U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation
Progress Report **July 2013**

Jim Yergin and John Kooper, Cape Romain NWR

Conserving the Future on the Road:

With the two-year anniversary of *Conserving the Future* being celebrated this month, we undertook a new media campaign to showcase the great work and recreation that takes place on refuges. If you missed the daily blogs, you have another chance. Go to the Blog on AmericasWildlife to check out the entries and photos posted by our team of three as we traveled for 11 days down the Southeast coast from Virginia to Florida. Along the way, we stopped at 10 national wildlife refuges to meet with local characters, employees, Friends and state partners.

From the Blog:

The common catch phrase, "that's why it's called fishing, not catching" was thrown around on the boat today. Jim Yergin and John Kooper were our hosts on the 28 foot skiff and we couldn't have asked for better company. Jim and John seem to have known each other since boyhood, yet it took 65 years for these friends to meet. They fish two or three times a week and catch anything willing to bite. Jim doesn't eat fish, but friends and family usually enjoy the catch and those special enough also receive their catch filleted, but as John said, "it depends on the person." These boys spend an awful lot of time on waters around the refuge, and you can tell by their tall tales that they care deeply for Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge.

July 2013 Progress Report

What's been happening since the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ratified its vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System two summers ago at the Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation conference in Madison, WI? Several themes emerged from the July 2011 gathering: recognition of the nation's changing demographics; the impact of a changing climate; the need for landscape-scale conservation; the necessity of unprecedented collaboration; and the fundamental importance of scientific excellence. The bold ideas from Madison inspired the entire Service and challenged the Refuge System to look at our work differently. Today, nine teams of Service employees are taking tangible steps to make *Conserving the Future* a reality. This July 2013 Progress Report is the 6th in a series of quarterly reports, aimed at sharing the progress and impact of the vision on your daily work. For archives on past progress and implementation team work, please visit AmericasWildlife.org.

Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative:

The first ever Urban Academy will be held this September 23-25, 2013, and you can participate virtually even if you are not attending in person. Designed for Service staff, Friends, and partners working in urban areas, the training is a direct result of the *Conserving the Future* Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative and will provide training on the urban standards of excellence developed by the implementation team, model new ways for the Service to develop outreach partnerships in urban centers, and share strategies for meaningful engagement with diverse communities, including overcoming barriers.

Trust for Public Land , National Audubon Society and National Wildlife Refuge Association are all sponsors, and others such as National Wildlife Federation and Chicago Wilderness will also play a role. Live streaming will maximize participation and share the expert line-up of speakers including Dr. Myron Floyd of North Carolina State University, Will Rogers, CEO of Trust for Public Lands, and numerous peers and partners from Refuges and other partnerships across the Service. You can find out more or join us virtually by visiting AmericasWildlife.org!

Planning:

There's a new paradigm for refuge planning, and the Final Report from the Planning implementation team describes it.

Recommendation 1: *Incorporate the lessons learned from our first round of CCPs and HMPs into the next generation of conservation plans, and ensure these new plans view refuges in a landscape context and describe actions to project conservation benefits beyond refuge boundaries.*

One important recommendation in their final report is to "Promote Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) throughout the Service, LCCs, and the greater conservation planning community." In fact, the Refuge System's success in implementing the new planning paradigm will be largely dependent on our partners' willingness to engage in LCD development through the LCCs. LCDs are envisioned as landscape-scale plans that will be developed by the greater conservation community through partnership in the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). Each LCD will describe the partners' individual and collective goals for that landscape, along with shared commitments for implementation and monitoring. Working with the National coordination office of the LCC Network, a Landscape Conservation Design Working Group (LCDWG) has been chartered. The LCDWG concept is compatible with the landscape-level planning programs of other Federal agencies and engages federal agency partners, AFWA, and NGOs.

Community Partnerships:

Working with volunteers, Friends, and community partners; we promote a shared stewardship of refuges and their associated natural resources to be treasured by both present and future generations. These collaborative partnerships are vital to managing our refuges; they not only help accomplish needed work but they engender development of a conservation constituency. The Community Partnerships implementation team provides a blueprint forward in the strategic plan "Volunteer and Partner Involvement in the National Wildlife Refuge System" that describes actions to enhance the effectiveness of volunteer programs, Friends organizations, and community partnerships within the Refuge System.

Bob Hudson, Friend of Lower Suwannee/ Cedar Key Board Member

Four Goals of the Strategic Plan:

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.

Successful implementation will require extensive communication, collaboration, and relationship building among interested individuals. The plan further recognizes that successful collaboration benefits both parties; we seek help from our local communities in making the refuge a success while we also strive to be important contributors to local communities.

Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation:

YCC Intern at Back Bay, NWR

Why should we expand opportunities on National Wildlife Refuges? Not only does Recommendation 17 charge us to, statistics show *access* is one of the key barriers to getting people outdoors.

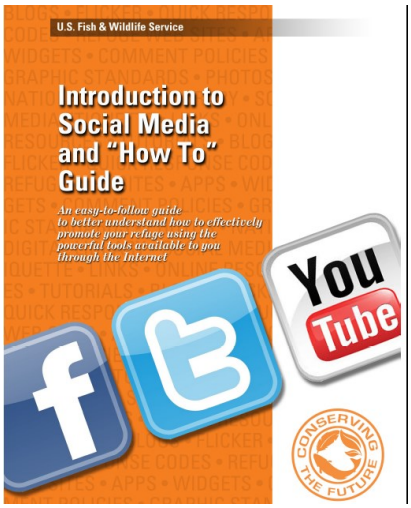
The Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation team has done just that, creating a draft strategy to address the major goal of working cooperatively with the States and fulfilling Recommendation 17.

Recommendation 17: *The Service will work closely with state fish and wildlife agencies to conduct a review of its current hunting and fishing opportunities, especially opportunities currently offered for youth and people with disabilities. Based on this review, the Service and states will work cooperatively to prepare a strategy for increasing quality hunting and fishing opportunities on national wildlife refuges.*

This strategy defines who we are and how we became a system of more than 560 national wildlife refuges. The draft strategy makes recommendations to conduct a review of current opportunities, especially opportunities offered to youth and people with disabilities, strengthen our relationship with States to develop increased opportunities on refuges, and periodically monitor to ensure implementation is being successful. The implementation team posted the strategy in mid-summer and are requesting comments back by mid-September based on input received through AmericasWildlife.org.

Communications:

How do potential new visitors find out about refuges? The most popular way to plan leisure trips, used by about 68 million Americans in 2011, is the Internet, and social media are an important parts of users' Internet experience. The Communications implementation team has drafted an **Introduction to Social Media and "How To" Guide** for the Service.



By virtually "meeting" potential new visitors on Facebook, Twitter or customized apps, the Service encourages and enhances their visits. By staying in touch via social media, we help foster a lasting bond. Using social media, the Service can help build a constituency for refuges that are closed or in remote locations, teach the public about wildlife, habitat and scenery they may value and support even if they never see it in person. We use social media as an interpretive tool, awakening a sense of wonder, a desire to spend time outdoors and a willingness to support conservation.

The Guide walks readers through the difference between "social media" and "new media," details which social media sites are appropriate under Service policies, and details sites approved for use such as Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr.

Scientific Excellence:

Through shared understanding and engagement, Refuge System staff, Friends, partners, visitors and other key stakeholders will be informed, empowered, and inspired to take personal and collective action to help reduce their carbon footprint and to address the impacts of climate change and related stressors on fish, wildlife and plants on Refuges and within local landscapes To this end, the Scientific Excellence implementation team has drafted a climate change engagement strategy for the Service following the direction of Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 2: *Develop a climate change implementation plan for the National Wildlife Refuge System that dovetails with other conservation partners' climate change action plans and specifically provides guidance for conducting vulnerability assessments of climate change impacts to refuge habitats and species as well as direction for innovation in the reduction of emissions and improved energy efficiency on federal lands.*

To the endangered California least tern–which nests on beaches at San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge–minor sea–level rise could mean major habitat disruption.
Credit: Mark Pavelka/USFWS

One goal in the strategy is to identify at least one Refuge unit from each Service region that has shown exemplary innovation and progress toward developing and implementing climate change communication and engagement strategies with multiple audiences. The efforts of these stations will be highlighted in ways that facilitate and encourage emulation by other Refuge units.

The team also plans to cultivate a front line of Refuge staff, Friends, and long-term volunteers to serve as informal, but engaging "Climate Change Communicators" to help effectively engage Refuge visitors, local stakeholders, local school systems, and others to inform, and inspire them to take personal and collective action to achieve the overall vision of mitigation and adaptation. Through communication, training, the Refuge System Ambassador Program and engagement efforts across the Service, the goal is to foster a greater understanding of climate change, its impacts on current and future generations, and actions that can be performed by both primary and secondary audiences to achieve the overall vision of mitigation and adaptation.

Strategic Growth:

How do we strategically grow the Refuge System in order to meet our conservation objectives? What are our priorities? The policy on strategic growth outlines priority conservation objectives for the strategic growth of the Refuge System with focus on acquiring lands and waters for the recovery of threatened and endangered species, implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and conserving migratory birds in decline.

The policy went through an internal review in the fall of 2012, before review by the Service Directorate and States in the spring of 2013.. Finalization is underway by incorporating comments and suggested revisions, developing a Question and Answer addendum to the policy and determining next steps for implementation.

Leadership Development Council:

As Winston Churchill once said, "*those who fail to learn from the past, are doomed to repeat it.*" To avoid that costly mistake, the Leadership Development Council's organizational efficiency team analyzed 12 previous governmental reorganization or efficiency efforts, in order to develop a whitepaper on reorganization suggestions for Service leadership. Reorganizations can revitalize the workforce, promote efficiencies, refine and refocus missions, and take organizations in a new direction, yet the prospect of reorganization typically provokes strong reactions from those likely to be affected.

Recommendation 21: *Assemble an evaluation team consisting of Service and Refuge System leaders to report to the Service Directorate on opportunities for organizational realignments or programmatic efficiencies.*

Given this dichotomy in views and outcomes, the team sought to determine if there were specific factors common to reorganizations or programmatic realignments that result in positive outcomes. Their methods included conducting interviews with managers and field staff directly involved in these efforts, examining Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviews and congressional testimony, and reviewing any available written reports or other documents.

Even though there was seldom a formal evaluation conducted of the results, there were commonalities that arose that significantly impacts people's perception of how successful the effort had been. The organizational efficiency team believes these themes provide helpful direction for implementing future successful reorganization or realignment models. This whitepaper is currently with the Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System and will be available on AmericasWildlife.org soon.

Interpretation and Environmental Education:

The future of conservation lies in the hands of our youth. How do we ensure we pass on a strong conservation ethic? Environmental education has long been an important way for employees to connect our agency's conservation mission and goals with visitors. For decades, national wildlife refuges have served as outdoor classrooms for diverse learning audiences, creating a greater understanding of local, regional and national conservation issues. Today's employees continue this tradition, as they look to teach interdisciplinary concepts to students of all ages to help them make informed conservation stewardship decisions.

Guidance on this strategic plan supports Recommendation 20: *Develop an environmental education strategy that inventories existing efforts, identifies priorities for investment of staff and funds, and outlines basic standards for all refuges.*

Sowing Seeds of Wonder: *a Strategic Plan for Improving Environmental Education for the National Wildlife Refuge System* provides recommendations to improve environmental education throughout the Refuge System and other Service field offices, and is organized under five strategic goals:

1. Inventory and evaluate program resources, content, staff, and delivery.
2. Provide quality environmental education programs throughout the Refuge System.
3. Invest in communications, training and professional development.
4. Maximize effectiveness of delivery modes.
5. Maximize partnerships and leverage program resources.

Within this framework of goals, the strategic plan identifies measureable objectives and strategies to reach those objectives over the next 10 years. The plan was available for comment over the summer of 2013 and is currently with the team as they incorporate comments based on input received through AmericasWildlife.org.

New Webpage for Final Products:
Now you can access *Conserving the Future* products from the Refuge System homepage! AmericasWildlife.org is still the number one source for the status of implementation, but now all final products will be housed on the Refuge System homepage. Visit http://www.fws.gov/refuges/and click on the **Conserving the Future** icon. You can search for final products by Recommendation, Implementation Team name, or year.

Conserving the Future Right in Your Mailbox:

Want the latest news about *Conserving the Future* products, deadlines and progress – right in your mailbox? Sign up for periodic e-mail alerts sent straight to you whenever there is a new product, a deadline for comments, or a progress report. You can sign up for the alerts by joining the social network online or sending your e-mail address to conservingthefuture@fws.gov. Implementation of *Conserving the Future* will change the way we do business, so we want to make sure you keep up with the latest events and provide us your input.

"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."
—Henry Ford