

Friends and the Urban Standards of Excellence
Webinar September 16, 2015

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There were approximately 45 participants; 23 identified themselves as Friends or staff at an urban refuge; eight were at other refuges. At last one partner organization was represented.

The American population is rapidly becoming more diverse and more urban. Yet the most recent Visitor Satisfaction Survey for national wildlife refuges shows that more than 90 percent of our visitors are white, male, and often over the age of 50. If the American people not enjoying, appreciating or even aware of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – let alone conservation – they will not care, support or protect refuges.

One of many recommendations following the National Wildlife Refuge System's Conserving the Future conference in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2012, addressed this challenge.

Recommendation 13:

“Create an urban refuge initiative that defines excellence in our existing urban refuges, establishes the framework for creating new urban refuge partnerships and implements a refuge presence in ten demographically and geographically varied cities across America by 2015.”

There are two prongs to the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program

Urban Wildlife Refuges



Wildlife Refuges Map

These national wildlife refuges located near major metropolitan areas will serve model best practices in realizing the standards of excellence for urban refuges.

Urban Partnerships

- Goals
 - engage communities where we are *not* present
 - nurture appreciation for wildlife conservation
 - leverage other efforts
- Projects take place IN the community, not on the refuge.
- Any program, Refuges, or other FWS offices such as Ecological Services, hatchery/fishery or Migratory Bird office, are partners.
- Partnerships target urban populations, be sustainable by both Service and partners and take advantage of existing partnerships and matching resources.

- 17 pilot partnerships now – exceeding the goal of 10 by 2015
 - Seattle, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Anchorage, Denver, San Juan/Pharr/Alamo, Houston, New Orleans, Chicago, Atlanta, Baltimore, Providence, Springfield, New Haven, Yonkers, Philadelphia



Urban Partnership Map

These urban partnerships are bringing the conservation message to new and diverse populations, matching and leveraging resources, using the expertise and skills of different offices of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Standards of Excellence

Eight [Standards of Excellence](#) have been established as a framework for collaboration among refuges and their partners, especially but not only in, urban areas. Each standard will be listed with a Friends group whose projects or activities exemplify that standard.

1– [Know and Relate to the Community](#)

- Relate to the diversity in your own community - [Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge](#), MI – Chuck Nelson, President
 - Participating in [Saginaw Livability Initiative](#) to help refuge become a more valued community asset
 - Using refuge’s Green Point Environmental Center to relate to the community
 - Working to portray refuge as welcoming even though most signs say “no trespassing”
 - Engaging community in habitat and environmental restoration
 - Investigating opportunities and challenges of auto tour route as it relates to community
 - Appreciating that surrounding communities are urban and rural, industrial and agricultural, culturally and economically diverse
 - Taking an ecosystem approach in partnership with state wild lands, private lands and citizen groups
 - Organizing kayaking tours to help people get on the river
 - *Refuge Update* [“Shiawassee Refuge, Saginaw Paired in Livability Study”](#)¹
- [Tualatin River Refuge](#), OR, offers Discovery Packs with bilingual resources. (Erin Holmes)
- [Friends of MN Valley](#) pays for Spanish-speaking Urban Program intern to do off-site community programs. (Sandi Kinzer)
- [Friends of San Diego Refuge Complex](#) , CA,– one refuge is next to the US/Mexico border; Friends participate with Mexican NGOs to reach families on both sides of the border and plan joint trash cleanups.

2 – [Connect Urban People with Nature via Stepping Stones of Engagement](#)

- Reach out to Latino visitors - [Ding Darling Wildlife Society](#), FL
 - [J. N. “Ding” Darling Refuge](#) and Friends identified problems in attracting more Spanish-speaking visitors, including cost and a concern about people in uniform.
 - Friends worked with a local Spanish language radio station to promote free Family Fun Day and Art in Conservation days.
 - The radio station helped craft message and sponsor events.
 - Spanish-speaking Friends and refuge staff were available to answer questions.
 - Result: more Hispanic visitors on these two days than ever before
- Partner with a Park - Houston Urban Wildlife Partnership
 - Four refuges ([Brazoria](#), [Attwater Prairie Chicken](#), [Anahuac](#), [Trinity River](#)) are becoming sister cities with parks in Houston.
 - Each park has its own Friends or other support group.

- The goal is to get the two support organizations to apply for grants for joint projects.
- Furr High School in Clinton Park already has a “green ambassadors program.” Students are canvassing their own neighborhood to see what people want. Friends and Clinton Park support group will apply for funding to implement what people want in the park
- For more information: Nancy_Brown@fws.gov
- [Friends of Horicon Refuge](#), WI, works to bring visitors to the Complex’s waterfowl production areas, which are sometimes closer to urban visitors. (Julia Lambert)
- [Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards](#), WA, works with 4th, 5th, 6th graders to provide three days of training in school plus one day on the refuge.
- [Tualatin River Refuge](#), OR, brings people to the refuge for an annual blood drive .(Erin Holmes)
- [Friends of Little Pend Oreille](#), WA, brings local 2nd and 5th graders to the refuge for one day (Daniel Price)
- [Friends of Heinz](#), PA, work on Cradle of Birding Festival – all free events plus partnerships with local zoo and other conservation/wildlife organizations. Local elementary school planted and maintains pollinator garden. (Lynn Roman)
- [Friends of Sherburne](#), MN, goes on the road to participate in a Not So Scary Halloween event at an early childhood Nature Explore Center; Friends also bring refuge information and an eagle nest to the Nature Explore Center. (Sue Hix)

3 – [Build Partnerships](#)

- Partner with an arts organization – [Friends of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge](#), MN
 - Bloomington, MN, received a National Endowment for the Arts “Our Town” grant to find sites for arts events, one of which was Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.
 - The refuge partnered with PlaceBase Productions, which held storytelling sessions in the community to hear people’s stories about the refuge.
 - PlaceBase produced an original musical that was performed all over the refuge.
 - Friends members auditioned for parts and helped with promotion.
 - 400 visitors came to the refuge for the production.
 - *Friends Forward* article [“After the Birds Taught Me to Fly”](#)
- [Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards](#), WA, partners with Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership and the Community chest to fund stewardship training for over 1,000 kids in the local community. (Dave Pinkernell)

- Proposal: hold monthly partnership meetings with Audubon, zoo, school district, plus local community residents

4 – Be a Community Asset

- Gather community support – [Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge](#), NM – President, Ric Watson
 - Friends established partnerships with existing environmental and youth organizations – the partnerships became a two-way street.
 - The refuge used funds from the Federal Land Access Program to improve the street that connects the city to the refuge.
 - Friends sponsor outreach events in the community and on the refuge, including hayride tours. In response to liability question about hayrides – Tom Worthington in the Midwest Region says the region has a hayride safety standard/guideline that he can provide.
(tom_worthington@fws.gov)
 - Friends pay for buses to bring school kids to the refuge.
- [Friends of San Diego Refuges](#), CA, invites families to quarterly open houses to highlight research activities on the refuge. (Dick Pilgrim)
- [Friends of Hagerman](#), TX, provides free activities each day of spring break for kids and families – this year’s theme was Power to the Pollinators.
- Friends of Shiawassee, MI, is involving urban neighbors in restoration of a former golf course property that is now part of the refuge. The goal is to return the land to forest and grassland and provide fishing opportunities in former golf course ponds. A local garden club is planting native plants in former sand traps, with a focus on pollinators and native plants.

5- Ensure Adequate Long-Term Resources

- Leverage your fundraising capability – [Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge](#), OR
 - Cabela’s opened a new store in Sherwood near the refuge.
 - Refuge staff and friends approached Cabela’s about being the title sponsor the 2015 Tualatin Bird Festival.
 - Cabela’s agreed and is now working on refuge’s first Youth Waterfowl Hunt and has suggested co-hosting activities in city parts and other places off the refuge
 - Friends, Urban program and refuge staff will participate in a branding exercise to develop clear understanding of different mission/goals so these can be better explained to potential donors

6 – Provide Equitable Access

- Help make your refuge accessible to all populations – [Friends of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge](#), MA
 - Friends led community fundraising to replace a vandalized beach buggy.
 - *Friends Forward* article [“Beach Ready Wheelchair”](#)
- Friends can work with schools to provide volunteer or job training opportunities for students in area schools, including students with disabilities.
- [Don Edwards San Francisco Bay Refuge](#), CA, has a Yellow Bus Fund to bring Title 1 schools to the refuge for field trips. (Aja Yee, San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society)
- [Friends of Neal Smith Refuge](#), IA, pays for 12 interns annually and pays for school field trips by elementary and college students. (Joan Van Gorp)
- [Friends of Front Range Wildlife Refuges](#), CO, offers transportation grants to local schools to bring students to the refuge. (Cindy Souders)
- [Friends of Valle de Oro](#), NM, is working with local agencies to extend a bike trail around the refuge and build a walk/bike trail across the Rio Grande River. (Ric Watson)
- [Friends of MN Valley](#) paid for bus transportation for an English as a Second Language class to visit – refuge information became part of the language class (Sandi Kinzer)
- [Friends of Valle de Oro](#), NM, is working on translating brochures into Spanish (Ric Watson); D.C. Carr, Pacific SW Region Friends coordinator, offered to help working with translators. Derek_Carr@fws.gov

7 – Ensure Visitors Feel Safe and Welcome

- Welcome visitors to your refuge – [Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge](#), NM
 - Friends provided funds to buy cameras and field journals so 4th and 5th graders could produce a field guide, which is still being sold in the nature store four years later.
 - *Friends Forward* article [“Through the Eyes of Children”](#) (page 5)
- Figure out what safety problems your refuge has and produce brochures or signs to address the problem with visitors (alligators, bears, poison plants, why certain parts of the refuge are off limits).
- [Friends of Outer Island \(Stewart B. McKinney Refuge\)](#), CT, follows Leave No Trace guidelines on the island and uses signs to explain this to visitors. (Jim Lockhart)

- [Friends of Ridgefield](#), WA, offers backpacks for library-type check out; backpacks include binoculars, specimen bottles, hiking rules (leave no trace), sample adventures. (Sandra Day)

8 – [Model Sustainability](#)

- Produce brochure about invasive/native plants – [Friends of Red River National Wildlife Refuge](#), LA
 - Chinese tallow is an invasive on the refuge but also a very popular backyard ornamental. Friends brought high school students to the refuge to help identify and clear tallow. They prepared a brochure showing invasive plants like tallow and native alternatives for home gardening. Students, including several with intellectual disabilities, handed out brochures and explained the invasive/native plant problem during a National Wildlife Refuge Week celebration at the refuge.
 - *Friends Forward* article [“A Goal, A Purpose, Self Esteem”](#)
- [Friends of Hagerman Refuge](#), TX, uses drip irrigation for water conservation at its new butterfly garden, which features native Texas plants. (Sue Malnory)
- [Friends of Outer Island](#), CT, reports that all power on the island is from solar energy. (Jim Lockhart)

Next Steps

- There is an online urban hub to get new urban information, including a Friends tab – www.fws.gov/urban
- National Wildlife Refuge Association is working on urban issues – contact Joan Patterson, Director for Grassroots Outreach jpatterson@refugeassociation.org
- Get on the urban email list by contacting conservingthefuture@fws.gov