



URBAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PROGRAM TEN-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN: BUILDING ON OUR FOUNDATION AND MOVING FORWARD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) finalized the strategic vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System, *Conserving the Future*, which included Recommendation 13: to create an urban refuge initiative that defines excellence in our existing urban refuges and establishes the framework for creating new urban refuge partnerships. In 2013 the Service established the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program (UWCP) through a [Director's Order No. 208](#) and subsequent policy ([110 FW 1](#)), with the overall goal of prioritizing conservation and recreational access in urban areas where more than 80 percent of Americans live and can more directly benefit. The Service recognizes that its conservation efforts are not reaching many urban residents, whether because of a pattern of ethnic or cultural exclusion, economic or access barriers, environmental injustices, or fear or unease from a lack of experience with nature. To reach the goal of leaving a legacy of abundant and healthy wildlife and wild lands for future generations of Americans to enjoy¹, the Service must reach new and ethnically diverse audiences, understand these audiences, and work together with them to ensure conservation experiences are both positive and relevant. This requires reaching out and establishing long-term, meaningful connections with culturally and ethnically diverse urban communities to achieve our conservation mission.

STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

- Know and Relate to the Community
- Connect Urban People with Nature via *Stepping Stones of Engagement*
- Build Partnerships
- Be a Community Asset
- Ensure Adequate Long-term Resources
- Provide Equitable Access
- Ensure Visitors Feel Safe and Welcome
- Model Sustainability

This 10-year strategic plan draws from the experience of those working at the urban interface, especially those leading efforts for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). The UWCP is not a one size fits all approach. There are aspects of the UWCP that can be adopted in the development of each Service Program's own urban work. The UWCP encourages inclusive approaches and leveraging existing work and lessons learned so that all Service Programs can make changes that result in a more equitable, effective, and relevant conservation model – regardless of where and how they operate. The following summary of findings and key activities draws from lessons learned from our urban communities, and from formal program-wide evaluations:

1. As a model for improving community engagement and strengthening local conservation outcomes, the [Standards of Excellence](#) have been embraced and validated as an effective framework for establishing genuine relationships between the Service and urban communities. ***The Standards of Excellence will be adopted in all urban areas.***

¹ From [Conserving the Future](#)

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

- **Community-focused:** Prioritize community needs with long-term commitments.
- **Intentional:** Develop community engagement methods that are deliberate, authentic, and measurable.
- **Inclusive:** Implement equitable solutions to involve the community in solving conservation challenges.
- **Collaborative:** Form long-term relationships with community partners and across Service programs that go beyond transactions, with the goal of increasing the collective impacts of shared conservation efforts.

2. To expedite the adoption of specific behaviors to improve our ability to meaningfully engage with urban communities excluded from conservation efforts, four essential and interrelated Critical Elements² have been developed. ***These four elements will be used as our foundation for building long-term partnerships;*** demonstrating our commitment to uplifting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities; and holding ourselves accountable to continual progress.

3. To be effective in urban areas and beyond, the Service must attract and retain a diverse workforce that is more reflective of the communities it serves. ***The Service will use the Service-wide Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan to develop and implement recruitment and retention goals for key UWCP positions.***

4. People are increasingly disconnected from natural environments, forgoing the physical and emotional benefits therein. Some community members have been historically excluded from use of Service lands while others have barriers associated with transportation and access. ***By 2030, 100 percent of Flagship Urban Refuges will work within the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model³ and take steps to support new types of recreational activities and remove barriers to traditional uses.***

5. Based on lessons learned in the first decade of the program, an approach is needed that encourages the adoption and championing of UWCP throughout the Service. This will provide a clear set of success factors allowing rational and effective use of resources. ***Within the next 10 years the UWCP will develop and roll out a maturity model and aim to have 70 urban national wildlife refuges and/or urban partnerships, including partnerships that collaborate with many Service programs that can celebrate “flagship” status – achieved when a refuge or partnership reaches milestones in fully embracing and implementing Standards of Excellence and Critical Elements.***

This strategic plan will prepare Service employees at all urban sites and beyond to dismantle the systemic barriers that have prevented the Service from engaging in conservation efforts with many communities. Now more than ever, the UWCP is poised to expand its reach with an aligned, Service-wide effort to forge bold partnerships. By adapting and implementing a more equitable and relevant conservation model, the Service will improve our effectiveness in building an informed conservation constituency.

² Reference Appendix: *Urban Wildlife Conservation Program Critical Elements & Key Terminology*

³ The Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model (ORAM) outlines the process of becoming an outdoor recreation participant. The ORAM illustrates, in a linear fashion, the steps an individual moves through as they learn about, try and then adopt a new activity or behavior and can be used to understand the difference between recruitment, retention, and reactivation. For more information, visit <https://cahss.org/oram/>.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Service has primarily focused on the explicit conservation of wildlife and habitat in unpopulated natural areas. In turn, the Service has not prioritized conservation that benefits the public directly and consequently overlooked areas where most people live. In response, the Service established⁴ the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program (UWCP) with the overall goal of prioritizing conservation and recreational access efforts in urban areas where more than 80 percent of Americans live and can more directly benefit – so that together we can leave a legacy of abundant and healthy wildlife and wild lands for future generations of Americans to enjoy⁵. While the Service has been doing and continues to do work in urban areas, the UWCP has developed a specific approach for engaging the public in conservation to meet this overarching goal.

The UWCP connects with urban communities through the following main types of engagement strategies that are flexible and adaptive, intended to reach as many people as possible:

- **Urban National Wildlife Refuges** (101 as of 2021): Wildlife Refuges within 25 miles of populations of 250,000+ that can provide experiences for people that are compatible with existing wildlife conservation purposes—these refuges adopt an additional goal of “fostering environmental awareness...informed and involved populace that supports fish and wildlife conservation.”
- **Urban Partnerships**: Place-based conservation partnerships on partner-owned lands (e.g., non-governmental organizations; local municipalities; the private sector; and other State, tribal, and Federal agencies). This is where all Service Programs can be value-added to a partnership. As of 2021, there are 30 Urban Bird Treaty Cities and 31 Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships.

All of these components of the UWCP aim to work together and with Service partners to engage people in fish and wildlife conservation and to build understanding of the Service mission. It is important to note that each component of the UWCP may stand alone or be implemented in combination with one or both of the other components; all of these components of the UWCP *are not required* to be active simultaneously at the same Service site.

The UWCP operates in the most racially and ethnically diverse parts of the country, ensuring the Service is well positioned to deliver more equitable nature benefits. This distribution of programming allows the Service to provide nearby and first-rate opportunities to experience what nature has to offer—the spectacles of fish and wildlife, outdoor recreation, or the solo/social recharge that comes from simply being outside in nature.

The Service recognizes that its conservation efforts are not reaching many urban residents, whether through a pattern of ethnic or cultural exclusion⁶, economic or access barriers, environmental injustices, or feelings of fear or unease that come from a lack of experience with nature. To achieve the overarching goal of the UWCP, the Service must reach new and ethnically diverse audiences, understand these audiences, and collaborate with them to ensure conservation experiences are both positive and relevant.

⁴ Through [Director’s Order No. 208](#) and Service [Policy 110 FW 1](#)

⁵ From [Conserving the Future](#)

⁶ Reference Appendix: *Urban Wildlife Conservation Program Critical Elements & Key Terminology* for definitions of key terms used throughout the document.

THE STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE: FOUNDATION OF THE UWCP

To develop long-term, meaningful, and more equitable relationships with racially and ethnically diverse communities, the Service recognized in 2011 that a new way of business was necessary. This new business model includes developing different approaches and new skills, adapting priorities, and hiring and retaining a workforce that better mirrors the diversity of the American people. Developed with input from Service employees and local and national partners, the following eight Standards of Excellence have served as the successful framework for strengthening local conservation outcomes by improving community engagement:

1. Know and Relate to the Community
2. Connect Urban People with Nature via *Stepping Stones of Engagement*
3. Build Partnerships
4. Be a Community Asset
5. Ensure Adequate Long-term Resources
6. Provide Equitable Access
7. Ensure Visitors Feel Safe and Welcome
8. Model Sustainability

Urban National Wildlife Refuges (Urban Refuges) and Urban Partnerships are applying the Standards of Excellence to cultivate an innovative model for community-centered conservation. In particular, the Standards of Excellence have helped field practitioners test this new model to ensure that all members of the public feel welcomed, included, and can experience and recreate in nature, as well as exercise stewardship of and responsibility for fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This 10-year strategic plan was developed with the advice of an UWCP Advisory Team composed of Regional and Headquarters employees along with representatives from several Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships throughout the country. Reflecting on conservation successes and challenges from the past—and taking advantage of lessons learned from the field, from our urban communities, and from formal program-wide evaluations⁷—the Service recognizes the following:

1. The Standards of Excellence are an important local framework for interfacing with urban communities in conservation projects and should continue to be used at existing urban locations or adopted to engage within new communities.
2. More resources must be devoted to improving the Service's capacity in cultural sensitivity and community engagement, as well as to developing a more equitable and inclusive recruitment model that results in building a racially and ethnically diverse workforce and partner base. These fundamental efforts, as guided by the Critical Elements (*reference Appendix: Urban Wildlife Conservation Program Critical Elements & Key Terminology*), are important undertakings across the Service and particularly crucial to success in urban areas.
3. Both documenting and sharing lessons learned are crucial to effectively scaling up UWCP efforts beyond Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships.
4. Developing a transparent urban engagement maturity model, informed by tested evaluation approaches, is necessary to effectively focus future investments.

⁷ Reference [2018 Progress Report for the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program](#)

10-YEAR STRATEGIC GOALS AND TACTICS

Many of the strategic goals and tactics presented below are interrelated and will involve action from multiple levels across the Service. They are organized to illustrate the ways in which all Service employees, Friends Groups, and volunteers have a part to play in supporting the UWCP vision in the next 10 years and beyond.

This strategic plan is the next chapter in the implementation of the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program—an effort built on the premise that all people should have the opportunity to experience nature and share the responsibility for its stewardship. Over the next 10 years, Service leadership is committed to ensuring that Service employees and volunteers at urban refuges, sites, and stations have the necessary skills, tools, and approaches to actively and meaningfully engage their local communities. However, that is not the end of the journey—the UWCP is at the forefront of culture change at the Service— experimenting with approaches and engaging and sharing lessons learned with anyone seeking to implement a more equitable, effective, and relevant conservation model.

As the UWCP looks toward the next decade of building and strengthening conservation partnerships with urban communities, it will seek to achieve the following strategic goals and tactics—each intended to be accomplished within the framework of the Standards of Excellence and guided by the four Critical Elements (see Appendix: Urban Wildlife Conservation Program Critical Elements & Key Terminology).

The strategic goals presented are aspirational. The associated tactics are intended to be achievable. In tandem, they are designed to ensure the Service makes measurable progress in working with urban communities to design and deliver equitable, meaningful conservation efforts over the next 10 years.

Strategic Goal 1: Scale up lessons learned to move all Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships toward an expanded and more mature UWCP.

Based on lessons learned in the first decade of the program, articulate a UWCP maturity model that moves all Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships toward greater adoption of the Standards of Excellence and Critical Elements (see Appendix: Urban Wildlife Conservation Program Critical Elements & Key Terminology). This model will improve all 101 Urban Refuges and existing Urban Partnerships (31 Urban Partnerships and 30 Urban Bird Treaty Cities as of 2021), as well as provide clear direction for any new Urban Partnerships that may be established. By adapting approaches based on evaluations and lessons learned, providing a clear set of success factors, and making these factors available, the Service can increase the speed of adoption and extent of UWCP implementation.

- **Target: By 2030, the following will achieve program maturity and:**
 - 30 refuges will be designated as Flagship Urban National Wildlife Refuges
 - 30 cities will be designated Flagship Urban Partnerships
 - 10 cities will receive federal status as Urban Bird Treaty Cities

WHAT IS A “FLAGSHIP” URBAN REFUGE OR URBAN PARTNERSHIP?

After demonstrating a feasible plan for achieving the Standards of Excellence, an Urban Refuge or Urban Partnership can be nominated by a Region and then designated by the Service Director. Further, a designated refuge or partnership can be celebrated as a “flagship” site when it has fully embraced and implemented Standards of Excellence and Critical Elements as articulated in the UWCP maturity model outlined in this strategic goal.

TACTICS

Finalize a UWCP maturity model, including progress indicators and evaluation approaches.

- Develop a path to success for Urban Refuges, Urban Partnerships, and Urban Bird Treaty Cities based on equity, transparency, and adaptive management.
- Complete outcome evaluations of the first six funded Urban Refuges to inform establishment of the UWCP maturity model and expand evaluation efforts to sites across the UWCP.
- Expand the use of the Implementation and Planning Assessment and follow-up assessment tools to additional Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships to support their efforts to plan and monitor progress to meet Standards of Excellence, using the Critical Elements.

Increase the skills and capacities necessary to collaborate with communities on conservation efforts that purposefully include the participation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and/or those who have experienced environmental injustice.

- Develop a toolkit effective in *starting* UWCP efforts.
- Develop a toolkit effective in *maturing* UWCP efforts.
- Share opportunities, tools, and resources with other Urban Refuges, Urban Partnerships, and Urban Bird Treaty Cities – as well as with other Service programs and National Wildlife Refuges.

Expand mentorship efforts to share skills, approaches, and lessons learned.

- Facilitate (annually) six interactive, peer-to-peer engagement opportunities (e.g., shadowing, extended details, experiential workshops, lessons learned exchanges) between more experienced Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships and those just starting out.
- Establish an individual, on-the-job training and mentorship program to provide access to institutional knowledge and build the next generation of UWCP leaders.
- Establish 10 new Friends Groups associated with Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships.

Strategic Goal 2: Reinforce a shared purpose for the UWCP, increase unity and identity, and align approaches to achieve our collective goals.

It is a Service priority to ensure we are inclusive in our mission to work with people to conserve and protect wildlife and habitats for the benefit of people. While the Service has been doing and continues to do work in urban areas, the UWCP has developed a specific approach for engaging the public in conservation. [Conserving the Future](#) laid out a vision to improve how we work with and benefit ethnically and culturally diverse communities and the 80% of the population living in urban areas. We created the Standards of Excellence (Standards) as a framework to make our vision a reality.

Early implementers of the Standards recognized that four essential and interrelated elements are necessary to meaningfully engage urban communities and meet UWCP goals. They are being: community-focused, intentional, inclusive, and collaborative (see appendix). These four elements emerged as the foundation on which the work of the UWCP is built. They clarify our collective purpose and build a deepening sense of what defines the UWCP.

As we grow our implementation of the UWCP across the Service, they are a guide for practitioners to prioritize activities and set expectations. We will develop accountability parameters to consistently measure our actions against these elements so that we make continual progress and positively impact the planet and people.

- **Target: By 2025, 100 percent of employees at Flagship sites will demonstrate cultural awareness and adopt meaningful community engagement practices.**

CRITICAL ELEMENT COMMITMENTS

- *Identify historically excluded audiences and engage these communities with genuineness and collaborative resolve.*
- *Be intentional about reducing the influence of exclusion by addressing our blind spots and implicit biases, while healing relationships with culturally and ethnically diverse communities.*
- *Acknowledge and honor that people who come from different cultures and ethnicities often have different and equally valid relationships with nature and the environment.*
- *Collaboratively work with historically excluded communities, appreciating and valuing their contributions to solving the Service's conservation challenges and the community's social and environmental injustices.*

TACTICS

- Develop cultural responsiveness training—led by the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), practitioners, and outside sources—for participation by all Flagship Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships.
- Change, update, and monitor Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP) measures to reflect adoption of Critical Elements and Standards of Excellence (i.e., quality over quantity, priority audiences, recruitment, and retention of diverse employees) for Flagship Urban Refuges.
- Develop tools to assist Service employees working on Urban Refuges and with Urban Partnerships in becoming proficient in using the Critical Elements, such as a rubric to measure every action and hold ourselves accountable to continual progress.

Strategic Goal 3: Develop relevant outdoor recreational experiences and reduce barriers to access and transportation in urban areas.

“Americans face a significant gap between their interests in nature and their efforts, abilities and opportunities to pursue those interests”⁸. Barriers such as less non-structured time, economics, and lack of nearby access to and fear of nature or natural areas are contributing factors. In addition, the Service recognizes the systemic effects of not providing opportunities or welcoming all Americans to enjoy wildlife-dependent recreational uses of Service lands (i.e., hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation). This goal and related tactics are aimed at broadening the ways that individuals, families, and others in urban communities can connect and engage with wildlife and habitats—in turn benefiting community members’ physical and emotional health. This requires us to think about outdoor recreational experiences in two ways: 1) removing barriers to participation in wildlife-dependent recreational uses (i.e., the “Big 6”); and 2) exploring creative and compatible ways of recreating on Service lands.

- **Target: By 2030, 100 percent of Flagship Urban Refuges will implement programming that includes steps to adopt new recreational activities or remove barriers to existing recreational activities—which will address the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model and provide stepping stones of engagement.**
- **Target: By 2030, 100 percent of Flagship Urban Refuges will implement at least one multi-modal transportation project to remove barriers to access.**

TACTICS

Remove barriers to access and transportation to urban stations and partnership sites.

- Prioritize funding for deferred maintenance, infrastructure, and signage in urban areas, with the intent of improving recreation experiences for persons with disabilities and for all communities.
- Increase the number of Transportation Fellows to support Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships and accelerate the application of best practices from the Urban Transportation Connections Study.
- Implement existing Access Plans for seven Urban Refuges and develop plans for 15 additional Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships.
- Assist communities near 15 Urban Refuges in applying for U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Land Access Program grants to improve off-refuge access.

⁸ [The Nature of Americans Report](#), finding #1.

<p>Create opportunities for solo and social recreational activities and outdoor skills that are informed by community partners and relevant to urban communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Broaden recreational opportunities beyond priority public uses (e.g., hunting, fishing) to include activities such as art, exercise, mindfulness, and more. Consider activities on and off federal lands and in communities (e.g., vacant lots, community pollinator gardens, schoolyard habitats, etc.). ■ Ensure that 100% of Flagship Urban Refuges develop community-informed recreation by reviewing findings of appropriate use and compatibility. ■ Establish 20 new Outdoor Skills Centers⁹ at Urban Refuges and in communities with Urban Partnerships. ■ Establish or strengthen 20 new partnerships with organizations in a position to reach out to excluded communities (e.g., Minority Serving Institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Zeta Phi Beta, Phi Beta Sigma, and organizations led by Black Indigenous, People of Color such as Latino Outdoors and Outdoor Afro). ■ Develop 10 new public/private partnerships to provide increased recreation access for urban audiences in their communities, on and off federal lands.
<p>Get the word out to support community engagement and enjoyment of Urban Refuge and Urban Partnership sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sponsor local events in conjunction with Service campaigns and initiatives in coordination with at least 40 Urban Refuge and Urban Partnership sites. ■ Ensure that Service photos and messaging represent the diversity of our nation. ■ Engage influencers and organizations with networks that already reach BIPOC audiences in the outdoors and the environment.

⁹ Places that provide the skills, equipment, and social structure for participants to learn new skills and eventually adopt and enjoy outdoor recreation activities independently. Outdoor skills centers focus on one or more activity areas and aim to reach a target audience of pre-teens to young adults (ages 12-35).

Strategic Goal 4: Build a UWCP workforce to reflect the changing demographics and needs of America.

Employees are our best ambassadors—positive user experiences are driven by impressions of passionate, welcoming employees. While this is needed throughout the country, it is especially critical to meeting conservation goals in urban areas. The Service commits to supporting cultural and workforce improvements necessary for UWCP success and the overall relevancy of the Service, acknowledging that employee retention is one of the biggest barriers. The following tactics will be closely coordinated with the Office of Diversity and Inclusive Workforce Management (ODIWM) and reflect both top-down and bottom-up opportunities to attract—and especially to retain—a diverse workforce more reflective of the communities it serves.

- **Target: By 2030, 100 percent of Flagship Urban Refuges and Flagship Urban Partnerships will develop and implement retention goals for key UWCP positions.**

SUPPORTING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS ACROSS THE SERVICE

UWCP embraces the actions and activities of the 2020-2024 Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan (DIIP) developed by the Executive Diversity Committee, recognizing that these actions are very relevant and urgent in urban areas. The DIIP recognizes that success hinges on recruiting, welcoming, and empowering bright, driven professionals from diverse backgrounds who can help us find effective solutions and connect with a rapidly changing America. This plan focuses on three key objectives: 1) employee engagement; 2) barrier analysis/removal; and 3) recruitment and hiring.

TACTICS

Incorporate metrics for the UWCP in employee performance appraisals.

Develop standards related to community engagement to include in EPAPs of:

- All employees that work on Flagship Urban Refuges;
- Any employees that work with Urban Partnerships; and
- Any other Service employees whose supervisors determine the use of community engagement EPAP standards is appropriate (e.g., Urban Coordinators, Park Ranger, Managers, Biologists, Law Enforcement Officers).
- Insert “strengthening the UWCP” elements into Performance Plans for Assistant Directors and Regional Directors to set expectations that urban wildlife conservation will be prioritized by all Service leadership.

Increase recruitment and retention of employees at Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships in a way that models UWCP Critical Elements and promotes community-centered conservation.

- Develop a plan to attract, hire, and retain a more ethnically and culturally diverse Service workforce and to track leadership compliance with that plan. Plans should include internship programs that recruit youth from historically excluded communities through partner organizations (e.g., Hispanic Access Foundation, Greening Youth Foundation, The Student Conservation Association, and many others) and Service authorities (e.g., Directorate Fellows Program, Pathways, increased use of the Public Lands Corps certification).
- Increase the number of entry level positions (GS-5/7/9) with promotion potential at Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships with promotion potential, to make it easier to recruit employees from local communities and partners.
- Establish local hiring authority for select positions to allow the Service to more easily hire local community members.
- Expand job series requirements to allow for recruitment of employees with key leadership and community engagement skills, without necessarily requiring a biology or natural resources background.
- Report progress and challenges related to recruitment and retention of diverse employees in the DIIP SharePoint site.
- Provide information and lessons learned on diverse employee recruitment and retention to help inform the DIIP Barrier Analysis Team, and work with the team to develop effective strategies.
- Retain employees by providing a welcoming and safe work environment, building career ladders, and offering training, professional growth, and leadership opportunities to employees at their current locations in order to maintain continuity of Service-community relationships.

Strategic Goal 5: Build a more relevant and inclusive conservation model across the Service.

In the Service’s continual progress towards a more equitable, effective, and relevant conservation model for the American people, all programs can champion the UWCP Standards of Excellence and Critical Elements regardless of where and how they operate. While visitor-facing programs like refuges and hatcheries can easily adopt the Standards of Excellence, other Service programs (e.g., Science Applications, Migratory Birds, Ecological Services, etc.) can incorporate the Critical Elements in the conservation work they conduct in urban areas to ensure relevancy and community support. Additionally, programs such as the Joint Administrative Operations (JAO) that are not public-facing can support cross-programmatic efforts in implementing the UWCP framework and other Service-wide efforts with an urban lens. Together, Service programs can capitalize on the momentum of ongoing initiatives by leveraging expertise and resources and exploring opportunities to collaborate. The tactics below are initial ideas that will be further developed during the implementation planning process.

- **Target: By 2030, all Service Programs will implement or support innovative community-based partnerships with communities historically excluded from conservation efforts.**
- **Target: By 2030, 100 National Wildlife Refuges in rural areas will implement the Standards of Excellence.**

TACTICS

External Affairs	Develop formal partnerships with three new national partners. Improve engagement with at least three existing formal partners that work with historically excluded communities.
Ecological Services (ES)	Improve innovative community-based partnerships with ES projects at stations throughout the country (e.g., community science, monitoring, education, stewardship, media outreach, etc.)
Fish and Aquatic Conservation	Utilize recreational fishing, community centered restoration, and community stewardship fish passage programs to build and improve lasting relationships between National Fish Hatcheries, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices, and the public.
Urban Waters Federal Partnerships (Department of Interior)	Evaluate existing relationships and engage Service offices in five Urban Waters Federal Partnership cities in order to identify projects the Service and local partners can implement.
Coastal Program/Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program	Identify Coastal Program field locations that present opportunities for collaboration with historically excluded communities by partnering with Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships. Incorporate these opportunities into the development of the Coastal Program 5-year Strategic Plans.

<p>Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) and Refuge Law Enforcement</p>	<p>Establish a team of Refuge Law Enforcement Officers, OLE Wildlife Inspectors and Special Agents, External Affairs, and field station personnel to plan interactive and informative events as well as develop tools, outreach materials, and exhibits with the goal of strengthening relationships with and becoming more relevant to BIPOC communities.</p> <p>Develop opportunities for UWCP mentorship of employees (e.g., through shadowing, extended details, experiential workshops, lessons learned exchanges) so they can bring back skills related to engaging with various cultures and communities.</p>
<p>Science Applications</p>	<p>Identify landscape-scale partnerships that present opportunities for improved engagement with historically excluded communities and incorporate these opportunities into partnership goals and practices.</p>
<p>Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program</p>	<p>Coordinate efforts for UWCP leadership to influence policy and grant guidance through the lens of the Critical Elements.</p>

CONCLUSION

The aim of this strategic plan is to prepare Service employees to dismantle the barriers that have prevented the Service from engaging historically excluded communities in urban areas. This requires a workforce that is diverse, culturally aware, and equipped with an improved set of skills and resources. We have identified the Critical Elements that define the UWCP and are the foundation of our Standards of Excellence for fostering long-term and genuine relationships with urban communities. Now more than ever, the UWCP is poised to expand its reach with an aligned, Service-wide effort to forge bold partnerships. By adapting and implementing a more equitable and relevant conservation model, the Service will improve our effectiveness in building an informed conservation constituency.

APPENDIX: URBAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PROGRAM CRITICAL ELEMENTS

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS?

For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program is defined by four Critical Elements: **community-focused**, **intentional**, **inclusive**, and **collaborative**. They are the foundation of our [Standards of Excellence](#) for building long-term, meaningful relationships with urban communities. Each element is essential and interrelated. We measure every action against these elements so that we positively impact the planet and people and hold ourselves accountable to continual progress, not perfection.

KEY TERMS FOR THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS			
Historically Excluded	Ethnically Diverse	Culturally Diverse	Conservation Effort
<p>Ethnically and culturally diverse groups that were not included in the decision-making processes, for example members of the BIPOC community. <i>The Service acknowledges that within every community, these groups have been prevented or inhibited from participating in the selection and implementation of and from receiving the benefits of conservation efforts – whether by design or by a failure to create systems that purposely include these groups.</i></p>	<p>People of varying national and ancestral origins. <i>The Service acknowledges that mainstream conservation institutions have generally excluded specific ethnicities from conservation efforts. Examples include African Americans, Hispanic and Latin Americans, Native Americans, and Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. The reasons for this – including oversight, implicit and institutional bias, and deliberate exclusion – are interrelated because they are born from historical systems of exclusion that continue to influence all of our thinking to this day.</i></p>	<p>The representation of a multitude of identities, ideas, customs, beliefs, traditions, and social behaviors in a group, population, or society. <i>Cultural differences exist across the ways by which people organize and identify (geography, sexual orientation, gender identification, abilities, family structure, socioeconomic status, etc.)</i></p>	<p>All projects, programs, events, collaborations, and recreational opportunities that involve participation by community members at any stage in the design and delivery process. <i>The Service engages communities using a wide array of methods. They all require some level of effort and they all contribute to the Service’s conservation mission.</i></p>

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following describe the Critical Elements and how the Service can take action to integrate them in the UWCP:

Community-focused: Prioritize community needs with long-term commitments.

We are being community-focused when we:

- Identify and reflect community members' needs (e.g., language, physical), culture, and values to foster mutual respect.
- Co-design and deliver conservation efforts with community members, ensuring they are responsive to community needs, support community goals, and produce community benefits (e.g., improving public health or education).
- Work with community organizations, leaders, and individuals in a way that all community members feel they have a voice and are empowered to participate in conservation efforts.
- Dedicate adequate staff and resources to support community-focused approaches consistently and over time.

We take community-focused action by:

- Getting to know the community in a purposeful way—learning from community leaders, partnering with representative organizations, and using community assessment tools.
- Asking community members what makes them feel safe, respected, and welcomed, then working with them to achieve these conditions.
- Being meaningfully present at gathering places and actively participating in community-based events, to listen, understand, and provide appropriate support.
- Involving the community when designing new conservation efforts from the outset with established and communicated processes that are transparent (e.g., constraints such as compatibility with the overarching wildlife mission are conveyed up front); respectful of community values related to their relationship to the built and natural environment; and reflect back where input informed Service actions and decisions.
- Building trust with historically excluded community members, so that they may be ambassadors and conservation leaders who cultivate greater participation in the design and delivery of conservation efforts.

Intentional: Adopt community engagement methods that are well-informed, purposeful, and measurable.

We are being intentional when we:

- Design our UWCP efforts—including building partnerships, prioritizing audiences, and program development and delivery—purposefully to meet the Standards of Excellence and community-based goals.
- Ground our decisions in empirical research and community knowledge.
- Design and implement evaluation processes to continually learn, adapt, and improve conservation efforts around measurable outcomes.
- Hold ourselves accountable to the community by ensuring conservation efforts provide community-defined benefits.

- Support and contribute to a culture of learning that includes diverse experiences and perspectives.

We take intentional action by:

- Making decisions explicit and transparent, specifying intentions and defining measurable goals and desired outcomes.
- Replicating engagement models that are proven to work—using messages and methods that are culturally responsive and cultivating trusted messengers who represent historically excluded community groups.
- Creating or adapting evaluation frameworks that align on-the-ground indicators with high-level outcomes.
- Continually learning from our efforts and communicating successes and failures across the Service and to partners.

Inclusive: Implement equitable solutions to involve the community in solving conservation challenges.

We are being inclusive when we:

- Increase access to conservation efforts by identifying, addressing, and removing institutional barriers for historically excluded communities.
- Share power with historically excluded community groups by involving them in the design, decision-making, development, delivery, and evaluation of programs.
- Actively work to provide equitable access to the benefits of conservation efforts.
- Extend ethnically and culturally relevant invitations to historically excluded community groups and ensure they are welcomed with relevant markers that they have helped identify and provide (e.g., language, communication methods, music, and food).

We take inclusive action by:

- Understanding the ways community groups express their culture and where they prefer to gather.
- Embracing equity and committing the necessary resources to build trust and participation capacity with historically excluded community groups.
- Engaging historically excluded community groups with authenticity—speaking with, not at, sharing power, not holding power over.
- Establishing practices (e.g., flexible meeting schedules, convenient meeting locations, food, childcare, and language assistance) that increase the ability for all community members to participate in programs and/or provide input in all phases of design process through evaluation.
- Celebrating the cultural and ethnic diversity of community groups in our conservation efforts.
- Training employees, volunteers, Friends, and partners to understand the importance of inclusion and develop the skills of individuals and organizations to be inclusive.

Collaborative: Form long-term transformational relationships with community partners and across Service programs with the goal of increasing the collective impacts of conservation efforts.

We are being collaborative when we:

- Relinquish our role as leaders and share resources, power, and decision making with partners, including volunteers and Friends.
- Find common ground with partners in mission, goals, and tactics.
- Create a culture and network among partners where we openly share and learn from each other.

We take collaborative action by:

- Developing meaningful partnerships with the community using a process for aligning goals, inventorying strengths and weaknesses, strategically bringing others to the table, and crafting common language.
- Expanding the Service portfolio of partners to engage with small community-based organizations, ethnically- and culturally-specific organizations, and those in sectors beyond conservation (e.g., health, business, art, and spiritual).
- Becoming ambassadors for our partners and our collaborative conservation efforts.
- Engaging other Service programs to develop shared strategies, methods, and messages and ensure we align community engagement efforts.