



Department of the Interior

# Fish and Wildlife Service: National Wildlife Refuge System

2020 Action Plan

Federal Customer Experience

**US** BY THE PEOPLE  
FOR THE PEOPLE  
WITH THE PEOPLE

# Who are we?



The National Wildlife Refuge System focuses on two primary customers: recreational visitors and local communities.

## RECREATIONAL VISITORS

Opportunities for outdoor recreation draw millions of people each year to national wildlife refuges, boosting local economies. Many visitors take part in heritage sports such as hunting and fishing. Others enjoy hiking, paddling, wildlife viewing or nature photography. All these activities offer visitors a chance to unplug from the stresses of modern life and reconnect with their natural surroundings .

- 59.7 million annual visits
- 42.1 million birders and wildlife observers
- 3 million nature program attendees
- 2.4 million annual hunting visits
- 7.1 million annual fishing visits

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to fish and wildlife conservation. National Wildlife Refuge System teams work to understand individual conservation issues as they affect the interests of local communities and groups. Then they customize approaches to address these needs to help fish, wildlife and people. While every staff field station serves their local communities. In the last seven years, the Refuge System has made a numerous strategic investments to ensure our local urban communities reap the equitable benefits of wildlife conservation at over 101 national wildlife refuges within 25 miles of populations of 250,000+.

Both these customer groups are primarily served by a small cadre of ~300 visitor services employees, thousands of volunteers, and hundreds of interns. This passionate cadre delivers programming at 400 refuges, wetland management districts, and monuments. More broadly, the National Wildlife Refuge System employs approximately 2,000 employees including land managers, biologist, maintenance, administrative and law enforcement, all who play a role in ensuring high quality customer experiences on these public lands.

# How do we deliver value to the public?

Customer:  
*Recreational  
Visitors*

## Occasion

Visitors seeking to engage in the outdoors via recreational experiences.

## High-Impact Service

- Improved user experience on [fws.gov/refuge](https://fws.gov/refuge) and [fws.gov/refuges](https://fws.gov/refuges).
- Expanding access to hunting and fishing opportunities and aligning regulations more closely with states
- Simplified information including national interactive map and brochures.
- Reprioritizing infrastructure improvements to greatest visitor need.
- Improved data management via implementation of new Content Management System, multiple geo-spatial data sets, and a Digital Asset Management System
- Pilot program at eight stations to improve entrance signage and orientation signage.

## Offering

Individuals are seeking experience varying from escape, enhancing relationships, and personal mastery. Typical activities include hunting, fishing and wildlife observation, such as bird watching.

These visitors seek quality recreation experiences, including easy trip planning, feeling welcome, being able to easily orient themselves to trails and facilities, having well-maintained roads, trails and signs.

# Where could we improve?

Customer:  
Recreational  
Visitors

## Steps →

### Customer Steps

Name and describe the main steps that a person takes to use the service, left to right, start to finish.

### Service System

Describe the channels, roles, and tools from your agency or partners.

### Pain Points

Describe the highest priority problems to solve

	1: Trip Planning	2: First Contact	3: Repeat Visit
Customer Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web search based on specific activity- birding, hunting, fishing, etc.</li> <li>• Trip Planning and Orientation , access, rules, hours, maps, etc.</li> <li>• Acquiring permits, lotteries, or signing up for other programming.</li> <li>• Buy Duck stamp for bird related recreation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in recreational activity on a National Wildlife Refuge.</li> <li>• Follow Social Media Channels for more information</li> <li>• Pay <a href="#">entrance fee</a>, only ~30 wildlife refuges charge a nominal fee.</li> <li>• Work with concession or Friend group for equipment reservations (only a nominal number of refuge offer this service)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat visitor</li> </ul>
Service System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fws.gov/refuges and fws.gov/refuges</li> <li>• State activity and tourism guides</li> <li>• Visitor Survey to determine satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaflets brochures</li> <li>• On site trails, visitor center, trails, signage.</li> <li>• Programming (nature walks, education programming, outdoor skills development)</li> <li>• Visitors Services staff and volunteers</li> <li>• Visitor Survey to determine satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor Skills Centers (repeat mentored Experiences</li> <li>• Visitor Survey to determine satisfaction and better understand experience</li> </ul>
Pain Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonly used platforms like Google maps do not display information correctly</li> <li>• Inconsistent design and inaccurate information on websites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcomplicated regulations for activities</li> <li>• Unclear about open and closed areas</li> <li>• Inconsistent our outdated signage</li> <li>• Lack of visitor services staff</li> </ul>	

# What will we do?

Customer:  
*Recreational  
Visitors*

## Purpose

*Why did your agency undertake this project?  
What does it hope to achieve, in specific  
performance indicators, if possible.*

*What is the problem?*

Due to the nature of the small workforce of the National Wildlife Refuge System, all field stations staff whether biologist or maintenance employee must help contribute to providing a positive customer experience to our recreational visitors and local communities.

*Desired future state?*

All employees foster a positive customer experience culture and understand its importance to contributing out our mission.

*Any measurable indicators and targets?*

- 25% of most highly visited national wildlife refuges will take Customer experience training by end of FY2021
- Approximately 35 refuges with 50,000 or more visits will have a visitor survey every five years.

## Approach

*Describe the timeline and work plan to achieve that purpose. If this is an ongoing initiative, describe your progress.*

*Process, methods, and expertise?*

Online training with site specific worksheets and planning documents.

*Timeline, stage gates and dates?*

FY2020- Training Development  
FY2021- Deploy Training

*Deliverables being produced?*

Develop online self-guided customer experience training

## Resources

*Describe the stakeholders involved, financial and human capital dedicated to the work, and any partners contributing to the work.*

*Who is responsible?*

USFWS- National Conservation Training Center

*Who is contributing to the project?*

NWRS- Division of Visitor Services and Communications

*Optional: estimated budget allocated to the work?*

Staff time

# What are we proud of this year?

Customer:  
Recreational  
Visitors

## Service Improvement

Who is the user and what was the problem?  
Hunting and Fishing Recreational Visitors

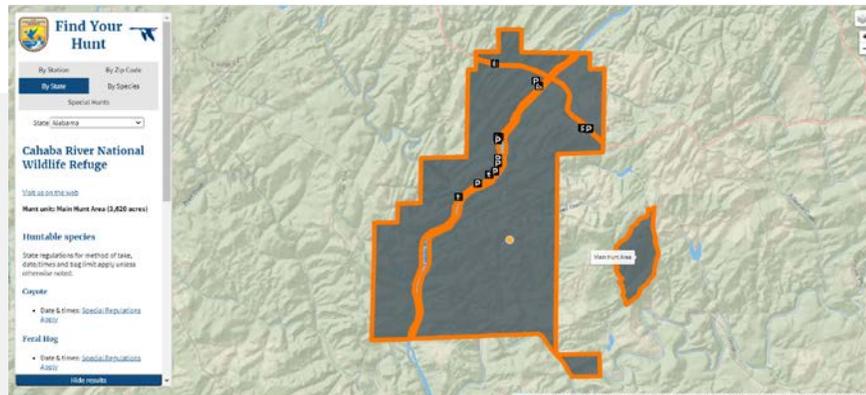
What did you build / improve? What does it do for the public or how you deliver your mission? What was the resulting impact?

Through a comprehensive assessment effort and parallel rule making process we have significantly simplified hunting and fishing regulations on National Wildlife Refuges, which improves the visitor's experience related to our 2.4 million annual hunting visits and 7.1 million annual fishing visits.

We are currently piloting online lottery permit systems for hunting opportunities on Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge through Recreation.gov.

Any lessons for other agencies emulating this work?

Where possible we matched local state regulations, so visitors were not tasked with navigating two sets of regulations.



<https://www.fws.gov/refuges/hunting/map/>

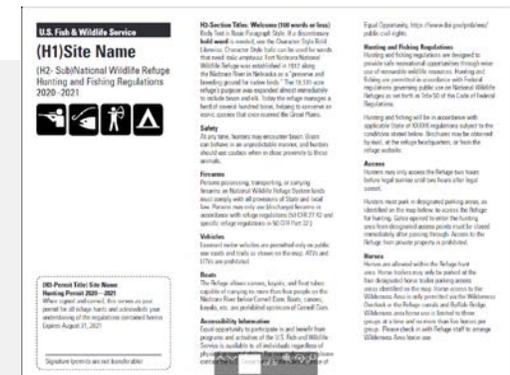
## Capacity Building

Was this a governance, measurement, organizational, customer understanding, service development, or service delivery capability?  
Service Design (Development and capability)

What was the new action taken capability and it's goal or purpose?  
Overhauled the design, layout and production of a series of templates (content outlines, and print publication files, and 508 compliant web-ready versions) and related training was delivered to field stations to produce simplified, standardized hunting and fishing brochures.

What was the resulting impact? Include numbers whenever possible.  
Standardized and simplified print brochures at a pilot group of 90 field stations.

Any lessons for other agencies emulating this work?  
Well-designed templates and separate word guidance has helped field stations be more self-guided in making the changes.



# How do we deliver value to the public?

Customer:  
*Urban Community-Driven  
Conservation*

## Occasion

Ethnically and culturally diverse groups that live near 101 of our Urban National wildlife Refuges who have been historically excluded from wildlife conservation decision making-processes and access to recreational opportunities.

The Service acknowledges that within every community, these groups have been prevented from participating in the selection and implementation of and from receiving the benefits of conservation efforts – whether by design or by a failure to create systems that purposely include these groups.

## High-Impact Service

To develop long-term, meaningful relationships with diverse conservation communities, the Service recognized that a new way of business was necessary—including different approaches, new skills, and a workforce that better mirrors the diversity of the American people. Developed with input from Service staff and local and national partners, the following eight Standards of Excellence have served as a guide for strengthening local conservation outcomes by improving community engagement, particularly in urban settings:

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

Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships are applying the Standards of Excellence to cultivate an innovative model for community-centered conservation under the umbrella of the UWCP. In particular, the Standards of Excellence have helped field practitioners test this new model to ensure that all members of the public feel welcomed, included, and can experience and recreate in nature, as well as exercise their rightful ownership and responsibility for fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation. eel Safe and Welcome.

## Offering

### Meaningful Community Engagement

- Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships will adopt Critical Engagement Elements to guide Service community interaction and collaboration in conservation projects.
- Build a UWCP workforce to reflect the changing demographics and needs of America.
- Develop relevant outdoor recreational experiences and reduce barriers to access and transportation in urban areas.

# Where could we improve?

Customer:  
*Urban Community-Driven  
Conservation*

## Steps →

### Customer Steps

Name and describe the main steps that a person takes to use the service, left to right, start to finish.

### Service System

Describe the channels, roles, and tools from your agency or partners.

### Pain Points

Describe the highest priority problems to solve

	1: Awareness	2: First Contact	3: Repeat Visit/Engagement
Customer Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word of mouth through trusted neighbor or community leader.</li> <li>• Discovery by walk-through area.</li> <li>• School children participating in refuge programming.</li> <li>• Participate in community outreach event.</li> <li>• Flier, or community board.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of facility for community meeting</li> <li>• Walk or bus to refuge to recreate</li> <li>• Special event attendance</li> <li>• Apply for a job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat Recreation</li> <li>• Become community ambassador</li> <li>• Employment, volunteering</li> <li>• Collaborative Conservation Program (grant, etc)</li> </ul>
Service System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Social Media Channels</li> <li>• Local community event outreach.</li> <li>• On and offsite signage systems and trails and road to access site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On site trails, visitor center, trails, signage.</li> <li>• Programming (nature walks, education programming, outdoor skills development)</li> <li>• Visitors Services staff and volunteers</li> <li>• Meeting Rooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gear Libraries</li> <li>• Local Hiring Authorities</li> <li>• Technical expertise and grants to do local conservation program (restoration, environmental Justice Planning)</li> </ul>
Pain Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language and Cultural barriers</li> <li>• Lack of trusted community liaisons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern for safety or inclusion</li> <li>• Lack of public transportation trails</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern for safety or inclusion</li> <li>• Recreational skill development</li> <li>• Lack of Gear</li> <li>• Comfort,</li> <li>• Community</li> </ul>

# What will we do?

Customer:  
*Urban Community-Driven  
Conservation*

## Purpose

*Why did your agency undertake this project?  
What does it hope to achieve, in specific  
performance indicators, if possible.*

*What is the problem?*

Early adopters of the UWCP recognized that the foundational element of conservation success is the ability to understand and meaningfully engage with urban communities. This engagement requires an understanding of and relevance to ethnically and culturally diverse communities, many of which have historically been systematically excluded from conservation efforts across the country for a variety of reasons.

*Any measurable indicators and targets?*

By 2021 staff at 17 Urban Refuges, Flagship Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships, and Urban Bird Treaty Cities with active federal status will have improved their cultural awareness and community engagement readiness, including through the exploration of power constructs, which have negatively affected systematically excluded groups.

## Approach

*Describe the timeline and work plan to achieve that purpose. If this is an ongoing initiative, describe your progress.*

*Process, methods, and expertise?*

Contractor

*Timeline, stage gates and dates?*

10 years

*Deliverables being produced?*

- Develop cultural responsiveness training—, practitioners, and outside sources—for participation by all Flagship Urban Refuges and Urban Partnerships.
- Transportation access planning with related prioritization of infrastructure improvement projects.

## Resources

*Describe the stakeholders involved, financial and human capital dedicated to the work, and any partners contributing to the work.*

*Who is responsible?*

USFWS- National Conservation Training Center

NWRS-Division of Infrastructure Management in collaboration with the Department of Transportation and related funding sources

*Who is contributing to the project?*

NWRS- Division of Visitor Services and Communications

# What are we proud of this year?

Customer:  
Urban Community-Driven  
Conservation

## Service Improvement

*Who is the user and what was the problem?*

Visitors to the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum had not experienced updates to the visitor center in nearly 20 years. Also, given its accessibility and visibility to over 1.7 million people living within 10 miles of the refuge and more than 35 million Americans living within a 2 hour drive, the refuge serves as a prominent ambassador of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

*What did you build / improve? What does it do for the public or how you deliver your mission? What was the resulting impact?*

Installation of new interpretive exhibits to provide a more immersive experience about how the nation's first urban wildlife refuge was established through the efforts of a diverse group of volunteers from the community.

