

Friends Forward



Fall 2011

National Wildlife Refuge System
www.fws.gov/refuges

New Refuge in New Mexico

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced approval of a proposed 570-acre national wildlife refuge on a former dairy farm just a few miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico's largest metropolitan area.

"Once complete, this refuge, which is within a half-hour drive of nearly half of New Mexico's population, will be a place for people to connect with and learn about the natural world and will provide valuable habitat for wildlife, including the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher," said Salazar. Ultimately, the refuge will give visitors a chance to see waterfowl, small

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Jana Svoboda

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM



Steve Hillebrand

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, FL



USFWS

National Elk Refuge, WY



George Gentry

William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, OR

Conserving the Future Vision

The *Conserving the Future* vision did not end when the conference closed in July. The final vision document has now been posted online at <http://americaswildlife.org>. There, you can also read about the implementation process and see videos of some conference presentations, blogs and Flat Blue. Three *Conserving the Future* implementation teams have already been named; members of the final six teams will be named before the end of the year. 

Visitors Say Refuges Offer Unique Experience

By Natalie Sexton

What activities are visitors participating in on refuges and how satisfied are they with their experiences? How much are they spending in the local community as part of their refuge visit?

For the past year, Friends have been assisting with an effort to find the

answers to these and other questions. The National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey took place from July 2010 through July 2011 on 53 refuges across the country, from Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge in Hawaii to Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico.

The survey, conducted by the Policy Analysis and Science Assistance

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Growing One Member at a Time

A year ago, the Friends of Kofa National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona had only a secretary and a treasurer and both had other full time jobs. Then Lynn Cramer—newly retired and looking for an opportunity to volunteer—moved in across the street from the refuge.

Now she is president of the Friends and within a year, membership tripled—still under 50, but growing steadily.

Cramer prepared a PowerPoint™ presentation about the refuge and began sharing it in Yuma—at RV parks where traveling retirees live, as well as school PTA meetings, churches, after-school care centers and business organizations like Rotary and Kiwanis. Today, everywhere she goes, she carries a supply of refuge brochures and membership applications.

Cramer often signs up new members one or two at a time, by recruiting volunteers for specific projects and making the community more aware of the refuge, especially the 100,000 snowbirders who live in Arizona just for the winter. This year, she recruited a local professor to help with a fall insect rally. The professor not only joined the Friends but is now on the board.

Forty people and the local newspaper came to the refuge when Cramer offered homemade muffins at a “grand opening” after two local crafters designed a new sign for the Friends’ book store. More volunteers showed up to help restore the old gold mine site on the refuge (Kofa actually stands for King of Arizona Mine). Others helped build a float that won first place in the local Silver Spur Rodeo. Cramer worked a free booth at the Arizona Indoor Marketplace in Yuma for



Lynn Cramer

Friends of Kofa Wildlife Refuge recruit volunteers and members at events like this insect rally for children.

five weekends in a row. Each event garners a few new members.

There is a new Friends of Kofa Web site, with membership information prominently visible on the homepage and seven membership categories:

Student: \$10,
Individual: \$20
Family: \$30
Teacher & Class: \$30
Special Friend: \$50
Supporting: \$100
Life: \$1000

At special events, the membership dues are often dropped to \$5—a 75% discount for one day only.

The Friends group is planning a geocaching class for teens this spring. “The GPS club in Yuma has more than 100 members interested in helping with this,” says Cramer. “How lucky are we?”

A junior birding club is being organized with the local Audubon chapter. The Friends will use part of a \$5,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to buy binoculars, journals and bird guides. A rally for children with disabilities is planned for February.

At every event, everyone leaves with a membership brochure and Kofa Refuge—along with Cibola and Imperial Refuges—gather a few more Friends. 🦋

Inventory & Monitoring: Making Informed Decisions

The *Conserving the Future* vision for the Refuge System calls for “robust inventory and monitoring” in a nationally coordinated effort to obtain data that will help refuges make informed decisions about managing habitat. Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s response to climate change gives the Refuge System a leadership role in developing a national inventory and monitoring (I&M) initiative.

The National Resource Program Center, established in 2010 and located in Fort Collins, CO, is leading the effort. Mark Chase, chief of the Center, says, “We are going to collect, store and make available information about resources in the Refuge System that is credible, scientifically rigorous and reliable. Our decision makers on the ground will get support tools that will help them make management decisions and set land acquisition priorities.”

In some cases, I&M means gathering baseline data about the vegetation or wildlife species that exist on a refuge. Most wildlife refuges do not have a comprehensive baseline inventory of the fish, wildlife and plants that live there. “This poses a challenge to the delivery of effective conservation, which requires an understanding of the abundance and distribution of species and their interactions with the habitat across space and time,” states the *Conserving the Future* vision.

As the vision further notes, collecting data is just the first step. Data must be analyzed, explained and reported. Therefore, the I&M initiative will also track priority fish and wildlife species, conduct invasive species surveys, assess the impact



Canadian botanist George Argus measures willows on Attu Island in Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

of fire, determine water quality and quantity regionally and generate data to evaluate just how vulnerable coastal refuges are to climate change. Friends and volunteers may be able to help with some of the data gathering.

A Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee is working to develop planning and management tools to foster wilderness stewardships throughout the Refuge System. There are more than 20 million acres of designated wilderness in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Natural processes predominate without human intervention in wilderness areas, making them an important part of a national strategy for monitoring long-term ecological change.

Another key aspect of the I&M initiative is collaboration with

internal and external partners to create a centralized data management system, so that individual refuges can easily access information about their refuge, as can other private or government agencies that might be working on the same species or in the same region. Starting in 2015, the *Conserving the Future* vision calls for a new quadrennial report on the state of the Refuge System, including data on the status and trends of wildlife and habitat in the System. The report is to be shared widely with both the scientific community and the public. 🦋



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stories



FLORIDA

QR

(Quick Response)* codes are the newest way for visitors

to learn about the iNature trail along Wildlife Drive at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, FL. Visitors scan a code with a smart phone application to see a welcome video. There are 20 QR codes posted on small signs along Wildlife Drive, easy to recognize for visitors walking, biking or driving. Some codes are linked to videos about the refuge; others are linked to a Web site, such as the home page for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society, the refuge Friends organization.

From June through September of this year, about 700 visitors looked at the videos—and that’s the slow period for this refuge. “The reactions have been incredibly positive,” says visitor services manager Toni Westland, “especially from young people who show the older people with them how to use QR codes.”

The iNature trail QR codes were developed by a college student from Sanibel with funding from private donations. The Friends identified a volunteer professional to shoot the videos. The Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau has developed a huge campaign around this novel use of technology, promoting the iNature trail as far away as Las Vegas and Times Square in New York City.

A cautionary note from Westland—“Make sure you have proper cell coverage on your refuge for different cell phone plans. In one case, moving the sign five feet away meant some phones couldn’t read the codes because the plan didn’t get coverage in that spot.” On the plus side, Westland says she has been able to access videos on the trail for a tour group by using a larger SmartPad or iPad to read the codes.

** QR codes and Microsoft Tags serve the same purpose but require different applications to read or create them. The codes can be created online at no charge.*

NEVADA

To help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service obtain wildlife survey information, Friends of Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex partnered with the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association to survey dragonflies and damselflies at the four national wildlife refuges in southern Nevada—Desert, Moapa Valley, Ash Meadows and Pahranaगत. Friends board member Bruce Lund, a retired botanist and avid naturalist, gathered and trained a team of volunteers who

conducted monthly surveys from June through September.

An online advertisement at Volunteer.gov generated a dozen volunteers, including retirees who are keeping their biology degrees alive, students looking for field experience before starting college, birdwatchers, real estate appraisers and several employees in the Clark County, NV, government. The common thread was their desire to learn and make a difference for conservation.

The volunteers learned to identify dragonflies with binoculars, catch them in insect nets (“wow, they are fast”), pull them out of the nets (“I can’t believe I’m doing this! Do they bite?”) long enough to take a photograph and release them again to the wild. An earlier survey had identified 32 odonates (dragonflies and damselflies) at Ash Meadows Refuge. In 2011, Lund and his volunteers found the 33rd—a spot-winged glider.

“The beauty of ‘dragonflying,’” says Ash Meadows Refuge outreach



These familiar bluet damselflies are the most abundant species at Ash Meadows Refuge, NV.

Bruce Lund



Betsy Burch

The WildWing deck became a reality through a great collaboration between refuge staff and Friends, supported by a Challenge Cost Share grant that provided \$5,000 from the refuge, \$2,000 from the Friends, and \$3,000 in-kind donation of materials and labor.

The refuge inaugurated the WildWing in July during its first Grandparents and Grandkids Day. The WildWing will also provide a viewing space just for kids during the Aleutian goose fly-off next spring.

Betsy Burch is president of the Friends of Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. 🦋

Friends of Humboldt Bay Refuge, CA, built a WildWing deck so children can learn about the fresh water marsh ecosystem.

specialist Alyson Mack, “is that it is surprisingly easy to do. From spring through fall, they are in plain view all day long, they fly and perch close to people and are extremely abundant.”

marsh environment and compare it with the brackish water environment of wetland areas. The youngsters will be able investigate the effects of tidal variations.

CALIFORNIA

By Betsy Burch

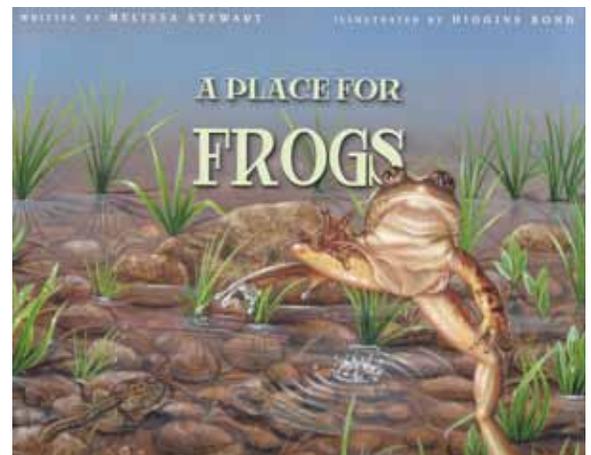
“Will there be spyglasses with mirrors to see under water?” “Can we have glass-bottom boats so we can see what is under the water?” “We want to scuba dive under the WildWing!”

A group of enthused 5th and 6th graders asked so many questions when they were told about the WildWing, a deck over a fresh water marsh on Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge, where they had been frequent visitors. The 16-foot x 20-foot deck, which opened in October, has safety railings with areas for water sampling equipment and redwood benches where students can sit to write in their journals.

The refuge is designing a curriculum so children can study the fresh water

The Book Shelf

Beautifully detailed illustrations and simple science fill the pages of *A Place for Frogs*, in which author Melissa Stewart and artist Higgins Bond focus on 11 North American frogs. Stewart’s message is that “frogs make our world a better place. But sometimes people do things that make it hard for them to live and grow.” *A Place for Frogs* won a Green Book Honor Award from the Newton Marasco Foundation; Stewart has also written *A Place for Butterflies* and *A Place for Birds*.



Q&A send us your questions

What are the keys to having a board that really gets the job done?

Creating and sustaining a dynamic board for a Friends organization is an ongoing process that must be high on everyone's priority list, because the board of directors holds the primary responsibility for meeting the Friends goals.

Finding Good Board Members

Rather than thinking strategically about how to attract and nurture appropriate leaders, many groups make the mistake of accepting whoever is willing to serve.

- Understand what qualities the group needs from its leaders. Younger organizations generally need a president who can take charge, while older groups need a president who delegates and acts as a coach.
- Decide what jobs need to be completed and the specific skills required to complete them.
- When asking someone to take on a leadership position, make clear exactly what the job entails. Don't make a task sound harder or easier than it really is.

Well-defined Jobs

The executive team (president, vice president, treasurer, secretary) has specific roles and duties. Other board members also need well-defined jobs. If they are chairing a committee, they may need to identify committee members and find a backup for themselves. Different board members may be in charge of each of the Friends' major activities or events—bookstore, festival, volunteer appreciation event, etc.



Take time from board business to appreciate the beauty of your refuge. This is Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge on the California-Arizona border, where refuge staff are actively seeking people to start a Friends organization.

Board members who cannot or will not fulfill their responsibilities should be asked to step down. This creates a culture where members are held accountable and progress toward a vision can be measured.

Ongoing Education

Board members must learn about both their refuge and the larger National Wildlife Refuge System and its place in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Continuous learning can be part of the board culture, with certain meetings or a portion of each meeting devoted to education. This can be provided by a board member who is knowledgeable about a particular area of interest, a refuge staff member or even universities and nonprofit groups that offer workshops on running a successful organization.

Role of the Refuge Staff

While refuge managers and liaisons cannot officially vote on Friends business, they play a key role in

Friends meetings. They interpret refuge regulations, identify refuge needs, communicate about ongoing projects and issues and offer guidance to the Friends about how they can best support the refuge. Meeting time can be used to nurture relationships, develop rapport and improve collaboration.

Have Fun

Don't get bogged down in business. "Tramp around on the refuge," says Ann Smith, vice president of Friends of Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge, LA. "Having fun is critical...this is 'my' refuge and it makes me feel grounded...It enriches my life."

This information is adapted from Soaring Heights: A Guide to Creating a Sustainable Friends/Refuge Collaboration, available online at www.fws.gov/refuges/friends/publications.html.

Visitors Say Refuges Offer Unique Experience—Continued from page 1

Branch of U.S. Geological Survey on behalf of the Refuge System Division of Visitor Services and Communications, provides refuge managers, planners, and visitor services specialists with a better understanding of:

- who visitors are according to such characteristics as their home locations, distance travelled, time spent on refuges;
- their opinions about the refuge they visited, from recreational opportunities to services provided by staff and volunteers;
- their associated spending in nearby communities; and
- what they thought about larger issues, including alternative transportation and communications about climate change.

USGS is creating individual refuge-specific reports, which will be available online later this fall.

A teleconference and WebEx meeting are being offered to refuges interested in discussing their results and Friends may participate. The Friends of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico has already scheduled a public presentation in the Socorro City Council chambers to highlight how refuge visitation benefits the surrounding community.

More than 250 Friends members and refuge staff were instrumental in asking nearly 15,000 visitors on site to participate in the survey. These invaluable “survey recruiters” ensured that visitors understood the purpose of the survey and encouraged them to complete the survey when they returned home. The response rate was an overwhelming 71 percent.

Preliminary results indicate that nearly 90 percent of visitors find their refuge experience unique compared to other public lands they have visited. Visitors tend to appreciate their refuge experiences, with at least 90 percent satisfied with the opportunities and services provided.

Plans are underway to survey visitors on 22 other refuges in 2012. In the meantime, a national report is being prepared that will provide a comprehensive look at the data for all refuges in the study. The report will track status and trends of visitors and their experiences over time, especially in light of the Refuge System’s *Conserving the Future* vision.

Natalie Sexton is in the Policy Analysis & Science Assistance Branch of the U.S. Geological Survey. 

New Refuge in New Mexico—Continued from page 1

mammals and neotropical migrant birds, including the flycatcher.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bernalillo County have long explored the possibility of establishing an urban refuge on the former Price’s Dairy Farm. After completing the necessary studies and planning documents, the Service is now authorized to acquire land and establish the refuge. By policy, the Service acquires lands for refuges only from willing sellers. Condemnation is not used. The current owners of the 570-acre site are interested in selling the land. The Bernalillo County Commission has set aside \$5 million to assist with land acquisition.

Joined at the September announcement by Senator Jeff Bingaman, Congressman Martin Heinrich and Bernalillo County Commissioner Art De La Cruz, Salazar



A new national wildlife refuge has been approved on a former dairy farm just a few miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico’s largest metropolitan area.

said a refuge in this location would fulfill the goals of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors initiative to work with community partners to establish a 21st century conservation

ethic and reconnect people, especially young people, to the natural world.

An unofficial Friends group has already established itself as advocates for the new refuge. One of the group’s leaders, Angela West, says, “I’m so excited and so proud of our community. This will change people’s lives and change children’s lives. Come back in five years and you will see that change.”

Additional funding for purchase of the land will likely come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Congress established the fund in 1964 to use revenues from offshore oil and gas drilling to support the conservation of America’s lands and waters.

Watch videos of community advocates for the new refuge at <http://bit.ly/q52YOK>. 

And the Winners are...

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar awarded a prestigious Partners in Conservation Award to the **Friends of Nevada Wilderness**, which supports Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge and other wilderness areas in Nevada.

Celebrating its 27th anniversary, Friends of Nevada Wilderness is dedicated to preserving Nevada's wildlife heritage. The Friends includes diverse partners, such as business and scouting organizations, faith-based and service organizations. More than three million acres of wilderness have been designated across Nevada.

The Partners in Conservation Award is given to organizations and individuals who partner with others to conserve and restore land, help wildlife thrive, address water issues and forge solutions to complex natural resource challenges.

Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuge was honored this year with a Southeast Regional Director's award for its ability to overcome obstacles. The organization supports eight refuges—Atchafalaya, Bayou Sauvage, Bayou Teche, Big Branch Marsh, Bogue Chitto, Breton, Delta and Mandalay. First came Hurricane Katrina in 2005 which displaced three-quarters of the group's members. Then-president Jim Schmidt and his wife Bonnie are credited with keeping the Friends alive by bringing in new members and organizing work-play days.

Once a month, Friends and volunteers gather to work on a specific project, such as mulching gardens, removing invasives or planting, and then take a canoe ride on Bayou Lacombe. "And there's always plenty of food," says Brett Henry, who responded to one of the calls for volunteers



Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges join in monthly work-play days to complete projects, have fun and eat well.

and is now president-in-waiting, a new position created to allow a more orderly transfer of leadership responsibilities. A new membership chair is responsible for adding members and keeping current members engaged.

The Louisiana refuges also had to cope with the impact of the Gulf oil spill in 2010. Current president Denise Stearns said the "Friends membership swelled with people who wanted to do something to be part of the recovery effort." Now the Friends group sports 150 members, many of whom help run the 15-year old Wild Things Festival in October—which brings about 4,000 people to the refuge each year and raised \$8,000 for refuge programs last year. 🐦

FriendsForward

Address editorial inquiries about this issue to:

Karen Leggett
USFWS-NWRS
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 632
Arlington, VA 22203
703-358-2375
Karen_Leggett@fws.gov

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