

Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge



Albuquerque, NM

community

- Albuquerque: 662,500 people, 30% of state population.
- Two Superfund Sites are within the neighborhood, one of which is the most contaminated Superfund Site in the state.
- The state's largest homeless family shelter is within the neighborhood.

Surrounding community demographics:

- Community is between 70-90% Hispanic.
- 93% of students receive free or reduced lunch.
- 75% students, most of whom are Mexican immigrants, speak Spanish at home.
- More than 55% of the population with incomes below 150% of the poverty level (2009).
- The refuge's southern neighbor is the Isleta Tribe.

project summary:

One of the nation's newest national wildlife refuges, Valle de Oro sits within a culturally diverse community that for several decades has been subjected to heavy industrial use but is now in the early stages of a community renaissance. We will integrate the refuge into people's lives through community engagement and new and existing partnerships. Central to the proposal is opportunities for youth, including conservation education, research, career counseling, and employment. A refuge-specific Environmental Justice Plan will be developed to help identify and address serious environmental impacts affecting communities. We will develop a conservation career resource library and establish environmental education partnerships with diverse, traditional and non-traditional partners. Access options will be developed for a variety of refuge visitors that are convenient and low cost, as well as funding of transportation alternatives for off-refuge programs.

Empowers minority, low-income, and tribal populations.

play

- Monthly free, regular open house events featuring art, music, cultural and natural history currently attracts an average of 50 local residents.
- A multi-modal hike and bike trail and pedestrian access to existing access routes will give the community greater access to refuge lands.
- A pilot bike share program will be established with partners.
- Develop an Explore Nature App to serve as on-demand tour guide-interpreter.

work

- Six students participating in Middle Rio Grande Youth Conservation Corps will work on the refuge, as well as off-refuge on partner and community-led projects.

learn

- Community workshops will engage in refuge planning efforts.
- More than 5,000 students will be reached through educational programs designed for K-12 schools and a refuge curriculum for a 10th grade class, reaching 75 students.
- Establish a conservation resource library

that supports local youth pursuing education and employment in wildlife conservation.

- Service-learning projects focused on youth-designed marketing and promotional campaigns.
- Proposals for refuge facilities developed by University students as part of their curriculum.
- Create outdoor classrooms.

serve

- Recruit volunteers to support educational events and programs.

To date, 100 students have applied for the six Middle Rio Grande Youth Conservation Corps positions.

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.