



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex
PO Box 457
Ridgefield, Washington 98642-0457



February 1, 2019

Dear educators, support staff, and families:

Local US Fish and Wildlife Service staff, partnered with the Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, have had the privilege of providing education programs in Ridgefield for over a decade now. I personally have worked with many of you year after year as we have adjusted programs in little ways to reflect your needs and our resources. We have come so far in finding our unique place in this region with our Environmental and Cultural Education Program. I continue to be so proud of the work of the volunteers and staff that came before me, setting the foundation for such great success. I was honored to inherit this program in 2009 and I am very excited to lead it into its next phases.

I would like to take a moment of your time to update you on our next steps for improving our programs to be a better community asset and more effective at achieving conservation success.

As a Refuge so near the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area we have been designated a “Priority Urban Refuge” and are currently working to align our site and programs to the [Urban Wildlife Conservation Program](#) and its eight [Standards of Excellence for Urban National Wildlife Refuges](#). This work is essential to helping educators and other community partners in accomplishing our common mission of helping people connect to nature and creating communities of conservation-minded citizens.

As with any initiative so vital to community needs, this work takes time - Time and resources to assess, plan, and implement changes based on community needs.

Refuge staff and Friends are committed to doing long-term work to learn the needs of students, families and educators by asking, listening, and collaborating. Our goal is not to reinvent our programs. Instead, we strive to evaluate what we can continue doing well, what we can improve on, and how to promote partnerships with other organizations to offer resources that may not have been realized in the past.

This is what you can expect over the next few years.

- Field trips will not be offered in 2019 while staff spend time working on program revision and revitalization. Resources will be focused on creating a more solid and sustainable structure for

the programs now and into the future by assessing community needs and creating revised program outcomes and evaluation processes.

- We will be working closely with the Ridgefield School District staff to refine our programs for 3rd, 4th and 5th grades. By concentrating on a few grades in one district we can maximize our limited staff and other resources to refine programs and curriculum locally, with the intent of scaling it to additional districts in the future. Ideally, this will eventually be expanded across more grades to create curriculum connections in middle and high school as well.
- We will seek out opportunities for staff and volunteers to learn more about implementing NGSS, CC, and STI so that we can create programs and curriculum to align and reflect with the work currently being done in classrooms.
- We will strive towards programs that help students connect both current and future lessons from their classrooms to the wildlife management activities and cultural appreciation at the Refuge.
- As we align with the Standards of Excellence, we will not only be curriculum-focused. We will also evaluate how we can be accessible and equitable to a diverse group of students with differing needs and comfort levels in the outdoors. We will strive to be not just a site for academics but also a place for students to engage with nature on their terms in a safe, healthy, and welcoming way.
- We will work on increasing our resources through grants and community partnerships so that we can better serve on-site educational and recreational visits in the near future.

We know that many of you have been visiting the Refuge for many years. Your current curriculum may be built around a field trip to our site. We understand that this may find you feeling inconvenienced and not sure what to do in the interim. Please know that we have spent much time deliberating on these circumstances. Putting a hold on our programs was not an easy decision. However, if we are to be a true asset to you and your students, we must be free to create a program that helps both the Refuge *and* the education community achieve its objectives.

We do hope to start offering onsite services in 2020. However, if resources do not allow us to reopen onsite programs, we may have to continue this hiatus. We will continue to work towards being a site for interdisciplinary environmental and culture education as soon as we are able.

In the meantime, if you are interested in bringing your students out in smaller groups to use our trails you are welcome to. Please see our [website](#) for specific guidelines and instructions on how to register your trip so that user activities and wildlife work does not conflict.

Thank you again for your support and your patience. I look forward to working with all of you in the future.

Sincerely,



Josephine Finley
Park Ranger