

Lowell Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership

Lowell, Massachusetts



With 80% of Americans living in or near cities, a community-centered model of conservation is needed to engage and inspire those who are geographically disconnected from nature. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) understands that an innovative, customized approach is needed, and wants to inspire the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts and conservationists. By maximizing partnerships and leveraging resources, the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program aims to recruit, reactivate, and retain outdoor recreation users and environmental stewards in urban areas with large populations.

Lowell is home to approximately 111,000 culturally diverse people, and is the fourth largest city in the state of Massachusetts. Located at the confluence of the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Lowell is a prime focus for community and watershed resiliency. In 2016, the Eastern

Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex partnered with the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, working together to provide stewardship opportunities, connect residents to greenspace, and connect the surrounding watershed to its communities.

Recognizing existing partnership efforts and the potential for growth, the Service designated the collaborative effort as the Lowell Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership on November 9, 2018. The Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, Central New England Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, National Park Service's Lowell National Historical Park, Lowell Parks and Recreation Department, among other partners, will work together to engage the Lowell community through its youth, stakeholders, and decision-makers. By increasing participation in community science, environmental education, and stewardship projects that improve the health of people, wildlife, and communities, the Partnership will inspire a connected conservation constituency that has cultural and civic awareness around environmental issues.

Initially focusing on communities along the lower reach of the Concord River, the Partnership will:

- Connect students to the Merrimack and Concord River watersheds and to each other through environmental education, community science, and stewardship events.

- Increase the awareness and understanding of educators in the Lowell Public School System on the impacts of climate change in their local watershed. This will enable teachers to inform and empower their students to engage in actions that help communities become more resilient.
- Build connected conservation constituencies to enhance resiliency and bolster the environmental health of the Lowell reach of the Concord river by revitalizing and restoring its riverbanks along the Concord River Greenway.
- Increase the visibility of the Partnership in order to reach a broader audience within the Lowell community and communities along the Sudbury/Assabet/Concord River watershed.
- Engage Lowell residents in citizen science to collect data on anadromous fish passage in the Concord River. Citizen scientists count the number of river herring that pass through the fish ladder at Centennial Island both on-site and through video monitoring.

Outside of the City, the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge currently hosts Lowell students at the Refuge twice per year, providing standards-based curriculum activities designed to foster an understanding and appreciation of nature. In addition to Refuge visits, the Refuge provides in-classroom programming for students to learn about native flora and fauna of Massachusetts, both in urban areas and in green spaces.



Urban Education at Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge

