

Understanding Urban Audiences

Community Workshop Results for John Heinz NWR at Tinicum

Background

In the summer of 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) began creating an updated vision for the future of the National Wildlife Refuge System. More than 100 people from across the Service worked together to craft *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation*.¹ This document lays out an ambitious plan for the next decade that addresses opportunities and challenges in the face of a changing America and conservation landscape.

To implement the new vision, nine teams consisting of Service employees were created, one of which was the Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative team. The Initiative team aims to increase the Service's relevancy to urban citizens and contribute to the vision's goal of diversifying and expanding the Service's conservation constituency over the next decade. It grew out of the recognition that America's increasing population is more diverse and increasingly living in urban areas. Objectives set by the Initiative team include establishing measures that help to define and achieve excellence, creating a framework for developing new urban partnerships, and establishing a refuge presence in ten demographically and geographically varied cities in the U.S.

An underlying need for the Initiative is a better understanding of factors that facilitate or inhibit connecting urban audiences with wildlife and nature. To address this need, the Service's Human Dimensions Branch collaborated with U.S. Geological Survey and North Carolina State University on a research project aimed at understanding urban audiences, identifying barriers to engagement in wildlife-dependent recreation, and identifying strategies that the Service can implement to overcome these barriers.

This multiple-method research project includes: (1) a review and synthesis of the current literature to better understand what is known about barriers, motivations, and proven successful strategies of urban engagement in outdoor recreation; (2) interviews with refuge staff and partner organization representatives in urban areas to understand current refuge visitation in these settings, identify programs and strategies that have been successful, and identify institutional factors that promote or impede the ability to connect with urban audiences; and (3) community workshops to hear from community representatives about the needs and motivations for outdoor recreation participation, perceptions of barriers that exist, and suggested strategies to better connect and engage diverse urban residents with wildlife.

¹<http://americaswildlife.org/vision/>

Site Selection

Community workshops were conducted at seven refuges (see Table 1) selected through a multi-stage process. First, Service GIS specialists compiled a list of urban areas within a 25-mile radius of a National Wildlife Refuge, using the Census Bureau's definition of an urban area. The 25-mile radius was selected as the distance because it was the average distance traveled by local refuge visitors who participated in the 2010/2011 National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey.² A list of 301 refuges was generated and further refined by omitting refuges that met the following criteria:

- Refuges in U.S. territories (e.g., Puerto Rico)
- Refuges with populations less than 250,000 within 25 miles (based on 2010 U.S. Census data)
- Refuges with no public access
- Refuges whose 2012 annual visitation was less than 22,000

Seventy-one refuges were identified and further refined by Service employees with extensive knowledge about refuges. Through this process, some refuges were removed based on various access or physical attribute restraints. The research team then selected twelve refuges in geographically and culturally diverse urban areas; this list was modified and narrowed down to six locations based on input from key contacts from regions, the Urban Initiative team, and others in the Service. Potomac River NWR was later added to the project based on the utility of the research for their needs and available refuge funds.

Table 1. National Wildlife Refuge locations for community workshops

Refuge	Urban Area(s) within 25 miles *	Population within 25 miles *	Visitors 2013 **
Tualatin River NWR	Portland, OR-WA	1,727,100	131,709
Don Edwards San Francisco Bay NWR	San Francisco-Oakland, CA San Jose, CA Concord, CA	5,019,028	685,400
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR	Denver-Aurora, CO	2,277,371	180,000
Minnesota Valley NWR	Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN-WI	2,610,793	230,000
John Heinz NWR at Tinicum	Philadelphia, PA-NJ-DE-MD	3,949,328	140,000
Potomac River NWR Complex			
Featherstone NWR	Washington, DC-VA-MD	2,479,129	20***
Mason Neck NWR	Washington, DC-VA-MD	2,832,706	38,210
Occoquan Bay NWR	Washington, DC-VA-MD	2,774,276	38,210
Arthur R Marshall Loxahatchee NWR	Miami, FL	2,586,378	276,680

* Based on 2010 U.S. Census.

** Based on 2013 RAPP.

*** Featherstone NWR is currently only accessible by water, and has very low visitation as a result.

² <http://pubs.usgs.gov/ds/685/DS685.pdf>

Methods

For each refuge, a protocol for contacting and inviting potential participants was followed. With assistance from refuge managers and staff, people with extensive ties to the local residents and communities of interest were identified. Individuals or organizations were contacted by the researchers to participate in a workshop at the refuge. See Community Workshop Findings, below, for more refuge-specific methods.

The research team for each workshop typically consisted of a discussion facilitator and two note takers. Notes were recorded on flipcharts that participants could view throughout the discussion to ensure that key points were captured accurately. Participants had multiple opportunities to review, clarify, and fill-in any information they felt might be missing. A second note taker recorded near verbatim notes on a laptop, identifying individual speakers with an anonymous coding system. Notes were edited for clarity immediately following the workshop. No audio or visual recording was used.

Both workshops lasted approximately two hours. All participation was voluntary; no money or other incentives were provided to the participants. To begin each session, participants were welcomed by the facilitator and refuge staff (if available), and then asked to introduce themselves and indicate the organization or community they represent. If present, the refuge staff was excused before the discussion began. Then, the facilitator reviewed the goal and guidelines for the session and began the discussion, which was guided by the following questions:

- Speaking on behalf of local community residents, what comes to mind when they hear outdoor recreation?
- What motivates people in this community to participate in outdoor recreation?
- What barriers prevent greater access or enjoyment of outdoor recreation opportunities by people in this community?
- What can be done to promote greater participation in outdoor recreation and use of the refuge by people in your community?

Following the discussion on barriers to outdoor recreation opportunities, participants were asked to indicate the three barriers they perceive as the greatest factors in limiting participation in outdoor recreation for nearby communities by marking them on the flip-chart notes. Participants were asked to do this again for strategies that could encourage greater engagement with the refuge. At the conclusion of the discussion, refuge representatives were invited to speak with the workshop participants and answer any specific questions about the refuge. The primary role of the refuge staff at this point in the discussion was to listen to the workshop participants, and be available to answer any specific questions the facilitator may not have been able to answer.

Analysis and Reporting

All notes from the workshop were compiled and organized by the guiding questions. Each set of notes was analyzed to identify themes representing workshop participants' comments. Themes for each question are summarized below, and, where appropriate, specific examples are provided from the notes. While these should not be considered verbatim quotations, as no recording devices were used, they adhere to the meaning and context of the speaker's original statements.

This report captures workshop findings for an individual refuge. Findings for individual refuges were prepared independently of one another by the workshop leaders, therefore variations in presentation may exist across the seven reports. Results for this refuge will be combined with results from workshops held at the other 6 refuges in a final report. A final report will include major themes and patterns that emerged from the combined data, as well as management and communication implications that could be drawn from the themes and patterns. Final results will be instrumental in the design of future strategies for communicating with diverse urban audiences, and for providing tools and resources that Service staff and affiliates can use to better engage all of America.



Philadelphia students birdwatching at John Heinz NWR at Tinicum. Credit: USFWS

Community Workshop Findings for John Heinz NWR at Tinicum

Workshops were conducted with community representatives at John Heinz NWR at Tinicum (John Heinz) in November 2013. Participants for these workshops were identified by the refuge staff. Those identified were asked to recommend other individuals and organizations to participate in the workshops. Twenty-one potential participants were contacted, and all but three were able to attend; one person declined and two did not respond.

Summary of Key Themes

A summary of the workshop discussions is presented below. The summary is organized around the four guiding questions discussed during the workshop.

1. Speaking on behalf of your local community residents, what comes to mind when they hear outdoor recreation?

Five general themes emerged from the discussion and are summarized below.

Activities: Participants described activities commonly associated with outdoor recreation such as hiking, camping, fishing, and birding. Gardening was also mentioned.

Outdoors: The discussion focused on the broader outdoor environment. Phrases were used such as being in the Great Outdoors, experiencing freedom, open space, and enjoying anything outdoors.

Urban Parks: Another major focus of discussion was activities and facilities commonly found in urban settings. Examples included playgrounds, picnicking and grilling, and socializing with friends.

Sports: Sports such as baseball, basketball, and tennis were mentioned as forms of common outdoor recreation in urban areas.

Fitness-related: Participants indicated that a lot of people participate in activities such as biking, running, and other fitness-related recreation.

2. What motivates people in this community to participate in outdoor recreation?

The responses to this question were grouped into the following themes.

Relaxation: Outdoor recreation and the refuge provide opportunities for getting away and relaxation.

Safety and security: People described being motivated to visit John Heinz in particular because it is a safe and secure place. In addition it provides a friendly culture and is welcoming. Some participants described the sense of safety they felt when in the woods.

Emotional response: Participants described how people sought fun experiences and the sense of adventure being in the outdoors provided. They also described passion for the outdoors stemming from transformative experiences in nature.

Connection to nature: The inherent human need for nature was discussed as a motivation.

Stewardship and service: Stewardship was discussed as a motivation for visiting the refuge and how volunteering provides a way to give back to the community.

Fitness and health: Maintaining one's health was an important motivation and the belief that being outdoors is part of a healthy lifestyle. John Heinz was described as a great place to exercise as it provides an aesthetic setting and the trails are good for running and protecting your joints.

Opportunities to see wildlife: Opportunities to see wildlife, the excitement of seeing animals in natural settings, and rare bird sightings bring people out to the refuge.

Family and social interaction: This theme related to being motivated by other people (e.g., everyone is doing it) and being with like-minded people. Family bonding was discussed also.

Developmental opportunities: Outdoor activities provide developmental opportunities and cognitive benefits for children and the elderly. For children, outdoor play helps them develop physically and cognitively (e.g., learning about the environment). For the elderly, the benefits of outdoor activity such as keeping them engaged and alert were mentioned.

Educational opportunities: The educational value of hands-on experiences in the outdoors was identified as a motivator.

Convenient location: The convenience and location of John Heinz, as well as free access, were identified as motivations for visiting the refuge.

3. What barriers prevent greater access or enjoyment of outdoor recreation opportunities by people in this community?

The major themes that emerged as barriers are summarized below.

Lack of awareness: Participants indicated that people are unaware that the refuge exists, and if they are aware, they do not know that it is a place you can visit or what opportunities are available there. There are also misperceptions, like the refuge charges an admission fee when it is free to visit.

"People are truly unaware of the refuge and don't know it exists. I have lots of friends in South Philly that don't know about the refuge."

"People don't realize that if they don't have a fishing pole the refuge has them available."

Fear: Several responses related to fear. People may fear the unknown and be reluctant to try something new. They may be afraid of hazards on the refuge that are both real (e.g., ticks) and perceived (e.g., lions). Fear of spiders and snakes were also mentioned.

"The urban experience means that there are children that don't go outside to play. The children look at the world through a window and see fighting, shooting, and crime."

Parents keep them inside. They are on guard about safety early on and being at the refuge would make them feel vulnerable.”

“A friend said brothers don’t go out in the woods. Bears and ticks are out there. You can’t control what’s out in woods.”

Lack of connection to nature: Some comments indicated a general disconnect with the natural world in our society. While some felt this transcended race and socioeconomic status, other felt there were differences among groups.

“The biggest barrier is the lack of connection to nature. For all ethnic groups and all socioeconomic groups; there’s a disconnect.”

“It is a cultural issue. I grew up in a white working class urban environment, and even though I was in the same economic class and lived in a row house, being white, I had that history of hunting, fishing, and camping that other cultures don’t.”

Transportation: The lack of convenient bus transportation to the refuge was mentioned. Even with public bus routes nearby, the bus stops are not ideally located for accessing the refuge. The high cost of transportation for school groups was also mentioned.

“If you take the bus you have to walk from 80th street and that’s not a safe place to walk.”

Electronics: Respondents generally agreed that competition from electronics was a reason that children stayed indoors.

Schools: Schools and students were a topic that was frequently mentioned and revisited throughout the entire community workshop. Barriers included lack of awareness or interest from teachers, lack of funds for transportation, and lack of opportunities to address curriculum requirements. Although participants did not indicate that the school-related challenges were among the top three barriers, they were the context for many of the other barriers.

Negative stigma of woods: For some, particularly African Americans, the woods is associated with negative historical events and context. Two African American participants shared their experiences:

“Why don’t people like me generally go in the woods? From my perspective, my parents were telling me don’t go in the woods, you might see a friend hanging from a tree. It’s about trying to escape slavery and trying to get out of the woods, away from those threats. Going back to the woods is a step back...for people of color it’s a challenge and I don’t know how you overcome that.”

“Even as an adult, I say to colleagues and friends, ‘I am going out to take a walk’ and they say, ‘better call one of your white friends because I’m not going.’”

Refuge wasteland: John Heinz is located adjacent to a superfund site and several comments referenced perceptions that the refuge was highly contaminated, a wasteland, and had

a reputation as a place where dead bodies were dumped. In addition, people wouldn't eat fish caught in the area because the environment is too urban and they don't believe it is safe.

Lack of staff: Respondents mentioned the lack of staff or volunteers available to answer questions, guide visitors, and offer structured activities. The lack of effective outreach into communities was also tied to this theme.

Staff diversity: A lack of racial diversity in leadership positions at John Heinz was mentioned.

"Staff and volunteers don't look like visitors. All the people wearing badges, volunteer shirts, etc. – they're all white people."

4. What can be done to promote greater participation in outdoor recreation and use of the refuge by people in your community?

Six themes were identified within the responses to this question and are summarized below.

Community partnerships and outreach: Workshop attendees emphasized that the refuge should do more to get out into the local community. Suggestions included working with recreation centers, churches, YMCAs, and local government agencies. Similar to the discussion on barriers, schools were often mentioned as an avenue for engagement. Creating community-driven events was also suggested.

"Staff need to get off the 'reservation' [i.e., the refuge] and come out into the community. Not just big shots in DC, but local refuge staff. There was a time when the staff had time to come to schools."

"Have programs at schools and send them home with a flyer...Appeal to them to come back and visit the refuge."

Human resources: Suggestions included increasing the number of staff, especially those trained to deliver programming for school groups and other visitors. More staff for outreach was also suggested. Suggestions were also made to increase human resource capacity through recruitment of volunteers or interns and providing volunteers the opportunity to advance to hourly pay.

"The refuge could provide opportunities for high school students to do job training and offer incentives like community service hours. They could train them to become experts on wildlife, or an area they are interested in."

Refuge activities: Additional programs and activities on the refuge beyond bird watching were suggested. Ideas included canoe programs, curriculum-based environmental education for school groups, overnight programs for youth, and activities that incorporate the use of technology.

"I think the refuge can use technology. If they have a walking trail, they could have self-guided trails with info on plants, animals....Visitors could use their electronic devices and

information could be in multiple languages. People get this at other places and this would update the refuge experience.”

Bring schools: Schools were a frequent context for many other strategies mentioned throughout these results. However, one area of particular emphasis was encouraging school groups to visit the refuge. Suggestions included applying for grants to fund transportation or partnering with non-profits, and offering programs that meet education requirements.

Marketing strategies: Ideas that were offered included creating better signage, displaying refuge information in other locations (e.g., zoos), having partnering organizations promote the refuge, and sending flyers home with children on school trips. It was also suggested that a national level marketing campaign was needed for the Refuge System.

“Kids bring parents back. Make communication through kids to parents. You could have a video online to explain to parents what kids experience here.”

Institutional change: Participants identified several areas where change could be effected within the Refuge System. Ideas included educating staff on their capabilities (e.g., what kind of marketing is allowed or not allowed?) and identifying a carrying capacity plan for refuge visitation (e.g., how many visitors can be accommodated).

Identifying Top Barriers and Strategies

During the workshop, participants were asked to identify the three most important barriers and the three most important strategies that the USFWS could implement to reduce those barriers when considering the best ways to engage local communities in outdoor recreation.

Collectively, the three largest barriers were identified as:

- 1) lack of awareness of the refuge’s existence or opportunities,
- 2) fear of new experiences or of the refuge specifically, and
- 3) lack of connection to nature.

The three strategies for engagement that were most heavily emphasized were:

- 1) community partnerships and outreach,
- 2) increase human resources, and
- 3) offering more structured activities at the refuge.

Conclusion: Addressing Barriers at John Heinz NWR

The themes that arose during community workshop discussions suggest several strategies that refuge management could consider to engage urban audiences and address barriers to participation in outdoor recreation. First, schools are perhaps the most important group to reach according to participants. The refuge could partner with school systems and offer guided programs at the refuge that meet education standards. Outreach could be targeted to teachers to make them aware of field trip opportunities, especially those teachers responsible for

science and ecology courses. In addition, informational materials could be developed for students to take home to parents. To minimize the amount field trips cut into teaching time, refuge staff could conduct interpretive and educational programs in schools, which would also alleviate transportation barriers. Other suggestions for overcoming the barriers to transportation for fieldtrips were to secure grants or partner with non-profit organizations that could fund transportation to the refuge.

Increasing outreach in the areas by going to urban communities was a strategy discussed during the workshops. Programs could be done at special events in surrounding communities and at events sponsored by partner organizations. By partnering with local organizations such as faith-based organizations, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCAs, and local government agencies, refuge staff could utilize existing information networks, cultural institutions, and funding sources to implement these strategies.

Given budgetary and staffing constraints, it is important to recognize that resources needed for outreach and educational programming do not necessarily have to come from hiring additional refuge staff. High school or college internship programs could be used to recruit outreach personnel with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Existing volunteer staff could be provided with additional training related to conducting outreach to urban audiences. However, even with greater use of volunteers, internship programs, and partner support, adequate refuge staff will be necessary to coordinate, train, and supervise volunteers and work with partners.

Overall, participants indicated that there were many ways to address the barriers that exist, and they were interested in opportunities to engage with John Heinz NWR to overcome these barriers.