

Bayou Sauvage Refuge



New Orleans, LA

community

- New Orleans population of metro area: 1,205, 374.
- One of the highest percentages of Black or African American populations compared to other cities, with targeted schools' population over 80% African American.
- More than 40% of the population closest to the refuge is Asian, with a Vietnamese population that's nearly 10 times the national average.
- The rate of free and reduced lunch recipients at one of the primary schools served is 99% and all students participate in the Student Scholarship Program (vouchers).

project summary:

Through a comprehensive partnership with the University of New Orleans Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences, this proposal provides unique opportunities to explore and learn about the coastal wetland environments with the urban center of Greater New Orleans. Underserved students and volunteers will participate in structured service learning activities and contribute to habitat restoration on the refuge. A mobile visitor center and lab will allow students to virtually explore the wetlands that surround and learn about issues unique to the Mississippi Delta region.

One of the largest urban refuges in the U.S. with more than 25,000 acres of wetland habitat within New Orleans' metropolitan area.

play

- Overnight trips for high school students doing research projects.

work

- Six positions will be created for youth, including two undergraduate interns hired through the Earth and Environmental College at UNO; two paid community youth interns from partner groups; and two SCA interns for the refuge complex.

learn

- Service-learning projects for students, including analyzing rates of land loss, measuring water quality, coastal restoration methods.
- Students will design and implement their own research projects.
- Cultivate and grow marsh grass and other wetlands plants in classrooms.
- The Mobile Visitor Center will serve 8,000-10,000 students who will learn about wetlands through interactive kiosks and exhibits.

serve

- Students and volunteers will grow and plant wetland vegetation.
- 2,000 students will participate in service projects resulting in the restoration of 800 acres of wetlands on Bayou Sauvage NWR.

The “Marsh Immersion Experience,” a 28-foot mobile visitor center and laboratory, will allow urban students to virtually explore the wetlands that surround them.

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.