

# Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge



**Minneapolis, MN**

# community



- Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, population 3.4 million.

## *Surrounding community demographics:*

- Vibrant Hmong, Hispanic, Somali, and African-American communities.
- Communities adjacent to the refuge's Visitor Center are 53% white, 25% black, 9% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 8% other groups.
- Over 33% of children in Minneapolis and 36% of children in St. Paul live below the poverty line.
- The Twin Cities Metropolitan area is home to approximately one-third of America's Somali population and home to the nation's largest Hmong American population.

## **Project Summary:**

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge will engage underexposed and urban audiences environmentally, socially, and economically through recreation, stewardship, and discovery activities. This proposal involves the community through a community-based plan that addresses neighborhood needs and interests. We will provide opportunities for students, volunteers, mentors and elevate the refuge into a recognized leader in urban environmental education. A multi-faceted awareness campaign will reach underexposed urban communities and ensure equitable access through bilingual outreach products and enhanced access. This urban refuge model can be exported to other national wildlife refuges.

**Provide an outdoor experience** and connection to Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge for the Mall of America's 40 million annual visitors.

## play

- Provide urban families with the tools and comfort to explore and enjoy the outdoors through 12 Family Outdoor Workshops per year.
- Partner with communities on 10 annual restoration projects to develop community gardens, urban waters and habitat restoration projects, and nature exploration areas in their neighborhoods.
- Build upon recreational opportunities adjacent to underserved neighborhoods.

## work

- Increase youth employment opportunities both on and off refuge lands for 50 underserved youth per year.

## learn

- Nature Novice activities on- and off-site will provide a spectrum of opportunities for 500 participants to experience hands-on, real-life experiences and recreational opportunities.
- Increase participation for 1,700 Partners School students and 3,000 Partner Teacher students to provide new experiences for target communities.
- Expand Teacher Practicum and Student Teaching to include partnerships with local universities for 10 pre-service teachers and 10 practicum interns.

## serve

- Engage urban communities and leaders in creating and sustaining a grassroots Initiative Collaborative Working Group and community-based Engagement Plan.
- Recruit, mentor and train community members to develop and lead nature exploration hikes/programs within their own communities.
- Expand Volunteer Trail Ranger Program to increase presence on the refuge.
- Use 30 naturalist trained interns as Roving Interpretive Trail Rangers.

**Assist schools, community centers, facilities, and communities with sustainability practices such as rain gardens, pollinator gardens, greening practices, recycling, composting, and more.**

# 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.