



News Release

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Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)

For Immediate Release

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Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative Going Strong in Southwest

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced its Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative (Initiative), an agency effort that will reflect the diverse perspectives, values and cultures of all Americans. With 80 percent of the United States population living in urban areas, the Service's Initiative brings the wildlife conservation mission and outdoor recreation programs to where the people are, cities both big and small.

Of the Service's eight national Urban Refuge Partnerships, two are in the Southwest Region – Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Houston, Texas.

“Being in nature is one of the best remedies for the pressure and pace of the modern urban lifestyle,” noted the Service's Southwest Regional Director Benjamin Tuggle. “Urban refuges provide an oasis that allows people to be closer to nature, offering a healthy and convenient break from the seemingly non-stop demands of city and suburban life.”

Established in 2012, Albuquerque's Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge is the Service's first urban refuge in the Southwest Region. Situated on a former dairy farm just south of New Mexico's largest metropolitan area, it will serve as an urban oasis for both wildlife and people. The newly formed refuge will eventually encompass 570 acres, a place for people to get outside and truly enjoy nature within their own community. Though not yet open to the public, the refuge currently hosts monthly open houses and is an active participant in community events in the South Valley of Albuquerque.

Houston, Texas, the fourth largest city in the country, has six national wildlife refuges within 60 miles and represents the Service's second Urban Refuge Partnership in the Southwest. The proximity to refuges presented excellent opportunities to bring the agency's wildlife conservation mission into the city. Refuge staff has begun partnering with some of the city's organizations that have an interest in restoring and protecting habitat in Houston; are in need of technical assistance; support inner city youth; and provide environmental education programs. The growing effort will ultimately lead to a coordinated conservation presence that includes the national wildlife refuge system and its conservation partners in the Houston metro area.

Tuggle suggests that those who visit urban wildlife refuges may be more likely to expand their connections with nature. “If people have more opportunities to learn about and enjoy the wildlife at an urban refuge in their own backyards, we can foster an urban conservation constituency that will naturally migrate to other national wildlife refuges where they can support and enjoy nature on a much larger scale.”

The Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative is part of the Service's *Conserving the Future* process, which set a strategic path for the National Wildlife Refuge System for the next decade and beyond. To stay engaged and informed visit: <http://americaswildlife.org/>

Watch a short video with more information on Urban Wildlife Refuge partnerships at: http://m.youtube.com/americaswildlife?uid=PPkKAnB2g6qR1K7dPsUUvQ&desktop_uri=%2Famericaswildlife

The National Wildlife Refuge System protects wildlife and wildlife habitat on more than 150 million acres of land and water from the Caribbean to the Pacific, Maine to Alaska. Refuges also improve human health, provide outdoor recreation and support local economies. Visit the Service's [homepage](#) at www.fws.gov/refuges. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service.

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