as a way to engage volunteers. The Service would increase facilities, such as trailer

pads, to accommodate seasonal volunteers. Other objectives and strategies focus on improved training and mentoring for staff, volunteers and partners, particularly revitalizing the Friends mentoring program.

Volunteers, Friends, and community partners have long played critical roles in furthering the conservation mission of the Refuge System. This plan builds on past successes in collaboratively managing our nation's natural heritage and strives to strengthen these capabilities. Refuge System employees will work side-by-side with an expanding contingent of volunteers, Friends, and community partners as stewards of nature. Within this context we collectively strive to increase our capacity to: 1) be caring stewards and trusted leaders who embrace landscape level conservation; 2) be valued contributors to the broader scientific community; 3) engage the American people; 4) be effective ambassadors; 5) provide a welcoming and safe environment for visitors; 6) be diverse and inclusive; and 7) share a passionate conservation ethic. As we work collaboratively with volunteers, Friends, and community partners; we strive to be important contributors to local communities by promoting a shared stewardship of refuges and their associated natural resources to be treasured and enjoyed by both present and future generations.

II. Purpose

This plan focuses on actions that can strengthen the future engagement of volunteers, Friends organizations, and community partnerships in collaboratively carrying out the mission of the Refuge System which 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 continuing benefit of the American people”. Although the primary focus of this plan is on Refuge System volunteerism, these same goals and objectives can serve as a guide for all other organizational entities within the Service (i.e. Fish Hatcheries, Ecological Services).

This plan considers “volunteers and partners” to consist of three different categories:

- 1) Individuals or groups of individuals who volunteer their time directly to a Service field station, formalized through a Volunteer Services Agreement that describes services to be performed;
- 2) Friends organizations who volunteer their services to manage their organization and its activities within the context of a written agreement that describes shared goals and objectives and roles and responsibilities of the Friends and the refuge. Friends organizations are independent, 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations, formed and managed primarily by private citizen volunteers and established with the primary mission to support the purposes and objectives of the Service site(s) they seek to assist; and
- 3) Other community partners working with the Service, formalized under a written agreement (e.g. MOU, MOA, Cooperative Agreement) that describes shared goals and objectives and roles and responsibilities between the community partner and the refuge. Ideally,

“...the primary focus of this plan is on Refuge System volunteerism, these same goals and objectives can serve as a guide for all other organizational entities within the Service.”



Photo Credit: *Sue Hix, Friends of Sherburne NWR*

this agreement will allow some flexibility for adapting to changing needs over the timeframe of the agreement. A community partnership is a formal relationship with a local group, organization, or business to achieve a common goal(s). Usually this goal is very specific and is embodied in an ongoing relationship as opposed to a one-time event. For example, a refuge might work with a local chamber of commerce to produce an annual bird festival. As defined here, a formal community partnership may be in addition to or an alternative to a Friends organization.

Many of the strategies and products in this strategic plan would also be useful for other partnerships with the Service, such as any informal associations for one-time events. There are a wide array of informal partnership efforts underway and these are encouraged and promoted. Likewise, there are many valuable partnerships between refuges and national or regional non-profit organizations. However, in the context of Recommendation #11 of the Conserving

the Future vision, these less formal or larger scope partnerships, would not meet the goal of having "...friends groups or community partnerships at every staffed refuge..."

This strategic plan distinguishes among these three categories of "volunteers and partners" and identifies goals specific to each category. However, these categories are not strictly exclusive of one another. For example, a member of the Friends organization may wear two hats; one day they may function as a Friend while working in the Friend organization's bookstore, while the next day they may be volunteering directly for the refuge in a trash pick-up with other volunteers who are not a member of the Friends. A community partnership may be very clearly defined, or the boundaries more indistinct. As an example of a clearly defined partnership, a refuge and a local Chamber of Commerce may work together to run an annual birding festival, where the refuge runs the event itself and the Chamber does the advertising

for the event. An example of a partnership that has more overlap might be a partnership between a refuge and a local environmental education non-profit organization where that organization's volunteers lead programs in classrooms and then a field trip to the refuge. In this case, the volunteers may originate from either organization and be trained by both, and be both partners and refuge volunteers simultaneously. This overlap is one good reason for roles and responsibilities to be carefully articulated in a formal agreement between the refuge and its Friends and community partners, and for all refuge volunteers to be acting within the scope of a volunteer agreement.

In this plan, the sections about volunteers are the most generic and overarching. These sections apply to any individual or group who contributes their time; regardless of whether or not they are a member of a Friends organization or community partnership group.

This Strategic Plan describes how the Service will improve its recruitment and retention of volunteers to better “augment and support the capabilities and efforts of Federal employees to implement resource management, conservation and public education programs and activities across the National Wildlife Refuge System...” (National Wildlife

Refuge System Volunteer Improvement Act of 2010 or Improvement Act). This plan fulfills the Improvement Act provision to prepare “a national strategy for the coordination and utilization of volunteers”.

This plan also supports several recommendations in the Refuge System's Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation Vision (2011). It predominantly responds to recommendations 12 and 11, but also is an important contributor to recommendations 13, 18, and 19 (listed below).

Recommendation 12:

“Develop a national strategy for recruiting, coordinating and supporting a more self-sustaining volunteer corps, while creating new opportunities for community involvement in implementing refuge priorities.”

Recommendation 11:

“Develop and nurture active and vibrant friends groups or community partnerships for every staffed refuge or refuge complex.”

Recommendation 13:

“Create an urban refuge initiative that ... establishes the framework for creating new urban refuge partnerships...”

Recommendation 18:

“Support and enhance appropriate recreation opportunities on national

“This Strategic Plan describes how the Service will improve its recruitment and retention of volunteers to better “augment and support the capabilities and efforts of Federal employees to implement resource management, conservation and public education programs and activities across the National Wildlife Refuge System...””



Photo Credit: *Sue Hix, Friends of Sherburne NWR*

wildlife refuges by partnering with state fish and wildlife agencies, other governmental bodies, conservation organizations and businesses...”

Recommendation 19:

“Develop an interpretation strategy...in partnership with key government agencies, National Association of Interpretation and other professional organizations.”

III. Background on Refuge System Volunteerism

Volunteerism has long been a tradition within the Refuge System. This tradition began at the turn of the 20th century with the efforts of the Refuge System's first informal volunteer, Paul Kroegel, who took it upon himself to protect the nesting birds of Pelican Island, Florida from slaughter for the fashion industry. He talked to anyone who would listen, trying to rally support to protect the birds and their island rookery. His pleas for state and federal laws to end the killing of millions of birds annually for their feathers successfully reached President Theodore Roosevelt, who then designated Pelican Island as the first national wildlife refuge and lead the way to the creation of a national system of lands and waters set aside for wildlife. Pelican Island is not the only place to have benefitted by a volunteer's passion. Volunteers throughout the history of the Refuge System have worked diligently to protect their local refuges or districts. Today you can find someone like Paul Kroegel in almost every refuge community.

Volunteers, Friends organizations and community partners are valuable allies of the Refuge System. These individuals and groups are vital to fulfilling the Refuge System's

mission and goals. Each year they give generously of their time, expertise and resources and play important roles in conserving wildlife and their habitats along with serving the more than 45 million visitors who enjoy our refuges. Today there are on average about 8 times more volunteers than there are federal employees within the Refuge System. Cumulatively, volunteers contribute additional work equivalent to 20 percent of Service work hours performed each year on refuges.

The role of volunteers has increased greatly over the last several decades. In 1982, more than 4,950 volunteers contributed approximately 128,000 hours of volunteer time to the Service. In FY 2011, almost 30 years later, more than 41,600 volunteers contributed over 1.5 million hours to the Refuge System alone. Data from the last five years, showing the numbers of volunteers, hours and types of activities they are involved in is displayed in figures 1-3.

The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended by the Fish and Wildlife Improvement Act of 1978, and the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement

“Volunteers, Friends organizations and community partners are valuable allies of the Refuge System”

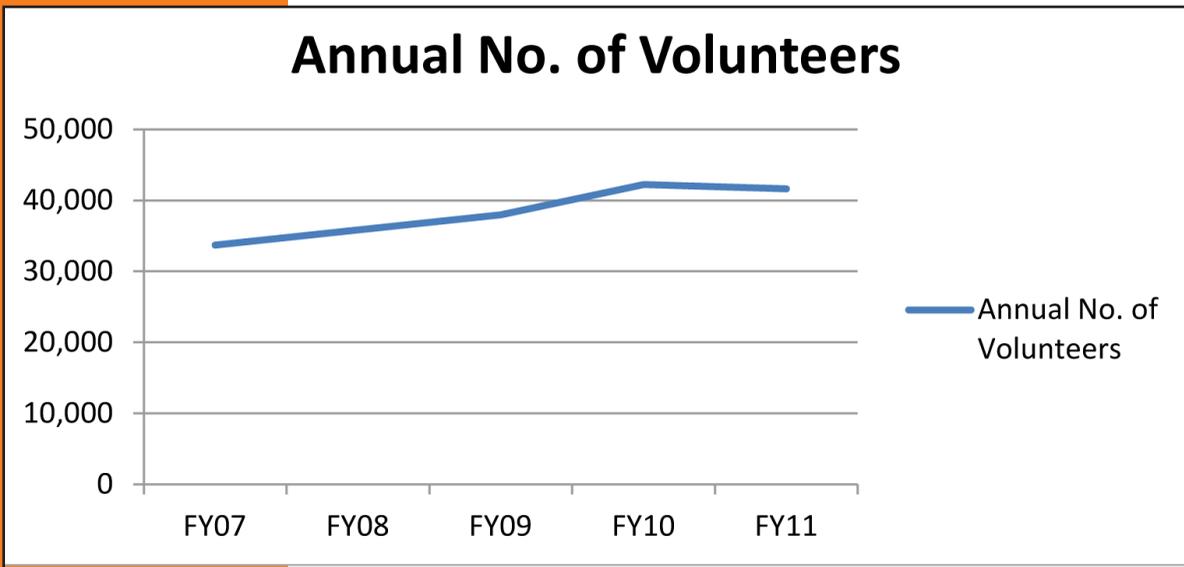


Figure 1. Annual number of individual Refuge System volunteers over the last 5 fiscal years.

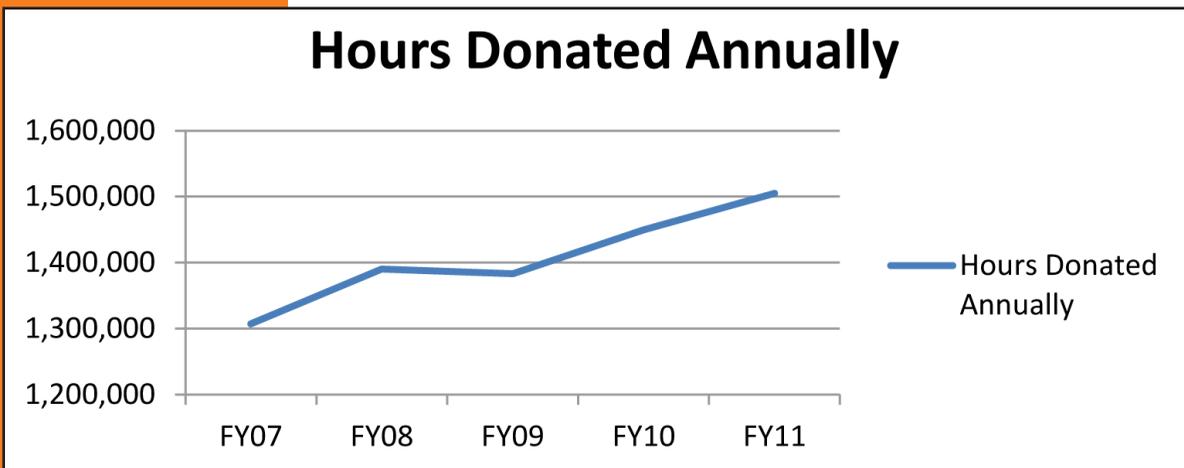


Figure 2. Annual volunteer hours donated within the Refuge System over the last 5 fiscal years.

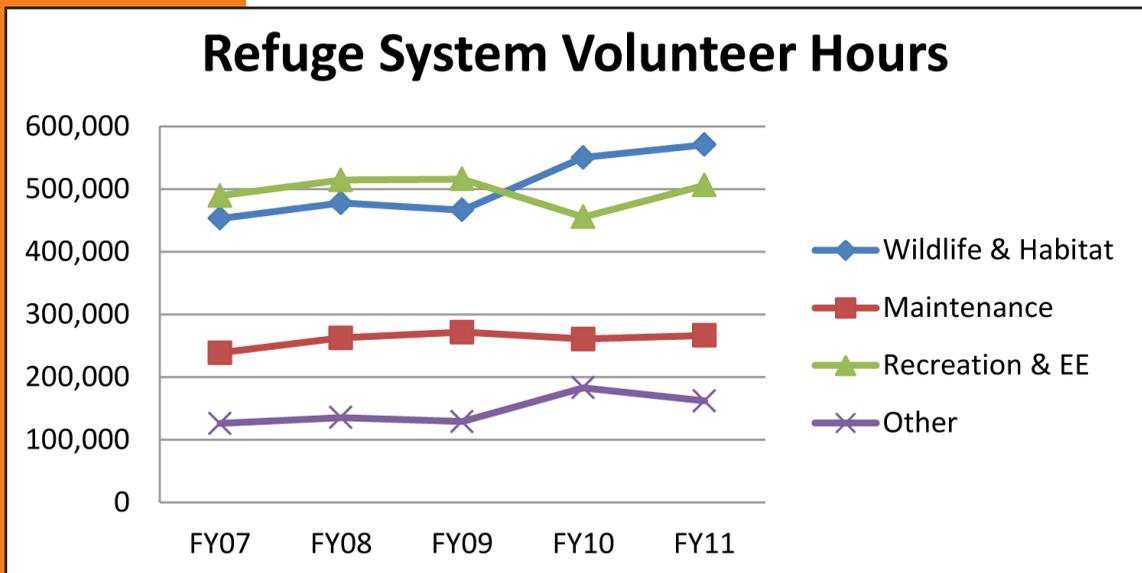


Figure 3. Primary activities engaged in by Refuge System volunteers over the last 5 fiscal years.



Photo Credit: *Todd Paddock, Friends of Refuge Headwaters*

Act of 1998 (Enhancement Act) authorize the Refuge System to accept volunteer services. Congress reauthorized the Enhancement Act in 2004 and most recently in the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer Improvement Act of 2010, affirming its desire to involve Americans as stewards of our nation's natural resources and wildlife. The Volunteer Improvement Act of 2010 also directed the Service to prepare a strategic plan for volunteers and, subject to available appropriations, provide a regional volunteer coordinator for each FWS region. The combination of legislative authority; public interest in nature; enthusiasm, contacts and hard work of the volunteers themselves; and innovation by refuge field staff has resulted in a significantly expanded volunteer program in the Refuge System. This has assisted in increasing environmental education programs, recreational opportunities, maintenance projects, wildlife habitat improvement, and community-based partnerships.

Though legislative authorities have been present for the Refuge System to expand volunteer and partnership programs, new funds to support the effort have been very modest. The current budget provides \$2.7 million and 23 full-time equivalents (FTEs) for the volunteer program on the Refuge System's 560 refuges and 38 wetland management

districts. While we have seen a steady increase in the number of volunteers and the hours they contribute, and our Friends and partnerships have grown, those who oversee these activities at their field stations often do so as an "other duty as assigned" or "collateral duties". In Washington, D.C., the Service has a designated national volunteer coordinator, a national Refuge System Friends coordinator, and a Service partnerships coordinator. Each of the eight regional offices has a designated regional volunteer and/or Friends and partners coordinator. However, most of these National and Regional coordinators have many other collateral duties as well. Although field stations that have volunteer coordinators report an average of roughly six and a half times more volunteer hours than those stations that do not, fewer than 20 refuges have full-time volunteer coordinator positions.

Volunteers: Our volunteers are individuals who want to give back to their communities and are interested in the work on a refuge, district, hatchery or other Service facility. They are parents and teachers who want to model environmental stewardship for their children and students, retirees willing to share a wealth of knowledge and experience, outdoor enthusiasts wishing to spread the

word about America's great natural treasures and concerned citizens of all ages interested in making meaningful contributions while learning about conservation. These volunteers perform a variety of tasks. Some volunteer full-time; others give a few hours a week or month; and still others help during special events.

The Service strives to match a volunteer's talents and interests with work needed to be accomplished, which varies from site to site. Whenever possible, Service employees put a volunteer's special skills and experience to work to achieve specific conservation goals. Volunteers conduct fish and wildlife population surveys, band birds and tag fish, lead tours and educational activities for school groups and other visitors, do laboratory research, manage cultural resources, perform administrative duties, work with computers and other technical equipment, maintain Refuge System facilities, write grant proposals, and much more.

Friends organizations: Service Friends organizations are private, independent, community-based, 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations formed by citizen volunteers who care about the refuge as a natural resource and work to protect it and support the mission and purposes of their local national wildlife refuge and the Refuge System. There are also several Friends organizations that support fish hatcheries or other Service offices. Friends organizations fit many of the criteria of a community partnership; the difference is that supporting a Service field station is the prime objective of a Friends organization; whereas community partner organizations have their own primary mission and cooperate with or support the refuge only in specific areas where their primary mission overlaps with refuge goals.

Friends organizations are crucial to the Refuge System's mission of conserving and protecting the wildlife of this great nation. From its start in 1903, the Refuge System has owed its very existence to concerned citizens eager to protect America's natural resources. Friends help

millions of Americans understand that their actions today determine the legacy we leave for tomorrow – and they are inspiring a new generation of conservationists.

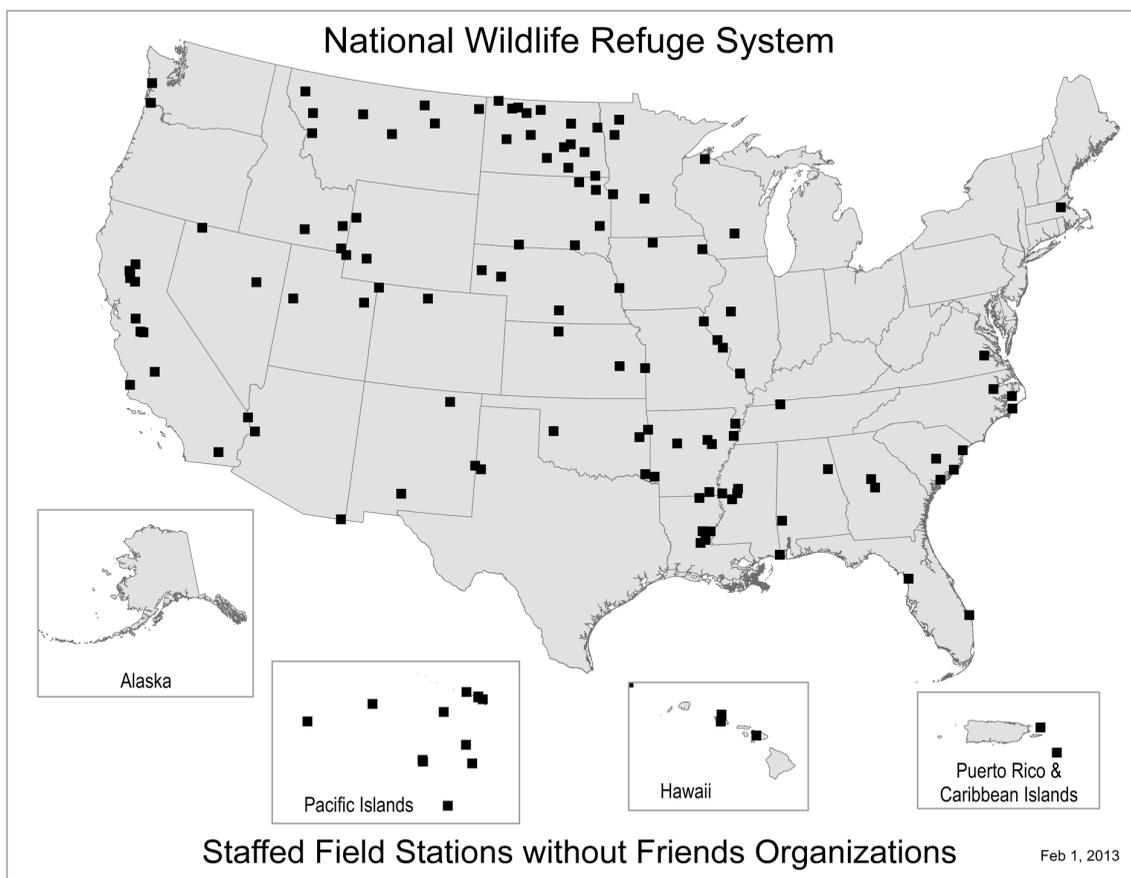
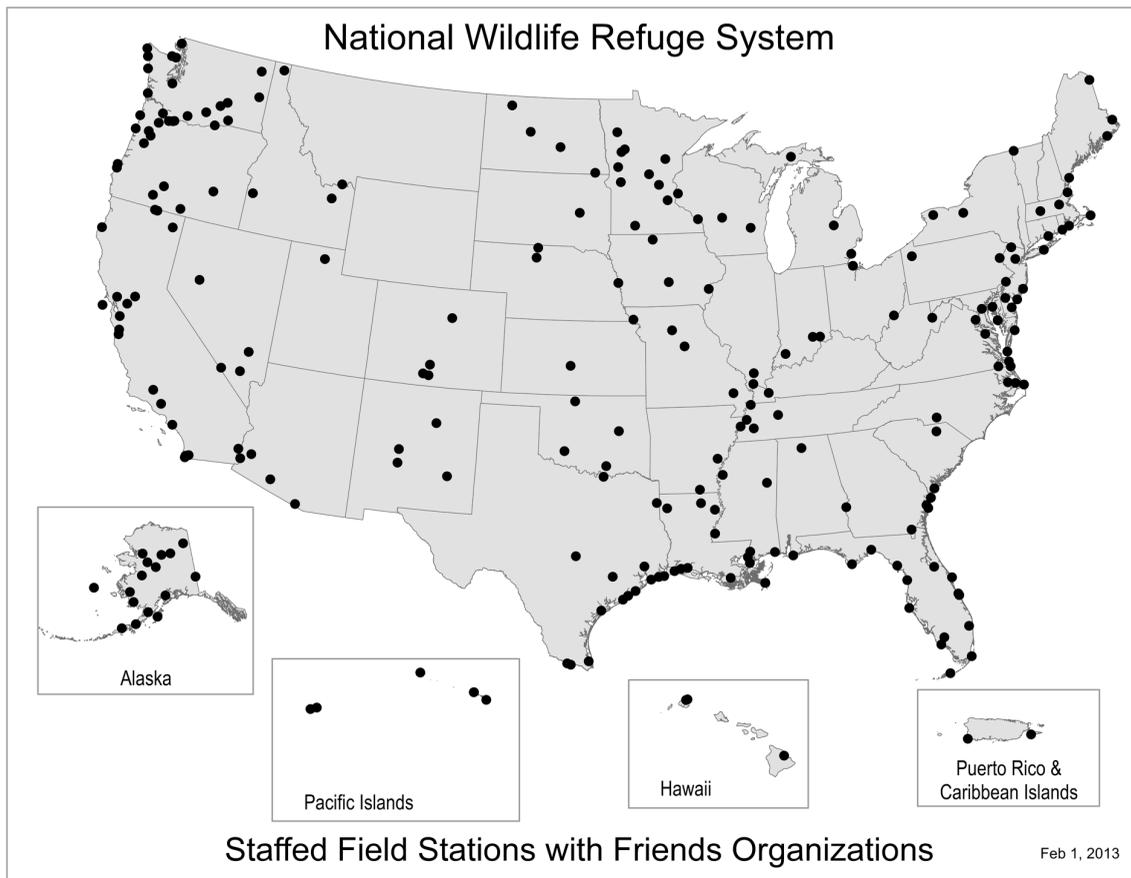
These important allies assist their field stations by educating local communities and encouraging community participation in programs that build long-term support. They raise funds and provide volunteer support to do work that might otherwise go undone. Friends are an essential link to the community in promoting land stewardship.

Currently about 230 Friends organizations assist nearly 300 refuge system field stations across the country. Our records as of the end of FY 12 indicate that 291 of the 594 (49%) field units reporting in the Refuge Annual Performance Plan database were assisted by a Friends organization. About one-third of all refuge field units are unstaffed and it is normal for Friends organizations to be more active with the staffed field units. Currently 61% of staffed refuges are supported by a Friends organization. It is surprising to discover that they also support 24% of unstaffed refuges. This strategic plan encourages development of Friends organizations or formalized community partnerships at staffed field stations that currently do not have them. Maps displaying the distribution of staffed refuges with and without Friends organizations are shown in Figures 4a and 4b.

The number of Friends organizations working with refuges has grown considerably in the last 15 years from about 115 in 1997 to about 230 today. Although Friends organizations are independent entities, the health and vitality of their organizations are greatly enhanced by a strong cooperative working relationship with the local refuge. Presently many Friends organizations are doing well while others are struggling to sustain themselves; a more detailed discussion of current challenges and opportunities are described in Section V.

Community partnerships: Today Refuge managers work beyond the boundaries of their units much more than in the past. In addition,

Figures 4A and B. Current distribution of staffed refuges with and without Friends organizations. A total of 61% of staffed field units reported partnering with a Friends organization in FY 12.



“Today Refuge managers work beyond the boundaries of their units much more than in the past.”

because of personnel and funding constraints, agencies increasingly rely on volunteers and partner organizations to complete projects. Partnerships with various groups have become increasingly important for addressing off-site threats to on-site goals and objectives. Examples of cooperative efforts include conservation communications, training, hunter education, natural resources scholarships, conferences and youth education.

The term community partnership has historically been used to refer to a wide range of both formal and informal mechanisms to work with outside entities. For the purposes of this plan, a community partnership is defined as a formal relationship with an existing local agency, organization, or business to achieve a common goal. Applying this definition in the context of the Vision recommendations, a community partnership is different than a Friends organization, though it should also operate under a written agreement that describes shared goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities between the community partner and the field station. As described above, the prime objective of a Friends organization is supporting the refuge; whereas community partner organizations may have their own primary mission and cooperate with or support the refuge only in specific areas where their primary mission overlaps with refuge goals.

Community partnerships serve as an alternate mechanism to a Friends organization to help encourage community engagement in the shared stewardship of a refuge’s wildlife resources. In a few cases these community partnerships may evolve into Friends organizations but in most cases the community partner organization has another primary mission and will continue to work with the refuge as common goals are apparent to both entities. Many types of community partnerships are formed at field stations. For example, there may be a partnership between a refuge and a local Audubon group to stage an annual birding festival, or between a hatchery and a local fishing club to maintain a public access area, between a refuge and a local garden club to care for a native plant garden/display area, or between a refuge and a local school district for educational programs. In some cases, visitors that come to a refuge are an important part of the local economy and the refuge and town may work together to manage parking and congestion issues, or work on birding trails, tourism brochures or other related projects together.

IV. Trends in Overall Volunteerism in the USA

The day of the always-there, long-term volunteer is beginning to pass. Many of today's volunteers are interested in smaller and more manageable commitments, and they want to test an organization before they make a long-term commitment. "Volunteering in America: 2007 State Trends and Rankings in Civic Life," released by the Corporation for National and Community Service (Corporation), provided a detailed breakdown of America's volunteering habits and patterns by state and region. The report noted that data compiled over the last 15 years suggests some change in how people volunteer. According to the report's findings, episodic volunteering (where the volunteer serves 99 or fewer volunteer hours in a year) has increased since 1989. The overall increase in episodic volunteering since 1989 has largely been driven by teenagers and adults between the ages 45 to 64. These two groups have the largest increase in the sheer number of volunteers serving 99 or fewer hours per year.

The Corporation's research also has found that 55 percent of 12-18 year olds volunteer – more than 1 ½ times the adult rate and that only 5 percent of youth volunteered due to a school requirement. Thirty

nine percent of teens who volunteered did so regularly; 35 percent occasionally and 27 percent are episodic volunteers. The Corporation's 2011 report shows that volunteers between the ages of 18-24 are the fastest growing segment of the volunteer population, having increased their participation from 12.3 percent in 1989 to 29.2 percent in 2010 (*Volunteering and Civic Life in America, Corporation for National and Community Service 2011*).



Photo Credit:
Todd Paddock, Friends of
Refuge Headwaters

Organizations, including the Refuge System, could benefit by identifying events or projects that will attract and productively engage short-term and episodic volunteers in meaningful service. Since there is still a need for long-term

regular volunteers, Service employees will also need to develop a system for cultivating the most interested volunteers in order to encourage their continued involvement. This two-pronged strategy will require a greater variety of volunteer assignments with shorter time commitments to attract and fulfill the desires of many volunteers as well as the development of a “career ladder” which can progressively lead a subset of these volunteers into greater involvement. This will also require a greater time commitment for Service staff to grow and maintain a sustainable volunteer program. The goal will be building relationships, improving retention, and promotion - not solely recruitment.

The Corporation’s study further illustrates that most volunteer hours come from a relatively small portion of the population, and are largely contributed by retired or senior Americans, who traditionally have distinguished themselves not only by the quantity of hours

volunteer work (*Connecting and Giving: A Report on How Mid-Life and Older Americans Spend Their Time, Make Connections and Build Communities, AARP 2011*). The sheer volume of baby boomers makes new retirees a fast-growing source of volunteer candidates.

One definition of volunteering is that it is “serious leisure.” In the coming decade more people may accept that definition. Many people design their vacation around working for a specific cause such as building homes in Central America or monitoring turtle nests at Cape Romaine National Wildlife Refuge. There are even magazines devoted to advertising these opportunities. You will hear this referred to by a variety of terms such as “ecotourism” and “voluntourism.”

The Refuge System already has a significant number of seasonal volunteers, both young and senior. Seasonal volunteers are those who live in different locations and shift their volunteering as they shift their domiciles. A portion of these seasonal volunteers are a group of highly mobile retirees who essentially travel the country in a recreational vehicle (RV), but who volunteer at public parks and refuges along the way. In these cases field stations that have housing and/or facilities that can accommodate these RVs have a major recruitment advantage. This migratory behavior conforms to the needs and interests of the would-be volunteers, and is a novel way of dealing with time constraints and the desire to move around. With the impending population of healthy and active “baby boomer” retirees, this type of volunteering is likely to blossom, becoming part of the defined “leisure” activities of the population.



Photo Credit: *Todd Paddock, Friends of Refuge Headwaters*

contributed but also by the quality of their efforts. Their style of volunteering is like that of a part-time employee, giving fixed amounts of time each week with no set end point. Volunteering ranks only slightly behind travel in importance to retirees. The AARP has found that 43 percent of those in baby boomer age group are “somewhat” or “very involved” in

V. Current Challenges and Opportunities for the Refuge System

Refuge managers across the country recognize the tremendous value and effectiveness of volunteers, Friends organizations, and community partnerships. There are many examples of outstanding assistance that volunteers, Friends organizations and community partnerships can provide. At the Silvio O. Conte NFWR, volunteers donated hundreds of hours to stop water chestnut, an aquatic invasive plant, from taking over 50 ponds across the landscape and spreading even further. Friends organizations have purchased buildings, run visitor centers and nature stores, and funded environmental education and biological programs. They may also encourage the community to protect a refuge and its associated resources.

In 2012, the Service surveyed all refuge managers, asking for a single response per staffed refuge. One hundred managers or their designees completed the survey. Ninety-nine percent of respondents indicated that their refuge used volunteers, 77% had a Friends organization, and 57% had at least one community partnership, with a majority of those having multiple community partnerships.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents thought a Friends organization was either critical or could be helpful in achieving refuge goals and objectives. Twenty-three percent reported that their Friends organization is very effective. Sixty-one percent of managers rated individual and group volunteers as having a broad spectrum of activity in support of various refuge programs, as well as being very effective. While a higher proportion of community partnerships (59%) had a narrow focus, many community partnerships were rated as being very effective as well as very self-sufficient (51% each).

However, weaknesses were noted, and improvements are possible. About 20% reported that their Friends organization did not have a formal written agreement, with a similar proportion reporting that their Friends had a narrow focus and often required substantial assistance from the refuge staff. Fifteen percent reported that their Friends organization was not very effective. Only three percent of managers ranked volunteers as often requiring substantial assistance from refuge staff, although roughly half of them ranked Friends and volunteers as sometimes requiring

“Refuge managers across the country recognize the tremendous value and effectiveness of volunteers, Friends organizations, and community partnerships.”

substantial assistance from staff.

The overwhelming problem for field stations is that effectively coordinating

asked to select the top three challenges facing their Friends organization, the selections most often chosen by Refuge managers included: too few active board members, board members facing burnout, a lack of active and engaged members, trouble finding new board members, and small membership numbers. Survey respondents also indicated that Friends organizations also have problems raising funds, too narrow a scope of interest, organizational issues, or the lack of paid staff. Occasionally, but reported less often, were communication issues with the refuge staff.



Photo Credit: *Todd Paddock, Friends of Refuge Headwaters.*

with and assisting Friends, volunteers and community partnerships, takes significant time, and many refuge managers feel they do not have sufficient staff to take advantage of the potential opportunities offered by these groups and individuals. The top reason for not having a Friends organization or community partnership was lack of staff to take on these responsibilities. In addition, lack of staff was the top reason selected for not having a volunteer program, and lack of staff or staff time to train and supervise volunteers was

Some refuges are located in very remote locations, where it is harder to find volunteers, especially volunteers committed enough to take on the substantial effort involved in running a 501(c)3 Friends organization. Being located in a rural area was the second most often cited reason for having no Friends group, and “not enough organizations in local area” was cited by 20% of the respondents as the reason they had no community partnerships. Still, half of the refuges that reported having no Friends organization to work with did have at least one community partnership. Although it is often perceived that National Wildlife Refuges are little-known and that local citizens sometimes have a negative perception of the refuges, these were not selected as serious problems by a large majority of respondents. Additional training was recognized as



Photo Credit: *Joe Milmoie, USFWS*

overwhelmingly selected as the biggest challenge for those who had volunteer programs. Friends organizations are also short of people. When

important to help improve specific problems. By better understanding the trends in volunteerism, Service employees can work smarter and capitalize on opportunities these trends present. Targeting volunteers at both ends of the age spectrum, providing more one-day events for volunteers, and providing more housing or RV hook-ups are just a few of the ideas that may pay large dividends in improved volunteer participation.

Despite the current challenge of overextended refuge staff, we see a number of positive trends that work in favor of expanding community-based shared stewardship of refuge resources through volunteerism. The American public continues to have a strong interest in studying and enjoying nature and in conserving wild lands that can be appropriately used for enjoying the out-of-doors. There is a strong interest by businesses to encourage their employees to participate in environmentally friendly actions and to volunteer their talents in support of activities on or related to conservation lands. If refuges develop strong relationships to local businesses, they

can sometimes benefit when the business's employees are given a paid day to volunteer or teams of employees choose the refuge as the place to carry out their annual community service day. The baby boomer retirement wave has begun, resulting in a large number of potential volunteers often with high skill sets interested in meaningful volunteer service. The digital age

is bringing with it new opportunities to engage the public in a variety of ways including opening

doors to begin doing more work with virtual volunteers. Many web platforms allow observations from citizen scientists from across the country to be entered and huge



Photo Credit: *Todd Paddock, Friends of Refuge Headwaters*

amounts of data may be collected this way; this is an excellent way to engage volunteers. Entering refuge data at home (collected by others and provided via email) may allow someone who lives far from a given refuge to still donate meaningful time.

In our conservation stewardship, we build upon past successes in managing our nation's natural heritage and strive to benefit generations yet to come. The Refuge System recently developed a strategy for the future in "Conserving the Future – Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation" (October 2011). While the vision statements and themes encapsulated in that document apply most directly to Refuge System employees, they also apply to the many partner organizations and private citizens who work side-by-side with us as stewards of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Within this context, Refuge System employees, partners, and advocates are caring stewards and trusted leaders who embrace landscape level conservation; are valued contributors to the broader scientific



Photo Credit: *Dave Edwards, Friends of Horicon NWR*



Photo Credit: *Todd Paddock, Friends of Refuge Headwaters*

community; engage the American people; are effective ambassadors; provide a welcoming and safe environment for visitors; are diverse and inclusive; and share a passionate conservation ethic. It is within this context that we strive to be important contributors to local communities by promoting a shared stewardship of refuges and their

associated natural resources to be treasured and enjoyed by both present and future generations.

VI. Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Volunteerism in any form - whether single individuals, Friends organizations, or local community groups - offers many benefits to the fish, wildlife, and plants the Service is charged to conserve as well as to the volunteers themselves. Rewards for volunteers include meaningful work; varied outdoor experiences that frequently involve getting close to nature; opportunities to increase skills and expand interests; opportunities to engage visitors; opportunities to see the work of professionals in the conservation field; and opportunities to meet and interact with new people.

This section identifies the goals, objectives and strategies the Service hopes to achieve in the next fifteen years. The Service organization assigned to achieve each strategy is identified in parentheses after the strategy, e.g. Headquarters (HQ), Regions, Field Stations, the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), and the Community Partnership Implementation Team (CPIT).

The overarching purpose of this plan is to strengthen the future engagement of volunteers, Friends organizations, and community partnerships in collaboratively carrying out the mission of the Refuge System. This purpose will be sought

through the following actions:

Goal 1 - *Increase volunteer management capacity at field stations and improve volunteer programs so that more citizens may work successfully with us to help steward Service lands and resources.*

A steady increase in the number of volunteers and volunteer hours (reported annually as part of the Refuge Annual Performance Planning [RAPP] system), the number of field stations with volunteer programs (reported annually in RAPP), and an increase in staff and volunteer satisfaction with their volunteer program will provide evidence of success in reaching this goal. The level of success can be monitored by repeating the 2012 survey.

The growth of the volunteer program and Friends organizations during the past 30 years has been a remarkable achievement of public involvement and stewardship. Volunteers of all ages and abilities now provide a wide array of vital services on refuges – working side by side with Service staff, they greet the public and teach youth; clear trails and control invasive

“The growth of the volunteer program and Friends organizations during the past 30 years has been a remarkable achievement of public involvement and stewardship.”



Photo Credit: *Sue Hix, Friends of Sherburne NWR*

species; and provide biological expertise with enthusiasm. The Refuge System could not function without the 1.5 million hours of work that our more than 41,000 volunteers contribute each year.

Still, most volunteer programs are limited by a lack of refuge staff to recruit, train and supervise volunteers. Refuge System staff growth will likely not keep pace with the demand for more volunteer coordinators, but if we accelerate the development of a more self-directed and self-perpetuating volunteer program, there is much we can accomplish.

In the 2012 survey, Refuge managers were asked to identify their three biggest challenges with respect to working with volunteers. These were identified, in order, as: staff does not have the time to train and supervise volunteers, no staff available to oversee the program, and the mandatory training requirements for volunteers being burdensome and time-

consuming. Since most field stations do not have the resources to have a full time volunteer coordinator, it is imperative to provide as much support as possible to the person(s) charged with coordinating the volunteer program as well as look at other ways to provide this service.

Another question asked was “if your refuge does not utilize volunteers, why not?” The number one response was that there is no staff available. When asked what was needed to help resolve these challenges, most responded that there is a need for a centralized website for volunteers to take training and report hours, a need for training of volunteers and volunteer orientation materials, and a need for training of staff and volunteers as a team.

“Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation” Recommendation 12 challenges the Service to create . . . a more self-sustaining volunteer corps. . . “ A self-

sustaining corps is created when good policies and practices are in place, and when volunteers clearly understand the refuge and their own duties so they can come and do their work with minimal oversight from the refuge staff. It is one in which the volunteers feel that their contributions are necessary and appreciated. The availability of volunteers is consistent without major recruitment efforts.

To create such a volunteer corps, whether the volunteers are individuals, Friends, or community partners, the Service needs to provide them with: adequate orientation to the Service and the refuge; structured, interesting opportunities that also meet refuge goals; enough contact and oversight to give them adequate direction and support; and formal appreciation for their help.

How do we meet these challenges and grow our volunteer program so that more citizens may work successfully with us to help steward Service lands and resources?

Objective 1.1. *Increase the number of full-time volunteer coordinators at refuges to support volunteers, Friends organizations, and community partnerships, so that eventually every staffed refuge has a designated coordinator.*

Strategy 1.1.a. As an initial effort, add 40 full-time volunteer coordinators at highly visited refuges or at refuges located in close proximity to urban areas. (HQ, Regions)

The 2010 reauthorization of the Volunteer and Community Partnership Act, which directs the Secretary, through the Director of the Service, to carry out a National Volunteer Coordinator Program within the Refuge System, encourages and provides authority for hiring additional volunteer coordinator positions. In general, refuges with high visitation rates or those in close proximity to urban areas have a greater need for volunteer help to operate visitor programs and can generally attract a higher number of volunteers. Dedicated staff could greatly increase the effectiveness of the volunteer programs at such refuges. This is

evidenced by the fact that the 19 field stations with full-time volunteer coordinators presently have an average of roughly six and a half times more volunteer hours than those that do not.

The recommended 40 new full-time volunteer coordinators would be most effective at either highly visited or urban refuges. Based on FY 2012 RAPP data, 48 refuges or refuge



Photo Credit: *Sue Hix, Friends of Sherburne NWR*

districts (a sub-unit of a single refuge) have more than 200,000 visitors per year; 41 of these do not have volunteer coordinators (see Appendix A). The NWRS also has an Urban Initiative under the Conserving the Future Vision implementation process that is focusing on how the NWRS can most effectively serve and interact with urban audiences. Volunteer



Photo Credit: *USFWS*

coordinators at urban locations could provide substantial opportunities for community engagement in the NWRs, but at the present time, few urban refuges have full-time volunteer coordinators.

Strategy 1.1.b. Encourage field stations to recruit a volunteer who would coordinate the volunteer program at the field station. A template job description for this will be developed under Strategy 2.4.c. (Field Stations, CPIT)

Strategy 1.1.c. Encourage our partners and Friends organizations to become or sponsor a volunteer coordinator. (Field Stations)

Strategy 1.1.d. Build a self-sustaining volunteer management model for Friends to assist with that also helps them build their own cadre of active volunteers. (CPIT)

Objective 1.2. *Provide training for staff on policies, procedures and best management*

practices for starting and working with volunteer, Friends, and community partnership programs.

Staff, in particular, need to understand what volunteers wish to gain from their experiences and need to understand the basics of non-profit governance.

Strategy 1.2.a. Develop a handbook that collects all the policies, procedures and best practices for working with volunteers, Friends, and community partners in one place. (CPIT)

This will make it easy for everyone to find answers to their questions, and will be a valuable reference for various training courses. This handbook should include links to other web resources and be served via the web portal mentioned below in Objective 1.6.

Strategy 1.2.b. The handbook should include specific materials that illuminate the basics of non-profit organizations. (CPIT)

Service staff do not manage Friends organizations, but they do need to understand the particular obligations, rights and limitations of these organizations.

Strategy 1.2.c. Drawing on existing materials, develop a specific training module on working with volunteers, Friends and community partners and incorporate this training into existing staff Academies, for example, Refuge Academy (also mentioned in 3.3.a). (CPIT)

Strategy 1.2.d. Develop and deliver on-line sessions and webinars so that more staff can easily and inexpensively obtain training on these topics, particularly for new volunteer coordinators. (NCTC, HQ, Regions)

Strategy 1.2.e. Work with the NCTC to develop and deliver a new Partnership Academy and Advanced Partnership Academy for staff working with Friends and community partners. (CPIT)

Objective 1.3 *Improve orientation of volunteers, Friends and community partners so they better understand the local refuge, the Refuge System, the Service, and expectations, policies and procedures that impact their work.*

Strategy 1.3.a. Develop standard orientation materials about the Service and the Refuge System. Develop templates for refuges to use for specific refuge orientation. (HQ)

Due to staff taking for granted their own deep familiarity with their agency and refuge, lack of staff time and an ever changing array of volunteers, orientation of volunteers, Friends and community partners may sometimes be inadequate. The importance of providing a solid orientation should be stressed in the handbook and in training.

Objective 1.4. *Provide training for volunteers, Friends and community partners to help them develop the skills and confidence to take on more complicated and higher level work, helping the Service to accomplish more while also developing rewarding skills for the volunteer.*

Strategy 1.4.a. Work with NCTC to develop and deliver trainings via web and at locations that are accessible to our volunteers and partners to keep costs down. (HQ, CPIT)

Courses should be offered in essential areas, such as providing environmental education and interpretive programs, coordinating special events, invasive plant and animal work, general biological work, trail work, and maintenance.

Strategy 1.4.b. Examine volunteer training requirements to streamline and gain efficiencies where appropriate through mechanisms such as credit for related experience, on-line training, and recognizing more non-Service training as meeting Service training requirements. (HQ)

“Staff, in particular, need to understand what volunteers wish to gain from their experiences and need to understand the basics of non-profit governance.”

“Developing volunteer training plans can be a time-consuming task having a template or checklist along with examples and generic materials rather than developing individual plans would benefit many refuges.”

For example, the Coast Guard Auxiliary boat safety courses may serve as an equivalent to portions of the Service Motorboat Operator Certification Course, or a local company may offer heavy equipment operator courses, or the volunteer may have significant work experience and training that could qualify them for a waiver of a required course.

Strategy 1.4.c. Refuge managers should find and recommend to volunteers local or web-based training opportunities, for example, Master Gardener or Master Naturalist training, or Stevens Point College’s on-line interpretation courses. (Field Stations)

This will assist in finding trained and willing volunteers or will provide existing Service volunteers with valuable training opportunities.

Strategy 1.4.d. Simplify or eliminate some training and paperwork requirements for volunteers. (Field stations, HQ)

Computer security training could be eliminated or simplified by providing alternative internet access (a separate internet line, sometimes called a “hotel” account) for use by our volunteers, partners and Friends organizations, and the complexity of paperwork required for background investigations could be simplified.

Strategy 1.4 e. The handbook being developed in Strategy 1.2.a and volunteer job description templates being

developed in 2.4.c should include what training and/or background checks are required for each job. Also develop training plan templates. (CPIT)

Developing volunteer training plans can be a time-consuming task, especially for smaller refuges. Having a template or checklist along with examples and generic materials rather than developing individual plans would benefit many refuges. This could be served on the web portal described in Strategy 1.6.a.

Objective 1.5 *Require Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) and other appropriate refuge plans to address volunteer, Friends organizations and community partnership needs and opportunities at each refuge. (HQ, Planning Implementation Team)*

Each CCP, Visitor Services step-down plan, and other similar plans should have goals and objectives for improving the refuge’s volunteer program, establishing or strengthening their Friends organization, and developing community partnerships. These objectives should be incorporated into the CCP’s staffing recommendations and the refuge Visitor Services’ step-down plan.

Objective 1.6. Empower volunteers to be self-sufficient and encourage development of volunteer programs that are increasingly self sustaining, (HQ, Regions, Field Stations, CPIT)

One way to help volunteers become more “self-sustaining” and reduce the amount of staff work needed to manage the program, is to make it easy for staff and volunteers to find answers to questions and for volunteers to self-manage hours reporting. Relevant materials should be consolidated in a single, easy to access location where staff and volunteers could get answers to all their questions and find time-saving resources. Examples include: templates of volunteer job descriptions that a refuge staff person could use, or tools and templates to allow a volunteer to act as a coordinator for other volunteers. Also, any volunteers who are interested in developing and assuming leadership roles in recruiting other volunteers, promoting programs, and coordinating activities should be encouraged to do so and provided with adequate training and assistance to enable them to succeed in that capacity.

Strategy 1.6.a. Develop a “one-stop shopping” web portal with resources for both staff and volunteers. Examples of resources include recruiting and orientation tools, policies, and guidance for staff; and training materials for volunteers. (CPIT)

Develop a portal that describes opportunities and benefits associated with volunteering, encourages support and development of Friends organizations, and describes tools and techniques for an efficient and effective program. This portal will also link to a web-based tool that allows volunteers to manage and maintain their training records, certificates, hours and networking contacts in one easy-to-use database that is available from any refuge or location.

Objective 1.7. *Offer additional incentives to refuge staff for running successful volunteer programs, and maintaining successful partnerships with Friends and/or community organizations.*

Strategy 1.7.a. Include successful collaborations with volunteers, Friends and/or partners as a component of the field station manager’s performance plan. (Regions)

By highlighting this as a critical element of performance, managers will be motivated to find solutions to any barriers they face.

Strategy 1.7.b. Develop Regional recognition for individual or groups of Service employees who run excellent volunteer programs, and maintain successful partnerships with Friends and/or community organizations. (Regions)

To provide an increased incentive, Regional offices may wish to award funds to support a much-needed volunteer project at the recipient’s field station.

Objective 1.8. Provide greater rewards, benefits and recognition incentives to volunteers, Friends organizations, and community partners.

Strategy 1.8.a. Encourage managers to provide volunteers with formal and informal rewards and recognition. Emphasize recognition and provide best practices in training courses and the handbook mentioned above. (Field Stations, CPIT)

Reward volunteers as they prefer to be recognized. The Volunteer Pass program recently reduced the number of required hours from 500 to 250 hours. Upon completion of the 250 hours, the volunteer is eligible to receive a free one-year pass to federal lands that have an entrance fee, but this may not be as important to retirees, who are eligible to buy a low cost pass. Other examples of special recognition could be providing an “insider’s” tour of the field station, or getting an article about a volunteer featured in a local newspaper. Some volunteers may appreciate receiving items with the refuge or Service logo on them, and these items also serve as advertising in the community when the volunteers wear or use them.

Publish a suggested standardized list of rewards for corresponding volunteer hours in the handbook; develop a national or regional program to place bundled bulk orders to reduce the price of these items through volume discounts.

Strategy 1.8.b. Develop regional recognition for volunteers, Friends organizations, and community partnerships. (Regions)

Strategy 1.8.c. Continue to support the National Wildlife Refuge Association Volunteer of the Year and Friends Organization of the Year awards. (All)

Goal 2 - Connect with and engage more and a wider cross section of the American public in volunteering for the Service. A steady increase in the number of volunteers, their diversity, and the diversity of tasks they accomplish will provide evidence of success in reaching this goal.

For many years, volunteers have helped get essential work done on national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts across the country. Volunteers may help for a day at a particular event, on a regular basis over a period of many years, or somewhere in-between. The new wave of retiring baby-boomers provides an unprecedented opportunity to recruit a large number of motivated volunteers.

Regardless of the length of time that volunteers work with the Service, they help get important conservation work done. This is not, however, the only value of volunteering with the Service. Volunteers gain knowledge and understanding about the nation's resources and natural resource issues. They may gain specific skills and self-confidence. Another important part of volunteering is that these volunteers develop personal relationships with the Service staff, with other volunteers and with the land itself.

Because the volunteer program is valuable both in terms of the work getting done and the personal relationships that can develop, the question then becomes, how do we help expand the volunteer program in a meaningful way, so that more and a wider cross section of Americans can volunteer with the Service?

The following objectives will help accomplish this goal:

Objective 2.1. Employ effective communication methods to increase general awareness of the Refuge System and Service in order to motivate more Americans to volunteer.

Strategy 2.1.a. At a national level, improve communication about the Refuge System by strategically developing targeted public service announcements, focusing on social media, and improving web sites. Provide new focus on recruiting retirees, culturally diverse audiences, and young people. (HQ, Communications Implementation Team)

Strategy 2.1.b. During regional refuge reviews, include review of current communications methods at the refuge to determine if they are effectively reaching potential volunteers, Friends and community partner organizations. (Regions)

Communication methods to examine include, but are not limited to: the field station's web site; the field station's social media sites; posting information on local job boards; posting information with local colleges and universities; and attending local conservation group and civic organization meetings.

Objective 2.2. Establish an ambassador program that raises awareness of all refuge staff and all existing volunteers, Friends, and community partners and trains them to be active advocates for benefits provided by the refuge and for promoting the rewards of volunteerism. (Interpretation and Environmental Education Implementation Team).

The Interpretation and Environmental Education Team will be developing training programs, as well as materials, brochures, and communication messages to promote this culture of outreach, engagement, and customer service.

Objective 2.3 As part of the annual work planning process, review opportunities for volunteers, Friends and community partners to help at field stations and share that information with Friends, partners and active and potential volunteers. (Field Stations)

While this may seem obvious, if field station staff regularly revisit the unmet needs at their field station, volunteer programs can explore new directions and gain support from more staff.

Objective 2.4 Given the needs for volunteers as determined by the field station staff in Objective 2.3, encourage field stations to strategically recruit volunteers who already have the needed skills and/or provide training for existing volunteers to develop these crucial skills.

Strategy 2.4.a. Identify and coordinate with existing and potential organizations who have members with skills commonly needed on national wildlife refuges and in wetland management districts. An example would be recruiting volunteers from the ranks of recently retired Service employees. (Field Stations)

Strategy 2.4.b. From the work in the strategy above, develop and share a resource list of national and regional groups that can help Service staff find volunteers with the skills frequently needed on field stations, including providing environmental education and interpretive programs, coordinating special events, invasive plant and animal work, general biological work, trail work, and maintenance.

This should be available via the web portal discussed in Objective 1.6.. A successful example of this is the partnership with the Student Conservation Association to recruit student interns for refuges. Encourage staff to engage local groups as well. (HQ, CPIT)

Strategy 2.4.c. Provide tools to assist the field stations to do effective targeted recruitment. (CPIT)

For example, to help improve the initial match-up of field station needs and volunteer skills, develop template job descriptions that outline required knowledge, skills, and abilities for specific positions. This will help field stations get away from doing general volunteer recruitment and move toward recruitment of volunteers with particular skills. These should be made available via the web portal discussed in Objective 1.6.

Objective 2.5. Encourage field stations to identify and cultivate those volunteers who might be interested in high-level responsibilities.

Strategy 2.5.a. Conduct regular discussions with volunteers to identify their developing interests and corresponding training needs. (Field Stations)

Strategy 2.5.b. Offer promising volunteers advanced training opportunities, either locally or through NCTC. (Field Stations)

Objective 2.6 Develop and implement nationwide strategy for engaging volunteers in “citizen science” efforts that will also benefit individual refuges or the refuge system (CPIT, Science Implementation Team)

Occasionally, a field station may not have the staff available to support an interested volunteer. By offering them an opportunity to be involved in something that is organized and run nationally, the volunteer may remain positively engaged instead of being turned away and disappointed. The Service also benefits from the standardized collection of data across the landscape.

The “Conserving the Future” Science Implementation Team is identifying and/or developing nationwide projects and protocols that can be used by local citizen scientists and will benefit the Service. These opportunities will be described on the web portal being developed by the CPIT.

Objective 2.7. Improve the recruitment and retention of long-term volunteers by improving and expanding facilities that can house residential volunteers. This is important because lack of housing can be a barrier to being able to attract and retain longer-term volunteers.

Strategy 2.7.a. Using Visitor Facility Enhancement or other funds, construct trailer pads, bunkhouses and camp sites at field stations, especially at remote field stations. (HQ, Regions, Field Stations)

Strategy 2.7.b. Incorporate information about available housing in the centralized recruiting portal so that potential volunteers identify opportunities with available housing. (CPIT)

Objective 2.8 Increase the diversity of Service volunteers.

Strategy 2.8.a. Incorporate or link the materials being developed by the Vision Implementation Team on Urban Refuges regarding creating urban presence partnerships and standards of excellence into the handbook materials. (CPIT)

Strategy 2.8.b. Encourage field stations to develop relationships with local groups that reach non-traditional audiences. (Field Stations)

There are many local groups that encourage their members to volunteer in the community (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brother/Big Sister, church groups, ethnic clubs, after school programs, summer camps, RV parks for seasonal visitors, senior centers, retirement communities, disability services organizations). By engaging their members in volunteer opportunities, a different, non-traditional audience will experience their local refuge and learn about the Refuge System first-hand.

Strategy 2.8.c. Encourage field stations to invite family groups to volunteer together either for volunteer events or on an on-going basis. (Field Stations)

In an age in which most families feel time-limited, offering full-family experiences can provide the opportunity for family members to volunteer and have time together.

Strategy 2.8.d. Encourage field stations to participate in nationally-coordinated citizen science projects that help volunteers see the connections between refuges and districts, migratory species, their entire community, and their backyard See Strategy 2.6. .(Field Stations)

Objective 2.9 Reach out to new audiences through electronic communications to encourage development of virtual volunteers. (Field Stations)

Electronic communication capabilities are making it increasingly possible for volunteers to help with certain activities remotely via the internet. Writing or editing reports, assisting with IT tasks, analyzing or developing GIS data, etc. are examples of the types of functions that we may be able to increasingly have available as projects for virtual volunteers.

Goal 3 - Encourage and support active and vibrant Friends partnerships at Service field stations.

Friends organizations have grown in number over the past 30 years to become a vital component of the work we do on refuges in engaging the public in outdoor recreation and promoting wildlife conservation and stewardship. Friends provide many vital services to our sites/programs, including community outreach, coordinating special events, developing and delivering educational, interpretive, and other visitor services programs, coordinating volunteers, and conducting habitat restoration and biological and maintenance program support. Friends organizations may raise funds from private sources, and have purchased buildings and funded environmental education and biological programs. The encouragement and support for active and vibrant Friends organizations at Service facilities will be an increasingly important aspect of national wildlife refuges into the future.

Objective 3.1. In the next five years, increase the number of staffed refuges with Friends organizations or formal community partnerships by 50. In the next 10 years assure every staffed refuge has a Friends organization or a formal community partnership.

There are 139 staffed refuges with no Friends organization working with them at present (see Appendix B). Data will be collected to determine whether they have any community partnerships in place.

Strategy 3.1.a. Formalize existing relationships. (Field Stations)

Some refuges may currently have a group of volunteers that operate as a Friends organization in all but name. They should be encouraged to formalize their group by applying for 501(c)3 status and signing the appropriate agreement with the Service.

Likewise, there are undoubtedly a number of partnerships with community organizations that exist but have never been formalized via a written agreement. These too should be formalized via an agreement.

Strategy 3.1.b. Develop and provide resources for refuges and other field stations to assess the needs, costs and benefits of starting a Friends organization or a community partnership at their location. Compile potential benefits to the community and analyze the community's desire to work with the refuge. (HQ)

Strategy 3.1.c. Develop a start-up toolkit as part of the handbook mentioned in Strategy 1.2.a. (CPIT)

Objective 3.2. Provide opportunities to increase the effectiveness of Friends organizations.

Friends organizations, like all nonprofit organizations, go through life cycle stages and may struggle with a variety of difficulties inherent in running a small non-profit group. These difficulties include maintaining effective leadership, board development and succession planning, managing the administration of the organization, raising funds, developing programs, engaging people to participate and help, planning and communicating with refuge staff, orienting and training new members on the refuge and the organizations purpose.

Strategy 3.2.a. Continue to strengthen and provide the NWRS Friends Academy course at NCTC which is designed for emerging Friends leaders to learn more about the Refuge System's mission, mandates, and core operations so they can work more effectively to support wildlife conservation. Develop post evaluation tools to measure the long-term outcomes of this investment in Friends. (HQ, NCTC)

This is the Refuge System's flagship training course for Friends.

“Friends organizations have grown in number over the past 30 years to become a vital component of the work we do on refuges in engaging the public in outdoor recreation and promoting wildlife conservation and stewardship.”



Photo Credit: *USFWS*

Strategy 3.2.b. Work with NCTC to evaluate and modify the existing Friends training courses on a 5-year cycle. (HQ, Regions)

The existing courses, “Developing and Working with Friends Groups” and “Sales Outlets and Beyond,” need to be evaluated and modified to meet the priority needs of the Service/Friends partnership. Trainings on additional topics needs to be assessed and strategies for their delivery should be established to reduce training costs.

Strategy 3.2.c. Work with NCTC and/or local training providers to support Friends by developing and delivering capacity-building training within each Region, possibly offered on a State-by-State basis or through targeted remote classroom or broadly available internet-served opportunities. (HQ, Regions)

Strategy 3.2.d. Continue to provide opportunities to access on-going training and networking for Friends via national conferences and regional workshops to build pathways for resource sharing and peer to peer support networks. (HQ, Regions)

Both regional and national Conferences can be costly and should only be used to supplement existing training and networking opportunities at the intra-regional level. National and regional conferences/workshops should be offered every few years (instead of every other year) with more resources shifted to developing and delivering intra-regional training and networking opportunities.

Strategy 3.2.e. Seek additional opportunities for training and networking from outside the Service. (Field Stations)

Promote the Refuge Friends Connect website, managed by the National Wildlife Refuge Association, where Friends can access discussion forums and share news, events and resources related to the management of their organization. With over 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the U.S. today, there are an abundance of nonprofit support organizations that offer valuable training opportunities from which Friends can benefit.

Objective 3.3. Provide opportunities for our staff to increase their effectiveness in collaborating with Friends.

Communication, collaboration and cooperation among Friends and staff are essential and should be encouraged.

Strategy 3.3.a. Develop and integrate Friends-specific training modules into all staff Academies at NCTC. (CPIT, NCTC)

Strategy 3.3.b. Work with NCTC to develop and deliver a new Partnership Academy and Advanced Partnership Academy for refuge staff working with Friends and community partners. (CPIT)

Strategy 3.3.c. Develop a program that would allow trained visitor services professionals to go on details or remotely assist field stations without visitor services positions to help develop their Friends organizations. (Regions)

Objective 3.4. Provide opportunities for the Friends-Refuge partnership to increase their effectiveness in collaborating.

Strategy 3.4.a. Re-design the Service Friends mentoring program. (CPIT)

While a quality program, the former mentoring program model is no longer able to provide timely assistance to a reasonable quantity of Friends organizations. A re-examination and re-design of the program is currently underway as a part of the vision implementation.

Strategy 3.4.b. Seek additional opportunities for mentoring from outside the Service. (Regions, Field)

With over 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the U.S. today, there are an abundance of nonprofit support organizations that offer valuable mentoring opportunities and unique views and advice from which Friends and staff can benefit. For years, the National Wildlife Refuge Association has provided excellent mentoring for Friends organizations. They

have co-hosted national Friends conferences and continue to assist in a variety of ways including providing support and mentoring via their website RefugeFriendsConnect.

Strategy 3.4.c. Facilitate intra-state and/or neighboring Service site peer to peer meetings and activities. (Regions, Field Stations)
Refuge Managers and Friends should work with their regional Friends Coordinator to host and/or help facilitate peer to peer Friends meetings annual from neighboring Service sites to share ideas, communicate and help one another. Other ideas include Friends volunteer activities (work blitzes) on various refuges throughout the region or the country, particularly remote refuges, and to encourage more Friend-to-Friend gatherings within states or at neighboring Service sites to share ideas.

Strategy 3.4.d. Provide clear examples to demonstrate how rural Friends organizations can be successful. (HQ, NCTC)

NCTC should develop webinars and video conferences that feature successful Friends groups from rural or remote areas (such as Friends of Midway, Friends of Alaskan Refuges, Friends of Squaw Creek NWR) discussing what has made their groups work. This effort should be targeted to increase and maintain enthusiasm among rural Friends members.

Strategy 3.4.e. Encourage “remote station stewardship” where existing Friends organizations add a station to their efforts, or new Friends organizations form to support a field station distant from their home location. (Field Stations)

Strategy 3.4.f. Hold webinar and video conferences among managers and Friends from across the system to encourage broad thinking and an understanding of the bigger picture. Refuge managers and Friends should each separately talk among their peers to discuss successes and ideas on a quarterly basis. (HQ, Field Stations)

“Strong community partnerships with local organizations can play an important role in supporting Service operations, particularly for those field stations without a Friends organization.”

Strategy 3.4.g. At each field station Friends and staff should conduct annual planning meetings to set goals and objectives for support of the refuge and Friends for the year. (Field Stations)

The purpose of these meetings is to focus on upcoming projects and programs specific to the refuge rather than internal operations or activities of the Friends organization, such as independent advocacy activities.

Objective 3.5. Develop stronger ties between Friends organizations and volunteers, and recruit new Friends members and board members from the volunteer base.

Strategy 3.5.a. Friends serving as volunteers should be oriented to and offered opportunities to be involved in a wide variety of field station activities. (Field)

This allows Friends members to understand more about their site and develop personal relationships with the non-Friend volunteers. Non-Friend volunteers should be an important target audience for recruitment by Friends.

Strategy 3.5.b. Service staff and Friends should make all volunteers aware of the Friends organization and the valuable support they provide the refuge. (Field)

Strategy 3.5.c. Service staff should be encouraged to support Friends on-site events. (Field)

Strategy 3.5.d. Service staff should conduct a refuge overview program for Friends and volunteers together on an annual basis. (Field)

Goal 4 - Encourage and support other active and vibrant community partnerships at Service field stations.

Strong community partnerships with local organizations can play an important role in supporting Service operations, particularly for those field stations without a Friends organization. For the purposes of this strategic plan, we are defining a community partnership as a formal relationship with an existing local organization to achieve a common goal.

Applying this definition in the context of the Vision recommendations, a community partnership is different than a Friends organization, though it also operates under a written agreement that describes shared goals and objectives between the community partner and the field station. Examples would be partnerships between a refuge and a local Audubon group to stage an annual birding festival or a local fishing club to maintain a public access area. Another example would be building work capacity through assistance agreements with nonprofits, local governments and tribes.

Although many community partnerships with a refuge may have a narrow, one-time focus and the partners may otherwise

focus on the core objectives of the community organization itself, there may be occasions when such a partnership could be broadened to be more like a Friends organization, or where members of the community partnership could become founders of a new Friends organization.

To fully realize the potential for encouraging both formal and informal partnerships, whether to accomplish a narrow mission helpful to the refuge or to help them develop into a more Friends-like organization, the Service needs to provide clear guidance, staff training, and funding support to promote the establishment and maintenance of these partnerships.

Although the objectives below are targeted to assist in developing and supporting community partnerships, most of these actions will also benefit Friends partnerships.

Objective 4.1. Provide clear guidance to staff about requirements for setting up partnerships. Strategy 4.1 a. Finalize policy on donations. (HQ)

Donation policies affect whether and how a refuge can accept support from a community partner, through donations of land, materials or funds. A draft policy has been developed and reviewed nationally, but has not yet been finalized. A final policy will clarify legal, ethical and policy requirements for accepting donations from various supporters of the refuge.

Strategy 4.1.b. Review and update policies on concessions and challenge cost share grants. (HQ)

Some partnerships on refuges include those with concessionaires who operate facilities or activities on a refuge. To assure that these partnerships conform to appropriate laws and regulations, as well as to U.S. Department of Interior ethics policies, policy guidance is needed. The last official concessions guidance was issued as Directors Order 139 in November 7, 2001. That policy has now expired, and the Fish and Wildlife Manual chapter 630 FW6 has not been completed.

Challenge Cost Share grants are used by the Service to leverage funding to increase participation by partners in the preservation and improvement of natural, cultural and recreation resources on Service lands. The most recent guidance on challenge cost share grants was developed by the Department of the Interior in 2010 (DOI Guidance Release 2010-05). The Service's manual chapter 055 FW 6 was prepared in 1992 and has not been updated to reflect this new guidance.

Strategy 4.1.c. Collect and organize existing guidance in one location, e.g., website. (CPIT)

Service staff often has a difficult time locating partnership policies and guidance. This guidance should be collected and stored in an easily accessible location that is regularly updated. This would likely be in the form of a website (see Objective 1.5), shared drive, or comparable internet location.

Strategy 4.1.d. Collect and develop templates for partnership agreements. (CPIT)

Several templates for challenge cost share and other partnership agreements exist, but are not easily accessible. In other cases, template or examples of non-monetary agreements need to be developed. All should be included on the "website" with the guidance described in Strategy 4. 1. c. above.

Objective 4.2. Provide information and training for staff and partners

Strategy 4.2.a. Develop a best practices list. (CPIT) Managers across the country have developed numerous unique and creative ideas for developing and maintaining partnerships based on on-the-ground experiences. An initial list was collected during a recent survey of refuge managers. That list should be organized, expanded and provided to field staff during training and at the "website" described in Strategy 4.1.c.

Strategy 4.2.b. Provide staff training opportunities. (CPIT, NCTC)



Photo Credit: *Joan Patterson, National Wildlife Refuge Association*

Training on the importance of partnerships, as well as the mechanics of developing and maintaining partnerships, should be offered in many venues throughout a Service employee's career. This would include modules during existing basic classes, such as refuge academy, as well as during specialized classes or on-line sessions that specifically focus on some aspect of partnerships. The Refuge System will work with the National Conservation Training Center to coordinate this effort.

Strategy 4.2.c. Identify possible training opportunities for partners (HQ)

The Conservation Fund provides excellent training courses on Gateway Communities and Balancing Nature and Commerce that may be helpful in developing and implementing these types of partnerships.

Objective 4.3. Provide funding opportunities for partnerships, including Friends partnerships.

Strategy 4.3.a. Reinstate the Challenge Cost

Share program (HQ)

Many partnership projects need only a small amount of seed money to encourage participation by various partners. Challenge cost share funds have been used for this purpose to leverage funds or in-kind donations by our partners for projects that meet field station needs. Due to budget issues, the Service put the challenge cost share program on hold in FY 2011. Because of this leveraging potential, the program should be reinstated in upcoming fiscal years, as budgets allow.

Strategy 4.3.b. Provide easily accessible information of funding opportunities in the volunteer/Friends/community partners web portal. (CPIT)

To assist Service staff in locating funding options for partnerships, information on internal and external partnership grant opportunities should be developed and maintained on an internal intranet/sharepoint site.

Appendix A

REFUGES WITH DEDICATED VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS IN FY 12

REGION	REFUGE	NUMBER of VISITS
1	Oregon Islands NWR, OR	4,448,058
2	Havasu NWR, AZ	3,200,000
2	Wichita Mountains NWR, OK	1,538,265
4	Pea Island NWR, NC	1,520,100
3	McGregor District, IA	1,443,445
5	Chincoteague NWR, VA	1,353,354
4	Merritt Island NWR, FL	1,173,319
7	Kenai NWR, AK	1,132,101
8	Don Edwards SFBay NWR, CA	877,033
3	Winona District, Upper MS NFWR, WI	796,000
3	Crab Orchard NWR, IL	787,541
1	Dungeness NWR, OR	786,590
3	LaCrosse District, WA	675,000
4	J.N. Ding Darling NWR, FL	657,702
4	Wheeler NWR, AL	645,000
6	National Elk Refuge, WY	523,819
1	Cape Meares NWR, OR	480,683
3	Horicon NWR, WI	427,000
5	Great Meadows NWR, MA	415,500
1	Kilauea Point NWR, HI	404,412
1	Hanalei NWR, HI	402,443
4	Tennessee NWR, TN	381,500
4	Felsenthal NWR, AR	380,000
3	Savanna District, Upper MS NFWR, IL	364,774
2	Laguna Atascosa NWR, TX	337,072
4	Key West NWR, FL	335,000
4	White River NWR, AR	310,000
4	AR Marshall Loxahatchee NWR, FL	308,694
1	Three Arch Rocks NWR, WA	301,472
4	Cape Romain NWR, SC	289,328
2	Imperial NWR, AZ	286,199
4	Eufaula NWR, AL	276,407
4	Reelfoot NWR, TN	275,000
5	Rachel Carson NWR, ME	273,250
6	Charles M. Russell NWR, MT	260,000
4	St. Marks NWR, FL	257,000
5	Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, NJ	250,000
5	Patuxent Research Refuge, MD	241,363
3	Minnesota Valley NWR, MN	230,000
5	Parker River NWR, MA	229,390
5	Silvio O. Conte NFWR, CT, MA, NH, VT	226,169
4	Vieques NWR, PR	215,000
6	Madison WMD, SD	214,700
4	Big Branch Marsh NWR, LA	214,233
2	Tishomingo NWR, OK	211,167
1	Nisqually NWR, WA	204,936
6	Lee Metcalf NWR, MT	200,448
3	Squaw Creek NWR, MO	200,151

Table 1. Refuges with over 200,000 visits in FY 2012 are in the below table sorted in decreasing order by visitation (the nine refuges with dedicated volunteer coordinators are bolded).¹ High visitation refuges along with those located in urban areas are priority candidates for adding new full-time volunteer coordinators.



PhotoCredit: *Chris Bailey Friends of Maga Ta-Hophi, Huron WMD.*

Table 2. Ten refuges with volunteer coordinators and less than 200,000 visits in FY 12. ¹

<u>REGION</u>	<u>REFUGE</u>	<u>NO. OF VISITS</u>
1	Deer Flat NWR, ID	178,552
3	Neal Smith NWR, IA	135,000
4	Okefenokee NWR, GA	188,468
5	Blackwater NWR, MD	180,000
5	Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR, VA	45,917
5	Rhode Island NWR Complex, RI	194,821
6	Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, CO	33,427
7	Kodiak NWR, AK	49,705
7	Tetlin NWR, AK	35,057
8	Desert NWR Complex, NV	145,128

¹ Note that some volunteer coordinators are funded by Friends organizations or other sources.

Appendix B

STAFFED REFUGES NOT CURRENTLY SUPPORTED BY A FRIENDS ORGANIZATION

(151 of 399 staffed field stations reporting in RAPP at the end of FY 2012).

<u>REGION</u>	<u>REFUGE</u>
1	Baker Island NWR, HI
1	Bear Lake NWR, ID
1	Grays Harbor NWR, WA
1	Grays Lake NWR, ID
1	Guam NWR, GU
1	Hawaiian Islands NWR, HI
1	Howland Island NWR, HI
1	James Campbell NWR, HI
1	Jarvis Island NWR, HI
1	Johnston Atoll NWR, HI
1	Julia Butler Hansen Refuge, WA
1	Kealia Pond NWR, HI
1	Lewis and Clark NWR, WA
1	Minidoka NWR, ID
1	Oxford Slough WMD, ID
1	Palmyra Atoll NWR, HI
1	Rose Atoll NWR, HI
1	Sheldon NWR, NV
1	Wake Atoll NWR, HI
2	Bill Williams River NWR, AZ
2	Buffalo Lake NWR, TX
2	Grolla NWR, NM
2	Havasu NWR, AZ
2	Little River NWR, OK
2	Maxwell NWR, NM
2	Muleshoe NWR, TX
2	Ozark Plateau NWR, MO
2	San Andres NWR, NM
2	San Bernardino NWR, TX
2	Sequoyah NWR, OK
2	Washita NWR, OK
3	Agassiz NWR, MN
3	Big Stone NWR, MN
3	Boyer Chute NWR, NE
3	Chautauqua NWR, IL
3	Clarence Cannon NWR, IL
3	Driftless Area NWR, IA

3	Glacial Ridge NWR, MN
3	Great River NWR, WI
3	Iowa WMD, IA
3	Leopold WMD, MN
3	Litchfield WMD, MN
3	Middle Mississippi River NWR, MO
3	Two Rivers NWR, IL
3	Whittlesey Creek NWR, WI
4	Bald Knob NWR, AR
4	Bayou Cocodrie NWR, LA
4	Big Lake NWR, AR
4	Bond Swamp NWR, GA
4	Cache River NWR, AR
4	Catahoula NWR, LA
4	Cedar Island NWR, NC
4	Choctaw NWR, AR
4	Cross Creeks NWR, TN
4	Culebra NWR, PR
4	D'Arbonne NWR, LA
4	Everglades Headwaters NWR and Cons. Area, FL
4	Grand Bay NWR, MS
4	Grand Cote NWR, LA
4	Hillside NWR, MS
4	Hobe Sound NWR, FL
4	Holla Bend NWR, AR
4	Lake Ophelia NWR, LA
4	Mattamuskeet NWR, NC
4	Morgan Brake NWR, LA
4	Mountain Longleaf NWR, AL
4	Overflow NWR, LA
4	Panther Swamp NWR, LA
4	Piedmont NWR, GA
4	Pond Creek NWR, AR
4	Roanoke River NWR, NC
4	Sandy Point NWR, PR
4	Upper Ouachita NWR, LA
4	Wapanocca NWR, AR
4	Yazoo NWR, MS
4	Santee NWR, SC
5	Great Meadows NWR, MA
5	James River NWR, VA
6	Arapaho NWR, CO
6	Arrowwood NWR, ND

6 Arrowwood WMD, ND
6 Audubon WMD, ND
6 Benton Lake NWR, MT
6 Benton Lake WMD, MT
6 Blackfoot Valley CA, MT
6 Bowdoin NWR, MT
6 Browns Park NWR, CA
6 Charles M. Russell NWR, MT
6 Charles M. Russell WMD, MT
6 Chase Lake Prairie Project WMD, ND
6 Cokeville Meadows NWR, WY
6 Crescent Lake NWR, NE
6 Crosby WMD, ND
6 Dakota Grassland Conservation Area, ND
6 Dakota Tallgrass Prairie Wildlife Mngmnt Area, ND
6 Des Lacs NWR, ND
6 Devils Lake WMD, ND
6 Fish Springs NWR, UT
6 Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area, KS
6 Flint Hills NWR, KS
6 J. Clark Salyer NWR, ND
6 J. Clark Salyer WMD, ND
6 Kellys Slough NWR, ND
6 Kirwin NWR, KS
6 Kulm WMD, SD
6 Lacreek NWR, SD
6 Lacreek WMD, SD
6 Lake Andes NWR, SD
6 Lake Andes WMD, SD
6 Lake Ilo NWR, ND
6 Lee Metcalf NWR, MT
6 Long Lake NWR, ND
6 Long Lake WMD, ND
6 Lost Trail NWR, MT
6 Lostwood WMD, ND
6 Madison WMD, SD
6 Marais des Cygnes NWR, KS
6 Medicine Lake NWR, MT
6 National Bison Range, MT
6 National Elk Refuge, WY
6 North Dakota Wildlife Management Area, ND
6 North Platte NWR, NE
6 Northeast Montana WMD, MT

6	Ouray NWR, CO
6	Rainwater Basin WMD, NE
6	Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area, CO
6	Sand Lake NWR, SD
6	Sand Lake WMD, SD
6	Seedskaelee NWR, MT
6	Tewaukon WMD, ND
6	Upper Souris NWR, ND
6	Valley City WMD, SD
6	Waubay NWR, SD
6	Waubay WMD, SD
8	Colusa NWR, CA
8	Delevan NWR, CA
8	Grasslands WMA, CA
8	Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes NWR, CA
8	Kern NWR, CA
8	Merced NWR, CA
8	North Central Valley WMA, CA
8	Ruby Lake NWR, NV
8	Sacramento NWR, CA
8	Sacramento River NWR, CA
8	San Joaquin River NWR, CA
8	San Luis NWR, CA
8	Sonny Bono Salton Sea NWR, CA
8	Sutter NWR, CA
8	Tulare Basin Wildlife Management Area, CA
8	Willow Creek-Lurline WMA, CA