

# SoCal Urban Wildlife Refuge Project



**San Diego, CA**

# 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.

# community

**Southern California**, is the second largest metropolitan area in the US, with over 17 million people.

The combined demographic areas are over 50% Hispanic, reflecting our nation's projected racial and ethnic mix in 2060. Our urban areas now reflect the future trends of the changing ethnic mix of the United States and our approaches in reaching diverse communities will be directly transferable to other parts of the country.

**This proposal** creates a media library that highlights the unique qualities of urban refuges for both people and wildlife and will be used to promote education, exploration and engagement on urban refuges.

## project summary:

Anchored in the south by the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex and to the north by the Hopper Mountain Refuge Complex, the SoCal Urban Wildlife Refuge Project reaches deep into Los Angeles' diverse urban core where the revitalization of the Los Angeles River is bringing back nature to urban residents. We will significantly expand the vast potential of the Los Angeles Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, one of the eight pilot cities under the Urban Wildlife Refuge Program, to connect urban communities with the great outdoors. We will expand reach into the surrounding communities by tapping into local schools and programs with cutting-edge technology and building upon our exemplary partnerships.

Our dream is to infuse new and diverse audiences within the large urban population of Southern California with the belief that conserving wildlife and natural habitats, whether in their neighborhood parks or within national wildlife refuges across the country, is essential to sustaining healthy communities. Through outdoor learning, service and stewardship of natural habitats, conservation-based work for

disadvantaged young adults, and enjoyment of being exposed to nature, we will build an urban constituency that supports conservation.

The SoCal Urban Wildlife Refuge Project will build enthusiasm for understanding science and growing future conservationists through outdoor learning, service and stewardship of natural habitats, conservation based work for disadvantaged young adults, and enjoyment of being exposed to nature. A River Corps program for disadvantaged youth will focus on habitat restoration and environmental education, and we will bring the 'river to the people' through community events and unique learning activities. Furthermore, we will build a corps of young technology-savvy environmental stewards and develop a pilot program to integrate technological tools with science curriculum, environmental restoration, and civic responsibility. Students and teachers will get hands-on and mentor-based programs that build science and technology skills while at the same time fostering collaboration, self-confidence, and experience. This proposal creates a media library that highlights the unique qualities of urban refuge for both people and wildlife and will be used to promote education, exploration and engagement on urban refuges.

# objectives

- **Develop new and expand existing partnerships with a broad range of community organizations that reflect the diversity of the Southern California metropolitan region. We will implement at least ten conservation-based programs that will connect urban residents with nature and raise meaningful and relevant awareness of the Service mission to our urban audiences.**
- **Engage students in at least five different school districts within the SoCal Urban Wildlife Refuge Project area in a range of conservation-based experiences (e.g., hands on education, remote interactive learning, STEM-based instruction) to provide each participant with the opportunity to find their own stepping stones to connect with the natural environment.**
- **Host at least two events annually in which Refuge staff from across the country and our urban partners can exchange ideas and share information that will assist all**

participants in improving the effectiveness of our outreach, transformative experiences, and expertise in conservation-based learning and to transfer our successes and failures with other urban refuges.

- Through the leveraging of existing funds to obtain additional funding and by seeking new and in some cases non-traditional partners ensure the continued implementation and sustainability of the various programs proposed within the SoCal Urban Wildlife Refuge Project well beyond the life of the current Urban Refuge Project funding.
- Provide the platform/ forum for future Directors and Secretary's to deliver the urban refuge and conservation messages.



## play

- Engage families inside the River Rover at community events where they will learn about riparian habitat, and have opportunities to fish, kayak, and bicycle.
- Conduct 30 River Corps-led environmental education and community outreach activities that engage families and youth.

## learn

- LA River Rover will focus on an in-class watershed lesson plan on the Los Angeles River's past, present, and future, with 50 school visits, 10 riverside events, and 15 educational field trips with River Corps members.
- CondorKids focuses on engaging Fillmore Unified School District, a low-income area near Hopper Mountain Refuge with over 75% Hispanic students, in becoming active condor conservationists. Other partners include the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, Santa Barbara Zoo, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology who will provide technology to stream the live condor nest to the classroom.
- Develop a community of young women (grades 7–12) engaged in STEM learning with Living Coast Discovery Center's BE WiSE program.
- Partner with Earth Discovery Institute to build a corps of over 90 young technology-savvy environmental stewards, including in-class instruction, field-based restoration, and production of capstone videos for public service announcements.
- Host 200 students in the Student Scientist Series with Living Coast Discovery Center.

- L.I.V.E (Live Interactive Virtual Exploration) creates the virtual classroom for all students to offer authentic, inquiry-based learning at San Diego Bay. We will expand the wireless network to create more opportunities for virtual field trips with San Diego State University, and provide teacher training and backpacks.
- Work with Zoological Society of San Diego to provide free science-based, laboratory and field research experiences to 20 science teachers and approximately 1,000 students from Title I to foster an informed and environmentally literate public.

## serve

- Host three site locations for the Gran Limpieza (Great Cleanup) of the LA River
- Students will produce at least 30 capstone video projects to be developed as public service announcements or environmental science teaching films.
- Host 16 one-day volunteer events with at least 150 participants.
- River Corps members will work with scientific experts to conduct five research surveys along the Los Angeles River.

## work

- Partner with the LA Conservation Corps to expand their existing LA River Corps program by funding a six-member crew of inner city, low-income young adults.
- Complete more than 50 projects by River Corps that contribute to the overall natural quality within and adjacent to the Los Angeles River.

