

Understanding Urban Audiences

Community Workshop Results for Arthur R Marshall Loxahatchee NWR

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:

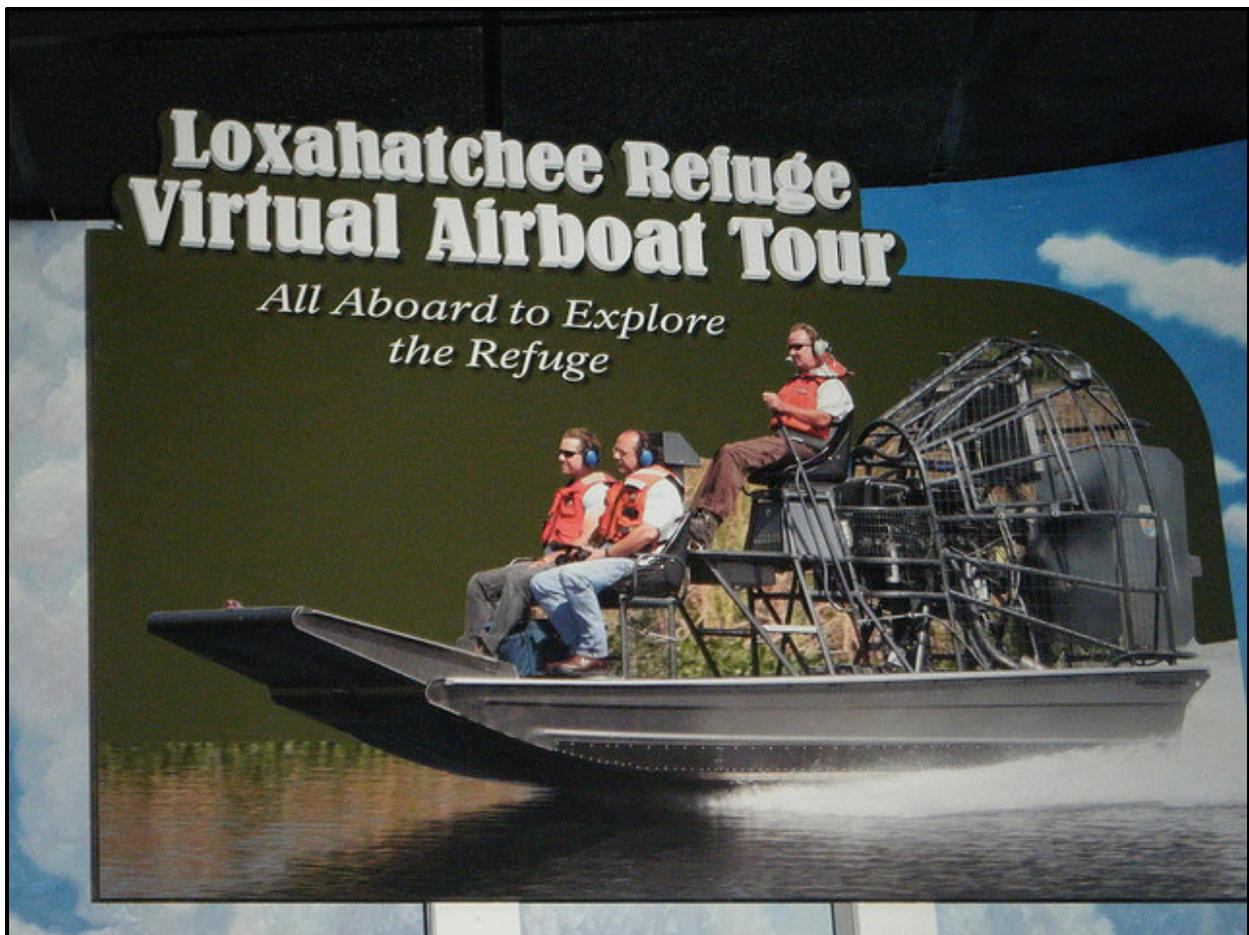
- Speaking on behalf of local community residents, what comes to mind when they hear outdoor recreation?
- What motivates people in this community to participate in outdoor recreation?
- What barriers prevent greater access or enjoyment of outdoor recreation opportunities by people in this community?
- 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.



Virtual airboat interactive exhibit at Loxahatchee NWR. Credit: Jennifer Strickland/USFWS

Community Workshop Findings for Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR

Workshops were conducted with community representatives at Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR (Loxahatchee) in March 2014. To recruit participants for these workshops, contacts were identified by the refuge staff and research team, and then a snowball technique was used; those identified were asked to recommend other individuals and organizations to participate in the workshops. These individuals were then contacted. Twenty-four people attended the workshops.

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?

Six broad themes emerged from the discussion, which reflect types of outdoor activities, places for recreation, and kinds of recreation experiences.

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

Activities: Participants described outdoor recreation in terms of activities commonly associated with the outdoors such as hiking, fishing, canoeing, and bird watching.

Outdoors: The discussion also focused on the broader outdoor environment. Phrases such as being in the fresh air, visiting parks, seeing the wildlife, and being one with nature were all mentioned. It was also mentioned that in South Florida outdoor recreation often means visiting the beach.

Adventure: Another major focus of discussion was having fun and finding adventure within outdoor recreation.

Unplugged: The opportunity to be “unplugged” from technology was mentioned several times. Escaping the urban environment and turning off ones cell phone were cited as opportunities to “engage your imagination” in the outdoors.

Healthy lifestyle: Recreation activities to improve health, such as doing yoga outside, were identified as a meaning of outdoor recreation. In addition, participants mentioned anything that promotes physical health as well as spiritual well-being was connected to outdoor recreation.

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

Responses to this question were grouped into the following nine themes.

Relaxation: Outdoor recreation and the refuge provide opportunities for getting away and experiencing peace and quiet, relaxation, and stress relief.

Emotional response: Key emotions were excitement, nostalgia, freedom, and also passion for the outdoors created by transformative experiences. The refuge and the outdoors also evoke a sense of adventure and exploration.

Connection to nature: The opportunity to connect with nature was highly valued and described as an inherent human need.

Fitness and health: Getting outside to do something active was a motivator and the personal desire for health and well-being that comes from being outdoors was another motivator.

Opportunities to see wildlife: The refuge offers opportunities to see wildlife and the excitement of seeing animals (e.g., alligators or rare birds) in the natural settings brings people out.

Family and social interaction: Family bonding and social bonding was another motivator. Time spent as a family in the outdoors creates a sense of unity.

Engaging opportunities: Outdoor recreation provides activities for all ages, from children to the elderly. Children are given an outlet to explore and participate in contests such as geocaching and photo contests. For the elderly, outdoor recreation provides outlets for hobbies such as photography.

Educational opportunities: The opportunity for education and learning about the environment was identified as a motivator for outdoor recreation and use of the refuge. The refuge is viewed as a resource that can support science and environmental education for youth, and in turn, youth can educate and motivate parents to enjoy the outdoors.

Cultural experiences: Given the diversity of the area, many people felt different cultural experiences motivated involvement in outdoor recreation. Specifically, immigrants to South Florida were motivated to discover the land. Comments included:

“Hispanics want to explore.”

“Immigrants want to discover South Florida.”

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

The nine major themes that emerged as barriers are summarized below.

Lack of awareness and advertising: Participants indicated that people are unaware that the refuge exists. If people had heard of it, they may not know that it is a place they can visit, or what opportunities are available. Comments included:

“People don’t know what Loxahatchee is and they don’t know what a wildlife refuge is.”

“Are there children’s programs here? Summer camps and stuff like that?”

Schools: Schools, students, and teachers 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, lack of opportunities to address curriculum requirements outside the classroom, and working around the “black out” dates of standardized testing required by the state.

Lack of connection to nature: Some comments indicated a general disconnect with the natural world that may be present due to cultural values and where you grew up. Some cultures were viewed as more connected than others. Comments included:

“People are getting further and further away from going out into nature as a choice for recreation.”

Transportation: The lack of convenient transportation was mentioned, along with the high cost of transportation for school groups:

“Schools can’t afford the bus for fieldtrips. You can have a free program, but to rent the bus is \$10-\$15 a head.”

Entrance fee: The refuge has an entry fee of \$5.00 per vehicle. Participants indicated that this was a barrier for some urban residents because they couldn’t afford it or they were unwilling to pay.

“People can’t drive out here, or can’t pay the \$5.00.”

A participant originally from Columbia shared: “Immigrants that just got here, we don’t pay to go to nature. Really? Pay to see something we’ve been seeing our entire lives?”

Language barrier: Language barriers were also mentioned as a barrier for many visiting the refuge.

Scheduling: Participants generally agreed that providing programs to meet the needs of the community was difficult. For one, it is hard to schedule programs that are convenient for residents to attend. In addition, some felt that there was a lack of age-specific programming.

Lack of staff: A lack of available staff or volunteers to answer questions, guide visitors, or offer structured programs at the refuge was discussed as a barrier. The lack of effective outreach into the communities was also tied to this theme.

Restrictions: Participants indicated that limitations or perceived limitations on certain activities were a deterrent. Picnicking was one of the examples.

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, summarized below.

Provide amenities: Participants felt that when an area has a nice presentation and facilities, people are more motivated to visit. In addition to the aesthetics of the area, having a staff that can provide good tours of the area was also mentioned.

“An elegant presentation and memorable first impression are important.”

Refuge activities: Additional programs and activities on the refuge beyond bird watching were suggested. Ideas included summer camps, non-outdoor focused programs (e.g., charity events), little ranger programs for youth, curriculum-based environmental education for school groups, and contests held for visitors (e.g., photo-essay contest for middle and high school students, drawing contest for kids and adults).

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 building a curriculum that incorporates school science requirements, scheduling refuge visits around standardized testing, visiting schools to promote outreach programs, and requiring some kind of nature experience or test in schools.

“There should be requirements in public school education to have wildlife experiences.”

Marketing strategies: Ideas that were offered included creating better signage, advertising on public education TV networks, press releases for the refuge, selling merchandise, email newsletters, and advertising in outdoor magazines.

“Palm Beach County has public television – I have been learning about parks in the county by watching those channels. I’ve never seen anything about the refuge on that channel.”

Community partnerships and outreach: Workshop attendees emphasized that the refuge should do more to get out into the local community. Suggestions included working with the Kiwanis club, non-profit organizations, and schools to increase visitation and awareness.

Human resources: Suggestions included increasing the number of staff, especially those trained to deliver programming for school groups and other visitors. Having staff at the gate to answer questions for visitors was also recommended. Suggestions were made to maintain the refuge’s canoe trail, including better advertisement of the trail, better upkeep of the trail, and teaching kids how to use the canoe trail safely.

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 Service could implement to reduce those barriers when considering the best way to engage local communities in outdoor recreation.

Collectively, the three largest barriers were identified as:

- 1) lack of advertising,
- 2) lack of funding for services and facilities, and
- 3) motivating parents to visit with their children.

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

- 1) more visitor services staff,
- 2) build curriculum that meet state education standards for science, history, etc., and
- 3) community-focused outreach.

Conclusion: Addressing Barriers at Loxahatchee NWR

Participants in the community workshops suggested several strategies that refuge management could consider to engage urban audiences and address barriers to participation in outdoor recreation. Given budgetary and staffing constraints, it is important to recognize that the 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 individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, existing volunteer staff could be provided with additional training related to conducting outreach to urban audiences, and opportunities to collaborate with the Florida State Park Service and National Park Service could be explored.

Schools are perhaps the most important community group to reach, according to workshop participants. Suggestions included building a curriculum at the refuge that meets the state education requirements and having guided on-site programs (i.e., at the refuge). Outreach could also be targeted to teachers to make them aware of field trip opportunities, especially those teachers responsible for science and ecology courses. This can be supported by providing training for teachers that includes making them aware of how the refuge can support classroom learning. In conjunction with outreach to schools and teachers, informational materials can also be developed for youth to take home to parents. Second, grants or partnerships with non-profit organizations can be used to fund transportation to the refuge.

Finally, another important part of engaging urban audiences is going in to urban communities. Participants suggested that this would minimize transportation and other barriers community members face for visiting the refuge. For example, having refuge staff conduct interpretive and educational programs in schools removes the need to fund school bus transportation and it reduces the amount of time taken away from regular classroom teaching. Programs could also be done at special events in surrounding communities and at programs sponsored by partner organizations. By partnering with local organizations such as faith-based organizations, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCAs, Kiwanis, and local government agencies, refuge staff can utilize existing information networks, cultural institutions, and funding sources to implement these strategies.