

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Wildlife Refuge System Communications Strategy



NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

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Overview

As America has become more diverse, the National Wildlife Refuge System's (Refuge System) rates of participation, visitation, and engagement have not reflected that diversity. As part of a system of public lands the Refuge System must strive to ensure that all Americans can appreciate/understand their place in wildlife conservation. Communications play a vital role in that goal by building awareness, understanding, and engagement.

The Refuge System's communications strategy is designed to implement the vision set forth in the *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* recommendations:

Recommendation 14: Create a strategic communications plan that educates the public about our mission and accomplishments, and create a positive, professional 'brand' for the Refuge System.

Recommendation 15: Develop integrated mechanisms for using web-based and other emerging technologies to store and share data, communicate within the Refuge System, and inspire and educate visitors and the public.

This communications strategy is the culmination of multiple rounds of development, drafting and editing since mid-2011. The first version drafted by the Communications Implementation Team touched on new ways to engage the American people in conservation and broadened the Refuge System's messages. The public comment period for this draft elicited more than 45 pages of detailed comments and suggestions. At the same time, the strategic plans and products of nine other *Conserving the Future* implementation teams called for many communication needs not addressed in the early version of the communications strategy.

This strategy addresses many of the other implementation teams' needs and defines the process of implementing a positive, professional brand that resonates with a diversity of audiences, both familiar and unfamiliar with the Refuge System. The concepts in the communications strategy will be used across the Refuge System, including in customer service training for employees, to expand online public engagement tools and better understand behavioral science insights to better serve the American Public per [Executive Order 13707](#).

Successful communication typically rely on a large, integrated team of writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, photographers, and web developers as well as efficient operational processes, often lacking in a small government agency. The National Wildlife Refuge System Communications Strategy addresses this by providing a three-part conceptual umbrella for effective and efficient audience engagement.

- A **Brand Strategy** that outlines a positive and consistent brand and shows more Americans the tangible impacts wildlife conservation has on their daily lives, and empowers all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees as Brand Ambassadors.
- A **Content Strategy** that re-imagines our current content and transforms it into powerful shared stories delivered strategically to engage a broader audience.
- A **Digital Strategy** that employs the latest media platforms and products (website, social media, etc.) to deliver user-friendly information to the public in order to promote transparency and deepen public engagement.

In concert, these three strategies are designed to bring Refuge System communications into the digital and mobile age with strategically shared content, and leverage communication assets throughout the organization to engage a broader base of current and new supporters. Specifically the plan aims to:

- Increase online engagement with new audiences.
- Increase diversity of visitation to national wildlife refuges, with special emphasis on encouraging visitation by those ethnic and diverse communities that traditionally have not been part of the visitation audience.

Success will be measured by utilizing online analytic tools common to the private sector. As well as capitalizing on other evaluation tools being developed in concert with the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, the Department of Interior's Youth in the Great Outdoors program and other diversity and inclusion efforts within the Service.

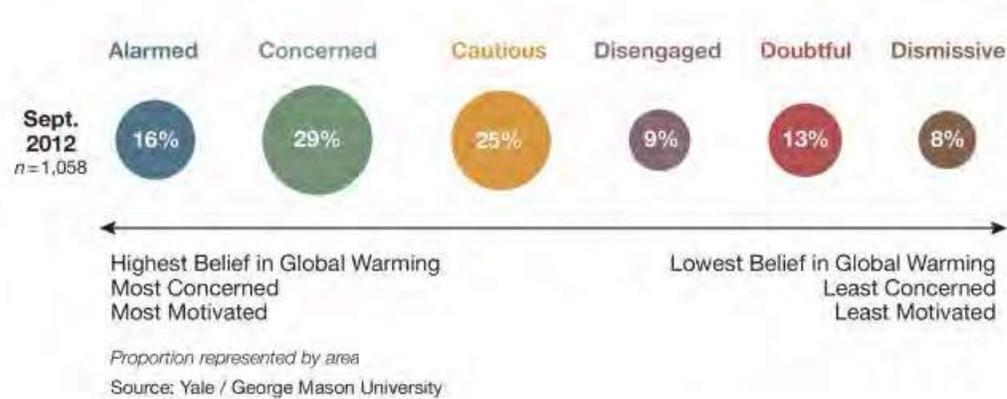
Situational Analysis

Many Americans understand the importance of a healthy environment to their physical and mental health, but they are less familiar with how wildlife and habitat conservation contribute to their well-being ([Language of Conservation 2013](#)). Many Americans may not be aware of the Refuge System’s role in supporting healthy environments for wildlife and people, or their role in supporting strong economies, preserving cultural history, and providing outdoor recreation opportunities.

If the Refuge System is to invite all Americans to see their place in wildlife conservation, then it needs to better understand what the public values about nature and wildlife, explicitly invite those new audiences who are most likely to engage, and deliver to them personalized messages in relevant ways.

Spectrum of Public Engagement in Conservation

Researchers in their publication [Global Warming’s Six Americas](#) have found that 70% of Americans are alarmed, concerned, or cautious about climate change. The remaining 30% fall along the spectrum from disengaged, doubtful or dismissive:



The National Wildlife Refuge System’s communication efforts can use this spectrum to focus our communication efforts. It will be ineffective for us to try and increase engagement with the 8% on dismissive end of the spectrum, who are very certain that global warming is not occurring, and strongly believe that conservation actions will lead to increased government regulation, higher energy prices and harm the economy. Conversely, it is also inefficient to focus all our efforts on the 16% of those that are “alarmed” who are most likely our traditional supporters. We have the most potential to engage a broader swath of the American public by targeting communication at those that are “cautious” and “concerned”. These could be urban residents who are concerned about the environment, but are unaware of the Refuge System; youth who

are already engaged in nature activities and recreation (including the recreation offered on national wildlife refuges), but fail to understand that there is a network called the National Wildlife Refuge System and so fail to engage with it; or local communities who value clean air, and clean water, and open space, but do not connect those benefits to the nearby refuge.

Traditional Supporters

People far along the engagement spectrum are the Refuge System’s traditional recreation users and citizen advocates, including hunters, anglers, bird watchers, photographers, wildlife enthusiasts, and some visitors. The Refuge System has more than 47 million visitors annually, about 200 Friends organizations, and a host of other conservation partners. Our partners’ work on behalf of wildlife conservation continues to be crucial to the Refuge System’s success.

Historically, Refuge System visitor services resources have focused on retaining and expanding traditional supporters. Staff at the field, regional, and national levels engage this audience through trainings, mentorship programs, conferences, web applications and special events like birding festivals and youth fishing days.

The Refuge System has gained some new audience traction through its communications work in media relations and on such social media platforms as Facebook and Twitter. Nonetheless, with limited resources, the Refuge System has focused most of its communication efforts on keeping traditional audiences, broadening its appeal among people who are potential Refuge Friends or volunteers.

A New America: New Audiences

More than 80 percent of Americans live in urban and suburban areas. Ethnic and racial diversity is at an all-time high and growing; by 2050, those who today are considered minorities are expected to constitute the majority of the U.S. population.

In short, demographics point to a strong need to communicate to a broad swath of diverse Americans about their place in wildlife conservation and within the Refuge System. Messaging needs to provide reasons and opportunities for all to find, appreciate, and care for nature in their communities and beyond. Leveraging communication efforts at the

Millennials in Focus

People grouped as “millennials” (born 1976-2004) number about 76 million and are influencers in the marketplace (<http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/millennials-millennial-generation>). A 2014 report by the White House Council of Economic Advisors titled “15 Economic Facts about Millennials” (http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials_report.pdf), found:

- Millennials are the largest, most diverse generation in the U.S, representing a third of the population in 2013.
- Millennials are shaped by technology, value creativity, and are innovative.
- Millennials value community, family, and creativity in their work. Millennials are moving into urban areas.

field, regional, and national levels to target new audiences is the best hope to enlarge the cadre of supporters for the Refuge System and on behalf of wildlife conservation.

People living in urban areas and touched by the Service's [Urban Wildlife Conservation Program](#) are not just an audience for urban refuges. They may also be among the most ardent supporters of more remote refuges, valuing them for their existence if nothing else. For example, the majority of followers of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's Facebook page come from cities and may never visit the nation's largest national wildlife refuge.

Youth Ages 15-34

Since the Refuge System works to ensure wildlife and their habitats thrive for future generations, youth are a key audience. The Refuge System has a growing presence in elementary education across the country through environmental education programs. Fewer engagement opportunities have been cultivated for students and youth beyond the elementary school age. In particular, efforts need to be made to engage high school aged youth, college students, and young professionals. The Refuge System must engage this age group by meeting them on their media and platforms of choice.

Finding Common Ground with a Changing America

The Refuge System's identity or brand has traditionally focused on the altruistic and intrinsic values of wildlife rather than on the way in which wildlife and habitats improve people's lives. Consider how this excerpt from Rachel Carson's *Conservation in Action* leaflet series emphasized "wildlife first" rather than translating the benefits of wildlife into improvement of the human living condition:

"If you travel in the much wilder sections of our country, sooner or later you are likely to meet the sign of the flying goose—The Emblem of the National Wildlife Refuges. Wherever you meet this sign, respect it . . . Wild creatures, like men, must have a place to live. As civilizations create cities, build highways, and drain marshes, it takes away, little by little, the land that is suitable for wildlife. And as their space for living dwindles, wildlife populations themselves decline. Refuges resist this trend by saving some area from encroachment, and by preserving them, or restoring where necessary, the conditions that wild things need in order to live."

This brand disconnect was reinforced by [a study](#) centered on Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge published in *Society and Natural Resources* that concludes that the "*wildlife first*" message is especially alienating local minority and low income audiences. The "*wildlife first*" brand may have served the Refuge System well in eras past, and will certainly continue to be a steadfast, core organizational value. However, the Refuge System must communicate other values of the Refuge System that invite a broader public to engage from their interests. Over the next five years, the Refuge System will use the Communications Strategy to shift its messages to

highlight the ways wildlife conservation benefits people and communities, including mental and physical health, economic vitality, career expansion, and youth engagement.

The Refuge System's success in reaching new audiences will also depend on its ability to keep pace with communication trends and the digital systems that drive them. Many *Conserving the Future* vision implementation teams have recognized digital needs, including upgrading and updating the Refuge System national website; a larger portal to engage potential volunteers; partner and employee collaborative sites; additional interactive maps to engage recreation users; and more interpretation and environmental education elements.

Brand Strategy

A strong brand or shared identity is at the heart of communications. It inspires consistent and positive experiences, builds awareness, and is the basis for growing public interest, engagement, and support.



What you see is just the tip of the iceberg.

Often, people think of a brand as the logo or tagline of an organization, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. In reality, brand is the aggregate experiences that people have with an organization, service or product, most of which is underneath the surface. [Learn more about branding.](#)

At the heart of the Refuge System's current brand is its mission:

To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Properly used, the brand will evoke the Refuge System's mission, core values, demonstrate its unique purpose through a voice or tone that resonates with a broader range of Americans, and help organize storytelling.

Our Unique Purpose/Brand Message

Our unique purpose or brand message conveys:

- Why Refuge System employees & partners do what they do
- How individuals are *part* of the National Wildlife Refuge System
- Why the public supports our organization.

The following brand statement and messages highlight the new ways a broader audience can engage on a more personal level with the Refuge System, and how we can deliver positive experiences for the next century.



Discover the National Wildlife Refuge System - from its rolling prairies, to its rivers, marshes, and estuaries, to its state-sized landscapes, to its vast underwater marine ecosystems. These special places shelter America's diverse wildlife and promote good health, economic vitality, and enjoyment for all people.

National wildlife refuges support systems of lands, waters, and wildlife that communities and people rely upon.

- Your health depends on a healthy planet, which includes healthy wildlife habitats.
- The Refuge System protects remote ecosystems, including four marine national monuments, wilderness areas, and large refuges. YOU may never set foot on these places but they're still critically important to the world's health and well-being.
- National Wildlife Refuges help ensure healthy populations of pollinators like bees, birds, and butterflies so YOU will have healthy food in the future.
- Refuges help provides clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment for your well-being.
- There are a few things in life that connect us all – one of those things is food. The National Wildlife Refuge System takes great pride in the providing wild food resources by managing hunting and fishing opportunities for all Americans.

National Wildlife Refuges support thriving communities, cultures, and economies.

- National wildlife refuges are economic engines for America, pumping \$2.4 billion into the local economy and producing \$792.7 million in job income in fiscal year 2011. That means a healthier economy and less tax burden for you

Applying the Brand Strategy
EXAMPLE

Inspired by Rachel Carson

Whether you live in the city, suburbs or remote reaches of our country, we invite you to keep an eye out an unassuming white sign emblazoned with a flying blue goose — the emblem of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

You may meet it crossing the rolling prairie in the Midwest, an oasis in the deserts of the Southwest, the wilds of Alaska, and even the Pacific Ocean.

You may catch a glimpse of it by a small pond on your morning commute, or as you park near your favorite beach, or as your boat floats through the winding salty creeks of a coastal marsh.

When you see the flying goose, it means the wetlands behind that sign are helping to purify our water; the insects and birds have a place to rest after pollinating our food; and our children will have the opportunity to discover for themselves places where they can see and enjoy the world's most abundant and rare wild creatures.

and your family! For every \$1 appropriated to the Refuge System, an average of \$5 is returned to local economies.

- In 2011, the Refuge System supported more than 35,000 jobs in local communities.
- The Refuge System offers young people employment opportunities starting with summer jobs, internships, or volunteer experiences.
- According to a [2012 study by researchers at North Carolina State University](#), homes close to a national wildlife refuge had a higher value than those that were not nearby.
- Each summer refuges in Alaska partner with elders and communities to teach youth how to harvest and prepare wild foods, from skinning and butchering big game, to checking nets and preparing fish, to berry picking.

National Wildlife Refuges support personal enjoyment and social well-being.

- People can renew or discover ties to culture and history at their local refuge.
- Refuges tell the story of our past weaving together the history of our families and the wildlife and lands they depended on.
- Outdoor recreation and access to nature are vital to people's physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being.
- People can create lasting memories with family and friends when visiting a refuge.
- At refuges people can see wildlife in their natural habitats.
- Refuges protect some of America's most iconic wildlife from the Arctic's polar bear to roaming herds of bison in the west.

Voice and Tone

The voice and tone are how a brand sounds and feels to its audience. They are translated through face-to-face interactions, social media, web communications, brochures, emails, and other communication channels. Maintaining a consistent voice and tone is essential to promoting consistency.

Inviting

Because national wildlife refuges are for all Americans, the Refuge System must ensure that its communications invite all to participate.

Inspirational

Service employees are passionate about the resource. We want to stay authentic and use this passion to create inspirational communications and minimize messages that could be construed as preaching or overly regulatory.

Credible

As a government agency that relies on science, the Refuge System's currency is credibility. To ensure support and confidence in management decisions, the Refuge System needs to communicate in a credible biological and social science.

Optimistic and Genuine

Wildlife conservation has discernable benefits for people. The Refuge System can – and should - - enunciate those reasons with a sense that the future of America will be enhanced when wildlife conservation succeeds. Americans recognize when someone is speaking from the heart.

Understandable

The Refuge System must communicate in the language that Americans use [plain language](#).

Content Strategy

The Refuge System does not have a shortage of content including: thousands of web pages, hundreds of Facebook accounts, interpretive signs, wayside exhibits, Flickr albums, [ServCat](#), documents as well as photos in the Service's Digital Library. Unfortunately, most content never reaches its full potential. Too often, the content is targeted at employees or those who already support the conservation cause; hard to find in last statement on an auto tour wayside exhibit; a striking photo lost as a blip on a field station's Facebook page; or a scientific discovery buried in the conclusions of lengthy academic reports.

The Refuge System Content Strategy seeks to more effectively deliver engaging content by:

- Targeting content toward new audiences;
- Harnessing field-generated content in one place (see Digital Strategy);
- Allocating communication resources (funds and staff) to write, edit, and deliver branded content;
- Forming strategic alliances and partnerships that maximize reach; and
- Evaluating efforts and adapting to be more effective.
- Supporting and encouraging all content creators from the field to headquarters.

Content Targeted for New and Diverse Audiences

The majority of the Refuge System's current content (web stories, reports, newsletters, etc.) aims to deepen engagement of our partners, traditional visitors, and employees. The Refuge System and the Service have succeeded in placing some feature stories in popular print and online media outlets, but these also tend to reach the already committed. To broaden its reach, the Refuge System must better understand new audience segments locally, regionally, and nationally, and invest resources (funds and staff) toward this end (*See Appendix A*). The Refuge System must also create content for the digital environment more effectively. Both of these tasks will involve a major internal training effort as well as new internal operation model. Training and a new operations model will allow us to more effectively create and distribute powerful shared stories from the field to headquarters.

From Tactic Driven to Message Driven

As a first step toward a new operations model, this strategy recommends redirecting the Refuge System's headquarters communication staff and funds towards coordinating message-driven campaigns versus creating individual products. For example, in July 2016, *Refuge Update*, a publication directed at an internal audience, will be discontinued. Staff and funding resources then can be directed toward coordinating campaigns and creating content targeting new audiences like shorter weekly web stories distributed through social media. Headquarter, regional and field visitor services staff will still be relied upon to continue to deepen engagement of Friends, volunteers, and traditional supporter, as well as invited to participate in new campaigns to reach new audiences.

Regional and National Communication Campaigns/Strike Teams

Next, this strategy recommends formation of strike teams, comprised of communicators (interpreters, graphic specialists, writers, and communication specialists) at various levels (headquarters, regions, field stations, and cross program) who identify priority audiences and messages; coordinate the creation, editing, and delivery of a suite of products; and assess the products' effectiveness and, if necessary, adjust accordingly.

Strike teams will be coordinated by communication and external affairs specialists in headquarters with co-coordinators in the regional office or field. Coordinators would support the collateral duty communication staff at the field level (park rangers, environmental education specialists, biologists), who are creating content and interacting locally with the public through social media, programming, and outreach.

Initially, one or two strike teams would be formed to create national campaigns addressing the highest refuge conservation priorities with broad applicability. Strike teams could last as long as a year depending on the tools, the scope of the message, or seasonality. To encourage broad participation, strike teams would supply support documents, toolkits and other guidance to the appropriate field staff to help deliver the campaign. Campaign toolkits may include message overviews, target audience descriptions, suggested tactics, timelines, key staff, graphic templates to engage contractors and cooperators, design parameters, and evaluation metrics.

Applying the Content Strategy

EXAMPLE

Alaska Region's Share Your Plate Campaign

This strike team model is being tested in 2016 in the Alaska Region for a communication campaign featuring Alaska wild foods. The goal of the campaign is to increase awareness among Alaskans regarding the critical role the Service plays in providing healthy wild food options. The team is comprised of regional External Affairs staff, outreach staff from other programs in the region, and field staff from four refuges.

First, the team identified the audience and determined objectives of the campaign, and the metrics to evaluate the campaign. Then they generated content for the campaign via an employee recipe/food photo contest. The team then posted the recipes and photos on social media and tagged [#akwildfoods](#), and [#shareyourplate](#). In the future they are planning a local gallery event and a possibly a recipe book. The social media posts have increased engagement across all social media platforms, and have encouraged local food bloggers to post the Service's content or write stories about Alaska wild foods. Refuge field staff and other partners now regularly use the hashtags in their communications. thus building a shared regional storv.



Selective Use of Tactics/Tools/Channels

The target audience and goal of each campaign will drive which platforms and tactics are used. Overwhelmingly, there are many entry points, tactics and channels for the public to interact with Refuge System content. These platforms and tactics include a wide variety of websites (CMS sites, fws.gov, and partners), social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, Tumblr), special events (Refuge Week, birding festivals), printed media (posters, newsletters, banners, fact sheets), search engines (Google, Yahoo, and Bing), third-party applications (RunKeeper, Google Maps, Discover Nature Apps, and thousands more), and traditional radio and TV media. Which platforms and tactics should the Refuge System and the Service use? For consistency of brand and effective delivery, strike teams should consider these criteria when determining which tools and tactics to deploy:

- Use audience analysis to inform objectives of the proposed campaign.
- Use a [Results Chain](#) or diagram that depicts the assumed links between you campaign and desired impacts.
- Use tactics and platforms that leverage new tools described in the Digital Strategy later in this document. For example, post original content to the national website site and link to the content via social media.
- Use tactics and platforms most suitable and relevant for the target audiences and message.
- Use tactics and tools that encourage two-way conversations. (See [Why We Want to Have a "Two-Way Conversation"](#))
- Use tactics and tools that focus on moving new audiences along the spectrum of engagement from awareness to engagement. See below for some examples.



Alliances and Partnerships

With the Refuge System's limited resources and regulatory and security constraints, it must rely on trusted leaders in the private sector and other federal agencies by pursuing strategic partnerships that will help grow awareness of the Refuge System brand with new audiences. This content strategy recommends that, for each campaign, the Refuge System pursue alliances and partnerships that can help gain visibility with targeted audiences. Below are some examples:



CABELA'S IT'S IN YOUR NATURE CAMPAIGN

Through a multichannel advertising campaign, Cabela's is working on bringing in new customers by sharing a series of individual stories from a variety of relatable outdoor enthusiasts through TV spots, and other media.



RECREATION.GOV & LATINO OUTDOORS ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP DURING NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE

Beginning September 15, 2015, Recreation.gov featured experiences from volunteer Latino Outdoor Ambassadors from across the country. Visitors were encouraged to join Recreation.gov through Facebook and Instagram and share stories, photos or videos of their outdoor experiences using #LatinoOutdoors.



Find your Park

To celebrate the National Park Service Centennial in 2016, the National Park Foundation has launched a multi channel campaign for Americans to “find their park in a different place and in a different way. Refuge could easily engage with NPS to highlight the differences and similarities between National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges.



NOAA EARTH IS BLUE

The NOAA, Earth is Blue campaign would also be a good partnership for the Refuge System's marine sanctuaries, and other coastal refuges.

Evaluate & Adapt

With each campaign deployment, the Refuge System must plan, design, deliver, monitor, and assess impact, similar to the tenets of our [Strategic Habitat Conservation](#). The goal is increased engagement with the target audiences, not necessarily number of likes or shares on social media. For example, a post might have few likes or shares, but a key multicultural non-profit or popular millennial blogger is sharing and liking the content. The Refuge System can then adapt and create more content that increases engagement with this key group. This type of engagement relies on experimenting with different types of content, and then carefully mining our data using tools like Google Analytics to closely track our performance. Then building upon what works and adapting what did not and trying again. We are looking for growing engagement with a new and diverse segment of the population, so this will take time and we must be patient. There are a myriad of tools that have evolved with the new digital marketing environment that will require communication staff throughout our organization becoming familiar with and using.

Digital Strategy

Multimedia's unmatched ability to entertain, educate, and activate audiences means that multifaceted digital content is now mandatory to successfully communicate with the public. This strategy recommends substantial investment in modernizing digital interfaces and training staff to use them by:

- Building one internal [digital asset management system](#) for collection, editing, aggregation, and distribution of content with multiple levels of users and functions.
- Reimagining and redesigning the Refuge System website so it is more user-friendly, mobile-first, data-driven.
- Investing in new staff with new skills; training existing staff in new key communication technologies; leveraging existing technical staff; and directing funds toward working with other public agencies and the private sector to meet our digital communication needs.

Digital Asset Management

Currently, Refuge System content is stored and published on a variety of platforms (social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr, hundreds of websites, [Fish and Wildlife Field Notes](#), local brochures, and the [National Image Library](#), among others). That puts content under multiple mouse clicks, and content is duplicated on multiple sites with little thought to editing or branding. To more effectively disseminate information and represent the brand, the Service must build a system for better asset management and project workflow with broad access from the field to headquarters.

One system would allow individual staff at various levels to curate and design communication products for local, regional, and national audiences. For example, a refuge manager could curate a selection of articles/photos/resources about pollinators and distribute into an email newsletter delivered to local farmers to discourage use of pesticides. Digital asset management also delivers raw content to national editors, social media experts and graphic designers for them to edit and repurpose for use on regional and national platforms.

Redesigning National Wildlife Refuge System Web Presence

Without a robust, mobile-friendly public web presence where content from an array of communication campaigns can be showcased and searched, the Refuge System cannot compete for the public's attention. The centerpiece of the digital strategy is building a data-driven, content-rich national website.

Responsive Design Driven by Mobile-Friendly Technology

Approximately 70 percent of web users view the web on mobile devices (phones, tablets). But 42 percent of Service web users come to its sites on mobile devices and are unable to access content because it is not mobile-friendly. The future focus must be on designing one overall theme (visual, navigation and messaging) that suits all screen sizes (responsive design). The Refuge

System must also move away from outdated web design technologies like Flash and ColdFusion and move toward HTML5, CSS3, and jQuery.

The wants and needs of new and diverse audiences' are important to consider in website design and functionality. The layout of the website needs to take into account what the consumer wants to see and read. This will be critical as the Refuge System moves forward with a new design and content management system (CMS) using Drupal. The Refuge System will use focus groups and usability testing to ensure user friendly web content and design.



The Refuge System must better balance creating content that the public seeks with content/information that the Service believes is a priority to deliver. Such decisions will be based on user analytics and real time data to create a national website that new and diverse audiences find valuable.

Digital Services

As part of a small government agency, the Refuge System has had a difficult time keeping pace with technology. It has relied on a patchwork of contracts carried out in various programs using various technologies.

Other federal agencies have been plagued with the same issues. After digital failures like *healthcare.gov* and security breaches, there is momentum toward innovation. These efforts are being spearheaded across government by the [General Services Administration's 18f](#) and White House's [Digital Services](#). Some of these innovations are outlined in the [Digital Services Playbook](#), which stresses these principles:

1. Understand what people need.
2. Address the whole experience from start to finish.
3. Make it simple and intuitive.

To take advantage of this momentum, this strategy recommends forming a nimble and technically savvy Digital Services Team that uses ad-hoc strike team(s) (similar to campaign strike teams), and driven by the priorities determined by an advisory board with organizational and technology expertise from across the Service. This team's goal would be to deliver user-friendly, intuitive, integrated, digital interfaces using the latest technology. This proposed model has grown out of the successes of several *Conserving the Future*-related implementation teams. Small implementation teams outlined project priorities, and then team members delivered, via contracts or in-house production, the *FWS Detail Site*, *Volunteer Tracker* (online tool to manage volunteers), and the *Urban Hub*, an interactive website developed in lieu of an online-handbook. By dedicating staff and also using the talent throughout the organization, the

Refuge System has had the opportunity to innovate and greatly improve organizational efficiency with a smaller overall investment.

The Digital Service Team would focus initially on small projects that will implement the National Wildlife Refuge System's Communications Strategy, and then build on one another to eventually tackle content sharing and distribution systems that would feed edited content to multiple web platforms. The team may also explore internal digital hurdles that currently hinder services offered to the public (e.g., special-use permits). Below are a few sample projects the Digital Service Team will tackle. The Digital Advisory Team will guide the development of a new Refuge System website and conversion of the Refuge System content management system (CMS) to the Department of the Interior's new Drupal content platform; the Digital Services Team will likely contribute needed elements within this conversion, such as maps, templates, etc.

Communication Strategy Action Plan

Below are the specific steps the National Wildlife Refuge System will take to implement the overall strategy. The headquarters Division of Visitor Services and Communications (VSC) will lead the implementation of the strategy with engagement across regions and in collaboration with External Affairs and the National Conservation Training Center.

Applying the Brand Strategy

- 1) Empower all staff and traditional supporters as brand ambassadors by:
 - a) Training/Presentations on the brand messages to a variety of groups, including Refuge System Regional Chiefs, and VS regional chiefs at Refuge Academy, and Visitor Services and Communication Workshops.
 - b) Create a matrix of stories from around the Refuge System that resonates with the target audiences/influencers and illustrates how each refuge and each region personifies the brand.
 - c) Integrate with other *Conserving the Future* outreach efforts, such as the Ambassador Program, to empower all staff, volunteer, and Friends as Brand Ambassadors.

- 2) Support and contribute to a Service-wide community of practice for those in the field, regions, and Headquarters who are charged with communication and outreach duties (social media, web managers, public affair officers, visitor services, external affairs, etc.).
 - a) Facilitate the sharing of stories and best practices among communication professionals via listservs, internal websites, social media groups, periodic teleconferences, webinars, Google sites, and workshops.
 - b) Provide regular updates to the wider internal audiences via *News from Washington* and other in-reach on progress of national campaigns and ways for all to engage as Brand Ambassadors.
 - c) Encourage and engage all segments of the Refuge System, including the Marine National Monuments, to participate in communications via workshops and webinars. (For more information on the focus of these webinars and workshops, visit this website on [social purpose branding](#).)

- 3) Hire a private sector firm to build the graphic elements of the new brand message as well as recommend taglines and tactics that will best establish the brand with new audiences.

Applying the Content Strategy

- 1) Use current audience analysis and research (*Appendix A*), final brand strategy, and subsequent story matrix to identify one shared narrative per region that resonates with a new audience in that region, and prioritize shared stories based on impact on new audience engagement.
- 2) Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Service's communication/content workforce (Visitor Services, Communications, Information Resource Technology Management, External Affairs, and others) at all levels to determine gaps in content creation expertise (photography, writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, etc.). Compile directory of communication professionals (*see HDgov*) and their skills sets, as well as outline skills that are in short supply and will need to be acquired via staff training, new hires, partners, or contractors.
- 3) Based on staff needs, design and identify necessary training programs and resources.
- 4) Utilize the multi-Program Digital Services Team to create and rollout the Digital Asset Management and Campaign Management Systems with user-friendly interface.
- 5) Assess and reallocate current communication resources (funds and staff) to coordinate and create communication campaigns to engage new audiences.
- 6) Across the National Wildlife Refuge System conduct communication product inventory and eliminate duplicative products and services offered by other programs (Visitor Services, External Affairs, regions, etc.) and re-imagine to better reach new audiences.
- 7) Assemble Strike Teams to plan and implement the top communication campaigns, which can be implemented over the course of a year across each region and nationally.

Applying the Digital Strategy

- 1) Assemble appropriate web development and user experience staff into the Digital Service Team.
- 2) Hire core team members as needed. While the core team is being hired, projects will be staffed by current staff, detailees, and contractors.
- 3) Form Advisory Team
 - a) Create and implement application process to select Advisory Team members.
 - b) Plan how to solicit projects, prioritize criteria, and make decisions about an overall digital strategy (i.e., technology stacks, security constraints, and organizational barriers).
 - c) Solicit projects widely from around the Service.
- 4) Develop Digital Asset Management System
 - a) Concurrently, with the development of the new Refuge System website, create a system that modernizes Field Notes for text/story management and build or purchase a platform similar to the [Peace Corp Media Library](#) that integrates with Drupal.
- 5) Design new Refuge System website
 - a) Inventory current content and reformat to populate new site. For example, convert timeless *Refuge Update* articles to a format that will be easily uploaded into the new website.
 - b) Collaborate with information architecture specialists via contractor to ensure the needs of the new site design/structure are addressed.
 - c) Collaborate with content strike teams to create and edit content for first few campaigns.
 - d) Begin planning on creating more connectivity among individual refuge web pages and the national website. This will be done within the Drupal CMS, which already can do this.
 - e) Transition all Refuge System websites to the Drupal Content Management System.
- 6) Prioritize other digital service team projects, such as Google Maps project and BlueGoose Passport App development.

APPENDIX A: Audience Analysis Tools and Insights

Below is a summary of data and insights used to inform this communications strategy:

- **Race, Ethnicity, Urban Populations and Wildlife-Dependent Recreation:** A Review and Synthesis of the Literature” A review of existing [insert literature field(s)?] literature by North Carolina State University provided a better understanding of barriers and motivations of racial and ethnic minorities and urban populations to participate in outdoor recreation. This review revealed trends from past research and recommendations for management strategies.
- **Stakeholder Focus Groups:** A marketing firm working with the Vision Communication Implementation team conducted four focus groups with 29 individuals, half in Denver and half in Philadelphia, who represented diverse, urban audiences. The focus groups were conducted to gain insights into the viewpoints of both young and older urban audiences. Respondents were selected because each was within close proximity to at least one national wildlife refuge. The audiences were segmented by age -- under age 35, 36-49 and over age 50 -- to gauge generational difference in attitude toward the outdoors and methods of consuming information. The selected respondents were not opposed to spending time outdoors, but did not actively seek out this/these activity. The groups discussed their knowledge of national wildlife refuges; their interest in and knowledge of wildlife in general; and their reactions to the idea of “wildlife associated recreation”. For more information contact Martha Nudel (*Vision Communication Implementation Team*).
- **Connecting America’s Youth to Nature Survey:** The bipartisan polling team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) recently conducted a survey American youth to assess the time they spend in nature and their connections with the environment.
- **Focus Groups:** Workshops with community leaders near seven urban refuges revealed how outdoor recreation opportunities benefit urban residents; the barriers to participate in the outdoors; and strategies for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to better connect and engage urban residents.
- **Urban Standards of Excellence as a guidepost to engaging with new audiences:** Developed to measure excellence in the Urban Wildlife Refuge Program (Program), these 8 standards are an excellent measure of community engagement whether urban or otherwise.