

Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge



Detroit, MI

community



The Detroit city population is 688,701, but is part of a metropolitan area of nearly 6 million people, or 7 million including Windsor, Ontario. Current refuge visitation is 8,000 people annually. However, with completion of the new Visitor Center in 2016, visitation will increase dramatically. The statistics for Detroit are disheartening, but are only part of the story: the city of Detroit has lost 60% of its population since 1950. Half of the property owners don't pay taxes. The city has declared bankruptcy; Wayne County's unemployment rate is 9.1% and 38% of Detroit residents live below the poverty level; only 4% of 11th graders in Detroit test "proficient" in science; more than 40,000 structures meet the definition of "blight" and there are more than 6,000 vacant lots that need immediate attention.

Project Summary:

Detroit is a city on the verge of a renewal – and it is focused on the Detroit River. The Detroit RiverFront Conservancy is creating a destination in downtown Detroit with walkways, green spaces and gathering areas. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is building an Outdoor Adventure Center that will introduce visitors to outdoor activities. Belle Isle, a 982-acre island, is an urban State Park. The river itself has rebounded from decades of pollution and is a first-class walleye fishery and birding destination.

The refuge will focus on three areas of emphasis: the Refuge Gateway, Community Ambassadors, and Youth Hiring.



play

- The Michigan Department of Natural Resource's Outdoor Adventure Center will offer 40,000 square feet of archery ranges, climbing walls, and fishing simulators. We will partner with the DNR to offer programs and adventures for families in downtown Detroit.
- Community Ambassadors will offer nature walks, programs, and outdoor skills workshops through neighborhood recreation centers.
- The Visitor Center at the Refuge Gateway will offer loaner recreational equipment such as fishing poles, binoculars, GPS units and other materials.
- Annual Measures: Outdoor Adventure Center: 1 million visitors; Community Ambassadors: 3,000 neighborhood residents; Refuge visitation: 100,000.

work

- The Refuge will partner with The Greening of Detroit, U.S. Forest Service, and others to offer additional work experience for Detroit Youth.
- The Refuge will hire and coordinate five YCC crews to work in city parks and in neighborhoods.
- Work with partners to hire interns from local neighborhoods to partner with Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs and other organizations to lead after-school programs and summer day camps.
- Annual Measures: Partnership with Greening of Detroit: 50 youth; YCC: 20 youth and 5 crew leaders; Interns: 15 youth.

learn

- Community Ambassadors will work with local schools to add hands-on experience to science curricula. They will develop schoolyard and neighborhood habitats for real-world learning.
- Develop partnerships with Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs and faith-based organizations to implement after-school programs and summer day camps, especially focusing on STEM subjects.
- Develop outdoor educational facilities at the Refuge's Gibraltar Wetlands Unit, adjacent to Oscar A. Carlson High School.
- Annual Measures: Community Ambassadors: 1,000 students; Partnership activities: 2,000 students; Carlson HS: 1,000 students.

serve

- The Refuge Gateway will recruit and train volunteers to lead programs, assist families with recreational activities, and conduct education programs.
- Community Ambassadors will recruit local community residents as program mentors and leaders. They will also work with the city of Detroit's Adopt a Park program and develop similar activities for new green spaces.
- Measures: Gateway site: 50 volunteers; Community Ambassadors: 25 volunteers in communities.

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.