

# Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge



**Denver, CO**

# community



**Denver is a magnet for Millennials** attracted to the region for its combination of dynamic, creative urban life and proximity to world-class recreational opportunities.

- Approximately 1,021,000 people between Denver, Aurora, and Commerce City.
- Demographics of the three surrounding communities include: 61-69% White; 28-46% Hispanic; 3-15% Black or African American; 2-5% Asian; less than 2% Native American.



## Project Summary:

The broad vision of this proposal focuses on expanding youth programs, increasing investment to established and emerging partnerships, removing barriers, and increasing and improving access for our visitors. We will engage a diversity of partners, including Environmental Learning for Kids, a successful program recognized by the Obama Administration for its strong educational support, healthy role models, and opportunities for positive community action for youth, helping them to become engaged, productive, and successful members of society. Since a priority focus will be on the physical connections between people and nature, we will reduce and eliminate barriers to community access through outreach and education and marketing materials that focus on ethnic diversity.

**As part of the black-footed ferret reintroduction effort, we will construct an outdoor live ferret exhibit to educate the public.**

## play

- Develop and enhance outdoor recreation partnerships in 50 cities over the next four years for more than 10 million young people.
- A new tour bus will increase access for 8,000 visitors from surrounding communities.
- The Rocky Mountain Greenway concept will provide a complete connection between the three national wildlife refuges and a vast network of open public/private lands in between.
- Open the Grand Loop, a tour route that will provide access to three quarters of the refuge, and create a bike/pedestrian trail on the southern side that will connect key locations on the refuge.

**Within the Denver city limits, the 16,000-acre Rocky Mountain Arsenal offers opportunities to see and learn about bison, bald eagles, mule deer, migratory songbirds and waterfowl. No other major urban area has a conservation holding of this size.**

## work

- Employ four to six summer interns.
- Through public and private partnerships, provide 100,000 work and training opportunities to young people and veterans over four years.

## learn

- 20,000 schoolchildren will participate in formal environmental education programs.
- Provide educational opportunities for at least 10 million K-12 kids annually.

## serve

- Attain 1 million volunteers nationally.
- Create an Urban Rangers program, a youth ambassador program that promotes science, conservation, fishing and awareness.
- From 2012 to 2013, the refuge saw a 1,200% increase in visitation, from 23,000 visitors to more than 300,000.
- Transportation alternatives will include connections to three new light-rail stations, upgrades to provide safe travel for schoolchildren from the refuge to five schools, and connectivity to Denver International Airport.

# Urban National Wildlife Refuges

## INTRODUCTION

The future success of conservation lies ultimately in our ability to inspire Americans to connect with the outdoors and nature, and to become stewards of the environment. With over 80% of Americans living in urban areas, spending less time outdoors, and becoming more ethnically and racially diverse, our challenge is to become relevant in their daily lives. Without public awareness and support, our conservation mission will not succeed.

*Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* challenges us to enhance the relevance of the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to this rapidly changing America. Building a connected conservation constituency requires connecting with the ever-growing urban population in order to ensure that Americans care about conservation. To this end, the *Conserving the Future* document contains a specific recommendation:

## 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 10 demographically and geographically varied cities across America by 2015.”***

Urban areas present a strategic opportunity to reach new audiences that are currently not visiting nor aware of the Service. Refuges that are in the heart of where the people are located provide the best opportunity to engage new audiences, whether through an urban refuge or an urban wildlife refuge partnership. Building this constituency ultimately benefits the entire System and the broader conservation community by nurturing new supporters who care.

The goal of the Urban Wildlife Refuge Program is to engage surrounding urban communities in wildlife conservation as partners. Excellence may be achieved through eight standards that serve as a framework for collaboration between the Service and urban communities on and off Service lands:

- 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**

In order to demonstrate the potential of urban refuges to reach new audiences in their communities, the Service requested innovative proposals from each region for one urban refuge to receive \$1 million in base funding in FY14. The Service received strong proposals from our 101 existing urban refuges that are within 25 miles of a population of 250,000 or more. **San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex (NWRC)** received the funding as announced in August 2014.

The approach to excellence for urban national wildlife refuges must be as flexible and unique as the communities the refuges serve. The Service must strive to understand both human and natural environments in order to understand the expectations of the urban community. The Service must strive to provide programs and leadership on conservation initiatives that are relevant to their communities. Service staff, volunteers, and partners must engage urban communities to develop meaningful connections to wildlife that last a lifetime. This starts by building awareness, fostering deeper understanding, and growing participation through programs that bring more people from the urban world into the larger conservation community.

Urban refuges are great places to build a broader conservation constituency, but the challenge is far too big for any one agency or organization to tackle alone. The Urban Wildlife Refuge Program recognizes the importance of embracing traditional and new collaborations. Various entities whose interests may be conservation, education, human health, or other subjects ultimately can help achieve conservation of wildlife, plants, and their habitats that are essential to maintaining a healthy planet for people.