

Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership

Albuquerque, New Mexico



Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, the Southwest's first urban refuge will serve as an urban oasis for both wildlife and people on a former dairy farm just a few miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico's largest metropolitan area. Urban refuges such as Valle de Oro NWR offer unique environmental education and recreation opportunities in highly populated areas while promoting the mission of the refuge system to protect wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Valle de Oro NWR was established in 2012 and the US Fish and Wildlife Service is currently in the process of acquiring the complete 570 acres of the Price's Dairy/Valley Gold Farms and the associated water rights. Refuge staff have also begun planning for both visitor use and habitat restoration on the property. Because the refuge is still a work in progress, Valle de Oro NWR is not yet open to the public.

Although neither Refuge land acquisition nor restoration are complete, and the Refuge itself is not officially open to the public, that doesn't preclude the Refuge from having a place in the community. So, in order to raise local awareness of the project, encourage community participation in the Refuge development and show the Refuge's desire to contribute to the community success as a whole, Valle de Oro NWR and the Friends of Valle de Oro NWR are partnering on three community conservation projects in the neighborhoods adjacent to the Refuge land.

In partnership with Audubon New Mexico, Bernalillo County and The Center of Southwest Culture, Valle de Oro NWR and the Friends of Valle de Oro will accomplish the following projects:

Bringing Audubon New Mexico's Birds of a Feather Curriculum to South Valley Schools

Audubon New Mexico, Valle de Oro NWR staff and Friends of Valle de Oro NWR will work together to provide meaningful nature-based activities for classes of students from South Valley area schools. Student populations will represent the diverse culture that makes up the South Valley's populace, creating an opportunity for students to learn through age appropriate conversation education focused on birds through Audubon's popular Birds of a Feather Explore Together program.

Students will engage in approximately 6 hours of instructional time over the course of 4 days, blending classroom and field science experiences at the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. Prior to education programs on the ground, Audubon will provide Valle de Oro's volunteer Friends with curriculum training on Birds of a Feather Explore Together, provide them with a materials list to construct a materials trunk, and mentor volunteers through program implementation with local students. This will allow the Friends of Valle de Oro NWR to successfully continue and increase these programs in the area in the future.

Audubon's Birds of a Feather Explore Together is an inquiry-based, standards-based curriculum that utilizes birds as a gateway to nature. This curriculum is designed for students of all ages, with a special



The partnership aims to provide environmental education programs to students and establish wildlife-friendly habitat sites throughout Albuquerque.



Center of Southwest Culture



emphasis on elementary grades 3rd, 4th and 5th. The program helps students understand that birds and humans share needs and habitats. Activities explain how birds play an important role in indicating the health of our world and how changes in their conditions warn of threats to habitats and natural systems critical to all life. Students are provided with the opportunity to develop awareness and knowledge about birds through a culturally sensitive presentation of activities, which focus on bird adaptations, including feathers, nests, eggs, beaks, claws and talons, as well as the scientific dissection of pellets. Students also experience the “outdoor classroom” in this program, as they observe local bird species, as well as other animals and plants in the area. Audubon’s programs are offered in English and/or Spanish and bilingual materials are provided to teachers and students.

Building a Mini-Refuge Community Garden at the Mountain View Community Center

Valle de Oro NWR refuge staff, Friends of Valle de Oro NWR and Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation Departments staff will work to create a community garden to serve as a mini-refuge experience at the Mountain View Community Center just 2 miles down the road from the Refuge itself. The garden landscape will include a pollinator garden, nature explore classroom and educational and interpretive signage. Refuge staff and Friends members will host community planting events and regular workshops to educate community members on the economic, aesthetic and wildlife benefit of native plants. The community garden will serve as a mini-refuge experience allowing community members to gather a better understanding of what a National Wildlife Refuge is and encouraging their participation the development of their own National Wildlife Refuge, Valle de Oro NWR.



“La Carpa” Informal Science Education Project at the South Valley Academy

The “La Carpa” project, a partnership between the Center of Southwest Cultures, Valle de Oro NWR, and the Friends of Valle de Oro NWR will educate inter-generational Hispanic families about science, specifically ecology and sustainability, by using traditional Hispanic culture and artistic expression to bridge the gap between tradition and modern society. The project will utilize the meaningful tradition of “La Carpa” (the tent) which used to travel to villages to expose isolated Spanish-speaking communities to the ideas and news of the day.

Different cultures have different learning styles, a product of their unique beliefs, values, and way of perceiving the world. An individual’s learning style develops through their experiences and exposure starting from birth to adulthood. This project will implement the historical model of the “Carpa,” a method of informal education in traditional Hispanic culture, with science presentations and activities in settings ranging from small rural communities to a large urban center. It will also implement ways of using social media as the new “carpa” – that is, allowing youth to leverage social networking sites, such as Facebook, blogs and vlogs, to express their interest in learning about science and the environment.

This approach builds upon strengths found in the Hispanic community – multigenerational households, an intimate observation of the natural world due to lifestyle, and a deep concern for the environment. This approach will be relevant to the participants by incorporating culturally-congruent content, presented in a bilingual bicultural format and, by engaging intergenerational family and community members.

La Carpa Project will be located at the South Valley Academy (SVA), a public charter high school located in Albuquerque. The SVA is part of the Albuquerque Public School District, the 28th largest school district in the US. Located in Albuquerque’s South Valley, the poorest quadrant of the city, over 93% of the students at the SVA qualify for the free or reduced lunch program; over 34% of adults ages 25 and older who reside in the area have not graduated from high school. The enrollment is over 90% Hispanic. The school has a strong track record of involving parents with over 90% attending quarterly student-parent-teacher conferences. La Carpa will benefit from ready-made audiences who have expressed a willingness to participate.