

**Recommendation 11:** *Develop and nurture active and vibrant friends groups or community partnerships for every staffed refuge or refuge complex.*

**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.*

Overview: Because there was not a commonly understood definition for community partnerships in the context of our team's work, we established a definition for community partnerships before identifying our planned products. A community partnership is a formal relationship with a local group(s) to achieve a common goal(s). Applying this definition in the context of the above Vision recommendations, a community partnership is an alternative or an addition to a Friends organization. A community partnership operates under a written agreement that describes shared goals and objectives between the community partner and the refuge.

The team has identified four products described below. Each product will address all three components of our team's charge: volunteers, Friends, and community partners. This means for example that for the first product, a strategic plan, we would not prepare separate strategic plans for each component but rather a single strategic plan that incorporates all three components - volunteers, Friends, and community partners – will be completed.

In addition to the four products below, the team identified a number of other actions that we recommend be undertaken by the Refuge System Headquarters office or other entities. We have provided our recommendations to other implementation teams and will assist with those efforts as appropriate. Collectively, these actions will result in a stronger volunteer/friends/community partnership program and will enable both our staff and our partners to be stronger ambassadors for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

#### Deliverable 1: Strategic Plan

- *To be completed by sub-team:* Beth Goettel (Lead), Marge Kolar, Anne Morkill, Shawn Gillette, Steve Reagan, Debbie Long, Dee Emmons, Debbie Moore
- *Description:* Recommendation 12 specifically requires developing a strategy and Recommendation 11 requires quantitative, specific results. The Washington Office is currently working on "A Strategic Plan for Volunteer and Partner Involvement in the National Wildlife Refuge System," in response to the Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 2010. This subteam will assist in creating the unified national strategy to address both recommendations. To better understand what is to be accomplished under Recommendation 11, Refuge Managers will be surveyed to determine

which refuges still need Friends organizations or community partnerships and what barriers exist. Results will be considered as part of the national strategy.

- *Approach:* 1) Develop a data call to Regional Friends coordinators to document number of existing Friends organizations or other formal partnerships, and 2) Circulate a questionnaire to Refuge Managers/Project Leaders (a) to identify factors that limit the creation of new Friends organizations, and (b) to provide a baseline for developing measurable objectives and targets in the Strategic Plan. Using data from the questionnaire, expand the draft “Strategic Plan for Volunteer and Partner Involvement in the NWRS” that is presently under preparation by the National Headquarters to meet the objectives for growing and sustaining volunteers, friends, and community partnerships at every refuge or refuge complex.
- *Major Milestones:*
  - April 13, 2012 – Complete employee survey (circulate for 21 days)
  - May 10, 2012 – Begin compiling survey results for team review and use
  - June 15, 2012 – Complete draft Strategic Plan
  - Feb 1, 2013 – Finalize Strategic Plan
- *Communications:* Consult with the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) to discuss their survey of Friends organizations and determine potential interrelationships between that questionnaire and the one our team will complete for FWS staff. The ongoing Volunteer and Partners Strategic plan will need *Federal Register* review and our team does not intend to delay that process so likely our final product will be a separate and more comprehensive version of that plan (details not yet determined). Formal internal regional review will be needed while less formal public input, such as through Americaswildlife.org, will be appropriate for the more in-depth strategic plan.

### Deliverable 2: Handbook

- *To be completed by sub-team:* Brian Salem (Lead), Chris Barr, Juli Niemann, Christy Smith, Erica Locher, Andy French, Andy Loranger, Lisa Hupp, and Derek Carr
- *Description:* Provide a comprehensive reference to guide management, recruitment, and retention of volunteer, Friend, and community partnership efforts in the NWRS.
- *Approach:* Develop a handbook or “how to” guide for working with volunteers, Friends, and community partners. We will expand upon existing handbooks such as “Soaring to New Heights” and apply lessons learned, templates, job description libraries, etc. to gain efficiencies in management of programs. This handbook will have Service employees as the primary audience.
- *Major Milestones:*
  - June 30, 2012 – Complete collection of background information and develop handbook outline
  - Oct 1, 2012 – Complete draft handbook ready for Regional review
  - March 1, 2013 – Complete final handbook

- *Communications:* We will likely want to compare notes with the NWRA as we prepare this document to see how it may blend with activities they have underway with the Friends capacity building initiative. The handbook will be considered a living document; it will be hosted on a public web site that invites ideas and feedback for improvement.

### Deliverable 3: Expand Web-Based Communications

- *To be completed by sub-team:* Kristen Gilbert (Lead), Sue McDonald, Juliette Gutierrez, Ken Grannemann, Joaquin Baca, Megan Wandag, Jennifer Strickland, and Sandy Perchetti
- *Description:* This project will create the architecture and begin gathering content for a consolidated virtual portal that assists with the recruitment, management, and recognition of Service volunteers. The new system will be easy to use and visually appealing. It will provide an information portal that to the extent possible provides one-stop shopping for all things Volunteers and Community Partnerships and will encourage the cross pollination of the Friends and Volunteer programs.
- *Approach:* The web portal will provide the following elements: 1) RECRUITMENT: Potential volunteers will be able to search and connect with appropriate volunteer opportunities; FWS staff will post searchable volunteer opportunities. 2) MANAGEMENT: Current volunteers will be able to maintain volunteer transcripts of hours of service, and training; and maintain a record and date of completed training, and evaluations. FWS will have easy access to policies, forms, a handbook and training modules on volunteer management. This will provide a central location to store volunteer records to reduce duplication in training, background checks, and hours tracking. 3) RECOGNITION: FWS staff will be able to run reports to determine hours served by volunteers by station. National awards for hours served could be generated automatically. The portal would also feature outstanding volunteers and snippets of their work to be shared with all. 4) SOCIAL MEDIA: A place for volunteers to connect with other Service volunteers as well as allowing them to connect with National Wildlife Refuges, connect Friends with volunteers, and connect Friends organizations with other Friends organizations to share resources, and best practices.
- *Major Milestones:*
  - May 1, 2012 – Complete research on existing web communications tools
  - Oct 1, 2012 – Develop an outline of the web-based framework and list of tools
  - Feb 1, 2013 – Finalize product specifications and Request For Proposals to solicit contractors or alternatively to build a portal in-house
- *Communications:* Will need to coordinate with NWRA so that expanded web efforts planned by NWRA and NWRS complement one another. Will need to examine other web portals such as volunteer.gov to determine connections, possible conflicting guidance, etc.

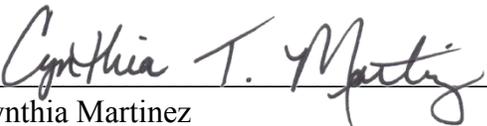
Deliverable 4: Training and Mentoring

- *To be completed by sub-teams:* 1) Mary Stefanski (Lead), Raul Molina, Paul Charland, Travis Culp, Kristine Askerooth, and Jim Hjelmgren will complete staff training component  
2) Joanna Webb (Lead), Nancy Brown, Ann Marie Chapman, Layne Hamilton, Susan J. Russo, and Tina Dobrinsky will complete Friends mentoring component
- *Description:* Strengthen the Refuge System's ability to implement vibrant volunteer, Friend's, and community partnership efforts through training for FWS staff and mentoring and training for Friend's organizations.
- *Approach:* This product has two components:
  - 1) Develop a comprehensive training framework for Refuge and other FWS staff as appropriate so that they develop skills and competencies in starting and sustaining volunteer programs, Friends organizations, and community partnerships. The training will incorporate inclusion of the topic in Refuge Academy, Maintenance Workshops, Foundations and other "academies" offered at NCTC as well as other classroom and web-based training on the topic. We will emphasize making the training available at Regional and local community levels.
  - 2) Develop a multi-faceted Friends mentoring program to help form new Friends organizations, as well as nurture and advise Friends organization beyond the early stages of forming. The mentoring program would provide a variety of guidance such as educational resources, information sharing through networking opportunities, and problem solving for forming or existing refuge Friends organizations needing assistance.
- *Major Milestones:*
  - June 1, 2012 – Identify staff training audiences and learning objectives. Identify objectives for Friends mentoring program
  - Oct 1, 2012 – Identify proposed delivery methods and key messages (both staff and Friends)
  - March 1, 2013 – Finalize overall outline of staff courses and complete one demonstration module. Finalize development of a multi-faceted Friends mentoring and training program
- *Communications:* We will coordinate with the National Conservation Training Center and identify and coordinate with other organizations engaged in training efforts to determine the best staff training strategy. We will work with the National Wildlife Refuge Association and others to develop Friends mentoring process.

*Success and Evaluation:* Possible metrics for assessing success of recommended products are below. These metrics collectively apply to all four products described above. The metrics could be measured through RAPP (quantitative measures) and through surveys of staff and volunteers (qualitative measures).

- Number of refuge staff engaged in volunteer/Friends/community partnership coordination increases
- Partnerships are stronger (measure of “active and vibrant”)
- Number of volunteers remains steady (returnees)
- Number of volunteer hours increases
- Volunteer satisfaction increases
- A broader cross section of the public is engaged in stewardship of refuges (measure of new constituencies engaged)
- Number of refuges supported by Friends organizations or community partnerships increases
- More refuge projects are completed by volunteers or partnerships
- Public is more aware of who we are and what we do (One potential tool is to add new questions in National Survey of Fishing, Hunting & Wildlife Associated Recreation [add place-based questions to survey to determine awareness of NWRS and volunteer opportunities])

**Executive Implementation Council Approval:**

  
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Cynthia Martinez

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

APR 30 2012

Date