

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Conserving the Future

*Wildlife Refuges
and the Next Generation*





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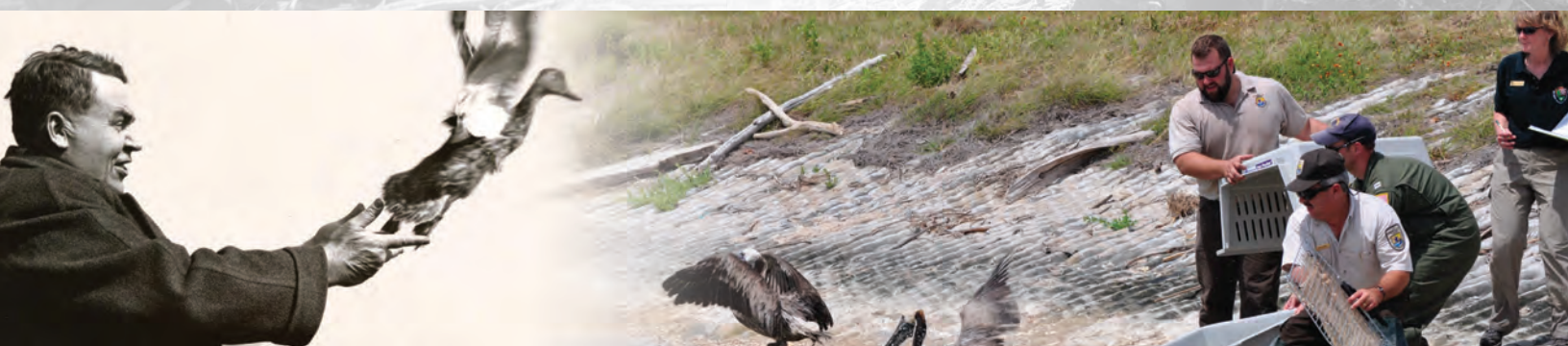
Executive Summary

For the past 18 months, the National Wildlife Refuge System has worked to create a vision that will guide the management of the Refuge System during the next decade and beyond. *Conserving the Future* is built on the foundation and inspiration of *Fulfilling the Promise*. This new vision seeks to not only further the System's mission, but also to raise the Service's profile in the broader national conservation effort. Consistent with our guiding legislation, *Conserving the Future* embraces bold, new ideas to realize the full conservation potential of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The conservation landscape has changed, the playing field has changed and the stakes have changed. Human demands on the environment combined with environmental stressors are creating an urgent need for conservation choices. The scale of issues and challenges we face is unprecedented and impacts us all; no single entity has the resources necessary to address these challenges on its own. *Conserving the Future* acknowledges that strategic, collaborative, science-based landscape conservation – along with effective public outreach, education and environmental awareness – is the only path forward to conserve America's wildlife and wild places. This document articulates the Refuge System's role in this effort: leading when appropriate and supporting our partners when able.

We recognize all of our conservation partners, and explicitly acknowledge the unique and valued relationship, expertise, and authority of state wildlife agencies in managing fish, wildlife, and their habitats associated with the Refuge System. We also recognize that we must identify opportunities to engage new constituencies to help us meet our mission.

Conserving the Future was developed by Service employees in partnership with stakeholders through a transparent public process. Although focused on the Refuge System, this process catalyzed a national discussion on conservation that transcends the Refuge System. Several recurring themes emerged: relevance to a changing America, the impact of a changing climate, the need for conservation at the landscape scale, the necessity of partnership and collaboration, and the absolute importance of scientific excellence. These themes are woven throughout the document.





Conserving the Future: *Wildlife and Wildlands* contains the foundational elements of our conservation design and delivery. Our vision is to embrace a scientific, landscape-level approach to conserving, managing and restoring refuge lands and waters, and work to facilitate conservation benefits beyond our boundaries. Simply put, we are a piece of the puzzle and we hold to the highest principles of scientific excellence to inform our conservation decisions and actions. We offer a series of recommendations: embrace a landscape approach, look through the lens of climate change, strategically grow the Refuge System, work in partnership to leverage resources and benefits, and report on the condition of wildlife and habitat to the American people and embrace high standards of scientific integrity and transparency.



A Connected Conservation Constituency is the people piece. Without the support of the American public, our actions—however well intended—will fall short. We seek to make wildlife conservation more relevant to American citizens and foster their engagement in and support of the National Wildlife Refuge System. As with our land protection efforts and management actions, we will be most effective in this area by both working with our traditional partners and by embracing new ones. Our recommendations include expanding community partnerships; encouraging volunteerism; embracing urban America; telling the conservation story in new ways with the help of technology; enhancing opportunities to connect people and nature; and embracing, elevating and holding our interpretation and environmental education programs to the highest scientific standards.



Leading Conservation into the Future is devoted to leadership and organizational excellence, and includes an explicit challenge to the entire Service to be self-critical and continually strive to maximize conservation delivery and demonstrate excellence in the stewardship of public funds. We also recommend deliberately developing a diverse, inclusive, competent and caring workforce that will commit to conservation, embrace the responsibility of public service, and succeed in realizing this in effective, efficient and innovative ways. We must develop a workforce that embodies our Guiding Principles and demonstrates those principles in our daily activities and interactions.

The challenges are immense and our quality of life is at stake.
The path is set before us: It is time to act.

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National Wildlife Refuge System**

www.fws.gov/refuges

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