

# Creating *Naturally* Refuge **v** in Philly

Engaging Local Communities  
with America's First Urban Refuge

**Philadelphia, PA**



# community



## Project Summary:

The Delaware Valley Region/ Philadelphia Metropolitan area has a population of over 6.1 million across four states (see map). Over 600,000 people reside within 5 miles and 1,700,000 live within 10 miles of the refuge.

Many residents in the local community currently do not visit the refuge. We will focus on the adjacent Eastwick community, which currently does not know the refuge well, to provide places and opportunities that offer a natural refuge in an urban community. As of the census of 2010, the ethnic makeup in the Eastwick community was 76% African American, with a median household income of \$41,290. This will be the FWS's greatest opportunity to share not only the Service mission with the public, but also to create a multitude of young and adult conservationists at the doorstep of America's first urban refuge in the "City of Brotherly Love."

We will develop a community engagement cycle consisting of educating our youth, training youth for work experiences, and providing youth jobs in the conservation field. This program will create and nurture ambassadors throughout the city of Philadelphia, who know the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) brand, and will share their great experiences with friends and family across the city and beyond. We will also connect the refuge with Philadelphia natural areas through new trail corridors and public transportation with new and improving regional and national partnerships. Creating community "pocket parks"/urban refuges will get the community involved in habitat conservation.



## play

- Create Corridors to Nature by improving infrastructure and programs to provide safe access and a welcoming atmosphere to the refuge and other natural areas.
- Work with partners to create and improve offsite corridors and transportation to reach more than 1,500,000 people living within 10 miles of the refuge. New corridors will connect more than 750 miles of trails in Philadelphia and throughout the regional area. New public transportation will bring carless visitors to the doorstep of our visitor center.
- Bring nature into the city by working with communities and partners to build neighborhood “pocket parks,” developing exhibits and natural areas at sites throughout Philadelphia, telling our story through strategic communications, and contributing to regional environmental and sustainability initiatives.

## by the numbers:

**Play: 1.5 million**

**Learn: 3,000**

**Serve: 1,000**

**Work: 134**

## work

- Establish a Groundwork Trust, which will employ an additional 20 youth annually in the community, and engage/educate families on environmental challenges.
- Provide youth employment opportunities for 114 youth annually, through our partnership with the Student Conservation Association (SCA).

## learn

- Environmentally educate up to 3,000 students in four schools within 3 miles of the refuge.
- Engage and educate the Eastwick community regarding our joint environmental challenges and develop community action that will reach more than 14,000 residents.
- Develop exhibits and natural areas at strategic sites throughout Philadelphia, while telling our conservation story through strategic communications.

## serve

- Provide youth volunteer opportunities for approximately 1,000 students from local schools with partners.

# 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.