

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

Overview: In today's world of multi-media, around-the-clock communications – with people checking their Facebook as they text message on their smartphones and search for new apps on their tablets – strategic conservation communications must go the extra step into marketing. While the National Wildlife Refuge System must ensure that it retains a professional “brand” that connotes scientific excellence, the Communications Implementation Team recognizes that the Fish and Wildlife Service must bust out of typical government communications to speak to Americans in the images and cutting-edge technology that commercial marketing uses. If Americans respond to a talking gecko by buying the auto insurance it hawks, then surely the Fish and Wildlife Service can take a lesson.

The Team also recognized other factors: The Refuge System needs to use the marketing savvy of sources beyond government; corporate partnerships/sponsorships are essential; the strategic communications plan must be integrated with Fish and Wildlife Service operations and arm the field and regional offices with materials, messages and inspiration.

Deliverables:

Strategic Communications Plan: Create messages, products, calls for action, and methods to increase use of the Web and emerging communications technologies in order to establish the Refuge System as essential to the quality of life in America. In the next five years, the nationwide campaign aims to:

- Increase the number of Americans who understand how the Refuge System improves the natural resources that contribute to a healthy web of life for this and future generations.
- Triple the number of refuge Friends members and volunteers
- Triple Refuge System visitation – whether virtual (Web, social media) or in-person
- Encourage Friends membership among target audiences, ages of 18-35
- Encourage Friends membership among African American and Hispanic audiences
- Create brand loyalty

Among possible inclusions in the plan: role of Refuge System Web site, mobile apps and other new media (QR codes and more); public service announcements, perhaps with celebrity; imagery, including video; annual messaging package and ready-to-use materials for field stations/regional offices; corporate tie-ins; appropriate products from commercial marketing world.

- *Approach:* A marketing/public relations firm will be hired to assist with development of strategic plan, bringing private-sector marketing savvy to the process. Communications Implementation Team is the responsible party.

- *Major Milestones:* Contractor will be hired by mid-April. Meeting with coordinating teams is suggested for spring/late summer. Draft plan is due in June.
- *Coordination:* With Climate Change; Scientific Excellence; Community Partnerships; Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation; Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative; Interpretation & Environmental Education implementation teams. Seek partnerships with NWRAs, corporations. Ensure that field stations are engaged.
- *Success and Evaluation:* Within five years, achievement of goals noted above.

Consistent, Mandatory Refuge System-themed Exhibits: Visitors to any one wildlife refuge should know there are hundreds of others. At least one kiosk at each refuge and every visitor center/administrative office should have national messages and Refuge System map.

- *Approach:* Sub-team chair, Region 3 visitor services chief Maggie O’Connell, has been tasked to lead evaluation of current policy and Visitor Services Handbook.
- *Major Milestones:* By end of FY13 WO produces template map, working with such individuals as GIS coordinator Ron Salz and Refuge System cartographer Sean Killen; Visitor Services chiefs and those in regions responsible for signs. By end of FY14 signs will be installed at NWRs. (The map template will also be used for the Interactive Mapping Tool identified in Recommendation 15.) Spring 2012: research existing policy and make contact with Refuge System cartographer for updated map. Summer 2012: Draft new policy and work with sub-team to develop map and messages in different formats. Fall 2012: Develop prototype exhibits for different uses (kiosk, visitor center, contact station, etc.). Winter 2012-13: Ensure that policy addresses need for updated and mandatory map.
- *Coordination:* Work with Interpretation & Environmental Education team.
- *Success and Evaluation:* Within five years, each field station will be identified as a unit of the Refuge System through interior and exterior maps, including but not limited to an up-to-date map and Refuge System messaging.

Visitor Satisfaction and Economic Benefits Studies: National surveys that highlight economic and human benefits of wildlife refuges should be undertaken routinely because results provide positive messages for field stations and help taxpayers understand importance of conservation.

- *Approach:* Susan Morse and Theresa Waswick will lead sub-team.
- *Major Milestones:* Identify current calendar by June 2012; establish five-year calendar
- *Coordination:* Work with Community Partnerships implementation team

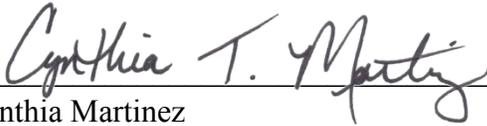
Communications Standards: Expand or develop standard language for inclusion into managers, supervisors and/or employees performance plan a portion of or a critical element focused on strategic communications. Develop a national policy based on the Strategic Communications Plan that institutes development of regional step-down strategic

communications plans for field level use, including SOPs for new media use and Congressional relations.

- *Approach:* Sub-team chair Ryan Mollnow and Kevin Forester, with Kyla Hastie acting as an advisor, have been tasked to lead. David Viker will assist with strategic Congressional communications.
- *Major Milestones:* Research any existing critical elements focused on communications.
- *Coordination:* Work with Leadership Development Council

Success and Evaluation: For too long the National Wildlife Refuge System has been America's best kept secret. The time has come to use the finest marketing approaches to put a lie to that long-held belief.

Executive Implementation Council Approval:



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Date