

Comment Period: Monday, December 3 – Wednesday, January 16

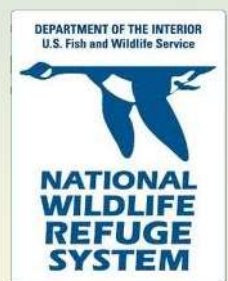
Please **sign-up** or **sign-in** to the social network to view and comment on this draft product. Learn more about the social network and how it works **here**.

We encourage members to leave comments, edits, and suggestions in the comment sections of the **groups** within the social network. Members of the implementation teams will monitor comments with the hope of robust conversation that will enhance these draft products.

You may also e-mail your comments to [conservingthefuture@fws.gov](mailto:conservingthefuture@fws.gov).



# U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System Draft Communications Plan



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Communications Plan.....</b>	<b>3</b>
• Objectives.....	3
• Audiences.....	4
• Strategies.....	5
• Overarching Theme.....	6
• Messaging.....	7
• Tactics.....	10
○ Meeting Audiences Where They Are.....	10
○ Building Interest Through Online Engagement—Refuge Live! Online Experience.....	13
○ Creating a Unique Onsite Experience.....	15
○ Other Supporting Elements.....	18
▪ Traditional, Successful Products.....	18
▪ Congressional Communications.....	21
• Measurement, Evaluation and Mid-Course Correction.....	22
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>23</b>
• Overarching Strategy Visual.....	23
• Consistent, Mandatory Refuge System-Themed Exhibits.....	24
• New Media .....	26
• Social Media Introduction and “How To” Guide.....	28
• Interactive Map Viewers.....	38
• Refuge Boundaries within Google Maps.....	41
• Performance Standards.....	43

## INTRODUCTION

As the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) embarks on a decade of change guided by *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation*, NWRS has been given the opportunity to introduce new and active audiences to the beauty, fun and value of the Refuge System. To meet the vision outlined in *Conserving the Future*, NWRS' communication strategy will broaden its focus, reaching and engaging non-traditional audiences – such as urban residents and young adults – while maintaining strong relationships with current visitors and Friends organizations. In this spirit, we present the updated communications plan for the NWRS.

The purpose of this plan is to guide communications activities that reach key audiences over the course of the next five years, driving awareness of the Refuge System, increasing online and in-person visitation, and ultimately, building the next generation of refuge supporters. The following pages include recommended strategies, tactics and measurements that account for a changing communications landscape, ever-expanding social media platforms and a new generation of Americans that share their experiences in real-time. Our tactics are designed to leverage and merge these digital and traditional worlds, cut through clutter and ignite passion in the next generation of refuge supporters.

### **Research Based**

The key elements of this plan were developed based on the results of several research activities:

- **Stakeholder interviews:** Interviews were conducted with 18 individuals that serve in a variety of roles, both internal and external of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Each discussed their views on the importance of wildlife refuges, target audiences, methods to raise awareness and other related questions.
- **Materials review:** The team also reviewed a sampling of NWRS' current materials to determine what existing approaches are effective and what adjustments may be needed to appeal to the campaign's target audiences.
- **Social media listening:** Research was conducted to provide an analysis of online conversations important to NWRS, such as conversations surrounding clear water and air, observation and photography, general recreation, scientific excellence and conservation.
- **Focus groups:** Groups were conducted to test the messaging and images included in this plan to ensure they resonate with our target audiences.

## COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

### Objectives

The following objectives are designed to strengthen the NWRS moving into the future and will guide strategy for the NWRS communication. The objectives align with the *Conserving the Future* vision document.



In addition to the objectives outlined above, the NWRS also has goals specific to raising awareness and educating congressional audiences. These goals are outlined on page 21 of this plan.

## Audiences

To achieve each of these objectives, it is critical that the Refuge System engage both current audiences and new groups. *Conserving the Future* expressly points out that engaging audiences who may never have heard of NWRS, let alone visited one, is critical to ensuring that future generations understand the value that the system provides. At the same time, however, traditional audiences must continue to be cultivated. Both groups are important stakeholders and necessary to meeting the long term goals.

To that end, as we move forward, the NWRS will place a particular emphasis on reaching:

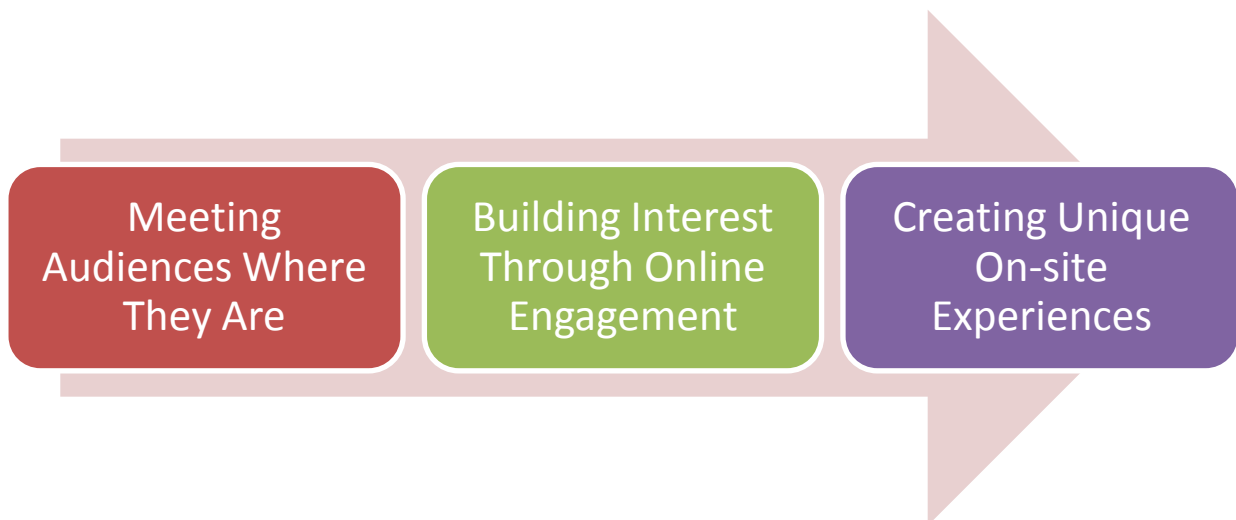
- Culturally diverse Americans aged 18-34
- Those reaching retirement age
- Urban dwellers
- Traditional system users (hunters, fishers, birders)
- Friends organizations' volunteers
- Schools
- Internal Refuge System staff
- Non-Governmental Organizations (e.g., Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement)
- Leadership at agencies/initiatives (e.g., Department of Interior, Council on Environmental Quality, Office of Management and Budget)
- Congress



## Strategy

Building the next generation of refuge supporters will require audiences to truly experience the wonder of the Refuge System, whether that experience takes place virtually or in person. Our plan is designed to take our target audiences on a journey – from their everyday world to ours. This journey will involve three key “stops” along the way.

- **STOP 1: Meeting Audiences Where They Are** – We need to bring the best of the Refuge System straight to our audiences; meet them in the places they’re already visiting within their local communities. Activities outlined in this section of the plan include local events, national media outreach and partnership development to further disseminate campaign messages.
- **STOP 2: Building Interest Through Online Engagement** – Many of our target audiences, particularly youth, interact online. Our plan includes activities that will engage people online through a series of activities that capture their attention, such as contests and games.
- **STOP 3: Creating Unique On-Site Experiences** – Many refuges already have compelling community engagement programs. Our plan includes activities designed to supplement these programs, increase visits and cultivate repeat visitors.



In addition to these three journey stops, designed to generate the next generation of refuge supporters, we will also keep conducting outreach to our traditional audiences and current supporters. These others supporting elements will include traditional, successful products and congressional communications.

## Overarching Theme

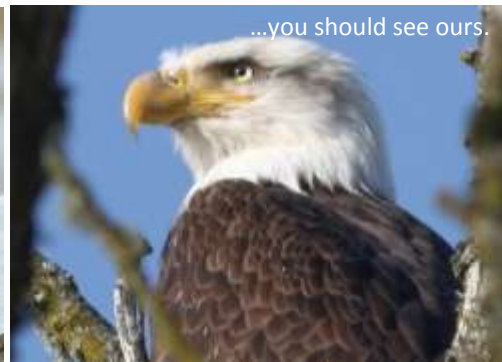
We know a barrier for our target audiences is a lack of awareness of the Refuge System, its benefits and its proximity to their local communities. With this plan, we strive to address that barrier by introducing audiences to a **“new world” right in their backyard**. We will introduce them to a place where they can see wildlife they likely can’t see anywhere else and where they can visit an environment they thought no longer existed.

The idea is to bring to life a stark contrast the beauty of the Refuge System compared to what our target audiences’ environment is today. Through stunning visuals, the overarching theme will use if/then comparisons for audiences to really grasp the beauty that is accessible right in their own backyards.

“If...”



“Then”



Through focus group testing, it was determined that images of people engaged in recreation activities were the most powerful for our target audiences, particularly images of children. Throughout the messages and tactics that follow, images of people will be integrated in order to ensure they resonate with our target audiences.

Here’s how we will integrate this theme throughout our communications program.

## It Starts with Messaging

At the heart of every successful communication campaign is consistent, compelling and plain-language messaging that resonates with target audiences. The message track below is designed to be used in materials, speaking opportunities and interaction with the public. Each message has a number of sub-messages (or proof points), giving individuals the flexibility to pick and choose supporting points that will work best for their particular needs. These messages will be integrated through the tactics in this plan.

### Elevator Speech

The National Wildlife Refuge System is your gateway to a wildlife adventure for you and your family. With more than 550 National Wildlife Refuges, you can discover a whole new world while staying close to home. The National Wildlife Refuge System is dedicated to conserving wildlife and their homes, so you can see wildlife you may not see elsewhere. And because wildlife refuges are part of a national system dedicated to conserving wildlife now and in the future, you can be confident the NWRS is doing everything it can to ensure refuges will be available for you and your family today and for generations to come.

### Message 1: Discover a Whole New World, Right in Your Backyard

*Each wildlife refuge is a new world to explore, full of plants and wildlife you may not have seen before.*

- Your refuge adventure will be truly different than what you can see and do in everyday life. You will be offered an intimate and accessible view of wildlife and wild places.
- Refuges provide homes for millions of migratory birds and hundreds of threatened and endangered species so that they have a chance to survive.
- These unexplored areas are closer than you might think; there is a wildlife refuge located within an hour's drive of most major U.S. cities.
- In addition to appreciating wildlife of all kinds and breathtaking scenery, you can also enjoy world-class recreation activities such as birding, photography, fishing, paddling, hiking, and hunting at National Wildlife Refuges.
  - Refuges provide more than 2,500 miles of water and nature trails.
- A new world is just a click away – visit [www.fws.gov/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/refuges) for more information and to plan a trip to your local refuge.



### Message 2: See Wildlife You Can't See Anywhere Else

*If you love animals, you'll love exploring National Wildlife Refuges. Discover rare wildlife that you otherwise wouldn't find.*

- Refuges provide homes for millions of migratory birds and hundreds of threatened and endangered species so that they have a chance to survive.
- At refuges you'll find wildlife in greater numbers than in most any other area, living, in many instances, in their natural homes. This offers great opportunities to observe and experience North America's most beloved wildlife species.





- Discover new and different wildlife at a National Wildlife Refuge – visit [www.fws.gov/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/refuges) for more information and to plan a trip to your local refuge.
- Help make a difference and be a part of the future by volunteering at your local wildlife refuge. Visit your local refuge to find out more.

**Message 3: Visit a Natural World that You Thought No Longer Existed, Where Wildlife and Wild Lands Still Flourish**

*Visiting a National Wildlife Refuge is like taking a trip back in time to discover a natural world.*

- Because refuges are dedicated to conserving wildlife and their homes, they offer a step back in time for visitors today and for generations to come.
- You can experience peace, calm and solitude not often found in everyday life.
- At your local refuge, you can renew your tie to local cultural heritage by viewing ancient and historic sites, strengthening the connection between wildlife and people.
- Create lasting memories with family and friends by visiting a National Wildlife Refuge.
- Take a step back in time at a National Wildlife Refuge – visit [www.fws.gov/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/refuges) for more information and to plan a trip to your local refuge.
- If you can't make the trip to a refuge, take your virtual trip back in time at [www.fws.gov/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/refuges).



**Message 4: Wildlife Refuges are Valuable for Communities and People**

*The National Wildlife Refuge System provides jobs, supports local economies and provides places where people can enjoy healthy activities.*

- We're dedicated to supporting communities, lifestyles, cultures and economies.
- The National Wildlife Refuge System provides an oasis for people to stay active, boost creativity and relax from hectic schedules, improving mental and physical health in the process.
  - National Wildlife Refuges offer a wide variety of physical activities people can enjoy in the great outdoors, such as hiking and paddling.
  - According to a study by researchers at the University of Kansas, outdoor recreation and access to nature play a vital role in the physical, psychological, spiritual well-being, health and development of people of all ages, especially children, who tend to be healthier, happier, have increased creativity and better social skills.
- In 2011, the Refuge System generated \$2.1 billion in economic activity.
- In 2011, the Refuge System supported more than 34,000 private sector jobs.
- The Refuge System hires thousands of youth each year.
- Wildlife refuges support clean air and water for the communities in which they operate.
- According to a study by researchers at North Carolina State University in April 2012, being close to a National Wildlife Refuge increases the value of homes in urbanized areas.

**Message 5: Conserving Your Wildlife is What We Do**

*We are the nation's only system of public lands and waters dedicated to conserving wildlife now and in the future. The future of wildlife is dependent on this work.*

- The Refuge System has been conserving and protecting our nation's wildlife since 1903.



- There are more than 550 wildlife refuges and 38 wetland management districts, covering 150 million acres of land nationwide.
- Our professionals work in tandem with state and local partners to conserve wildlife and their homes nationwide using scientific principles.
- You can help conserve wildlife and their homes in your community by volunteering at your local wildlife refuge. Visit your local refuge to find out more.
- Help us conserve wildlife nationwide – visit [www.fws.gov/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/refuges) for more information and to plan a trip to your local refuge.

**Message 6: Our People are Passionate about What They Do**

*National Wildlife Refuge System professionals care about the land and wildlife they work every day to help protect.*

- These trusted experts use all the tools at their disposal – including the latest in environmental science and technology – to make refuges great places for wildlife and for people.
- Our environmental professionals are dedicated to the Refuge System and understand that in order to have healthy people, we must have a healthy planet that ensures America’s rich wild habitat is maintained.
- Let us share our passion with you – visit [www.fws.gov/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/refuges) for more information and plan a trip to your local refuge.



**Message Rollout**

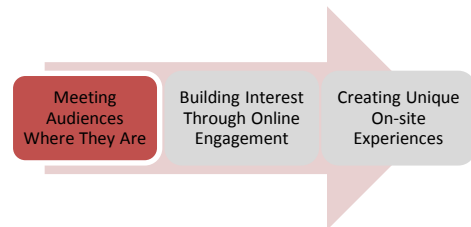
In order to ensure consistent communications, NWRS will:

- Create talking points for refuge spokespeople
- Conduct spokesperson training for national staff, select regional staff
- Develop a “why new messaging” presentation to share with regions, Friends organizations
- Host conference calls to review messaging with FWS/NWRS employees and volunteers
- Integrate training on updated messaging into Refuge Academies, Friends Academy

## Tactics

### Journey Stop #1: Meeting Audiences Where They Are

To entice target audiences to learn more — and to potentially even visit their local refuge — we need to first bring the best of the Refuge System straight to them; to the places they're already visiting in the local community. The following activities will help accomplish this and disseminate key information about the Refuge System to key groups effectively.



#### I. PSA Contest and Movie Series

##### Filmmaker PSA Contest

The NWRS will develop a PSA contest in which individuals can compete for a chance to have their PSA selected for a national campaign. NWRS will develop contest rules and solicit entries that focus on key messages and the “if, this...” campaign. The winning entry will form the basis of the national PSA campaign, including print, online and broadcast placements to help raise awareness of NWRS and opportunities for visitors.

To raise awareness of the PSA program and recruit participants, NWRS will conduct outreach to the following channels:

- Universities with film programs
- School groups
- Relevant trade magazines
- Available social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube
- Flyers at refuges
- NWRS website

NWRS will select the finalists after reviewing all submissions, and facilitate online voting to determine the winner (see PSA Contest Entries and Voting).

Once the winner is identified, NWRS will distribute a press release and conduct targeted outreach in the winner's local market. This, in turn, will provide an additional opportunity to promote the overarching awareness campaign's messages in addition to the end of the PSA contest. To expand reach, NWRS will partner with a local college's film programs and Friends organizations in addition to spreading the word through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media channels. The PSA will also be distributed through a national PSA distribution service.



##### Outdoor Movie Events in Pilot Markets

In each region, NWRS will select a pilot community and host an outdoor screening of a family friendly movie. Factors for determining these pilot sites may include proximity to a popular wildlife refuge, concentration of youth and other target audiences and potential partnerships with local community members. This activity will entice people to take their first step outdoors, and provide an ideal opportunity to promote NWRS. At each screening, movies will begin and end with

the winning Refuge System PSA. In addition, printed materials about the Refuge System will be distributed to attendees encouraging them to visit the NWRS website and/or their local refuge. With the success of these screenings, the program will be expanded to other sites.

## II. Media Outreach & Promotion

To build awareness of the NWRS and its PSA activities, NWRS will conduct a series of media outreach activities surrounding each phase of the PSA contest.

### PSA Contest Announcement

In order to promote the availability of the contest, NWRS will:

- Encourage film schools and other partners to promote the contest through their existing channels
- Conduct outreach to relevant trade and student magazines
- Outreach through existing NWRS social media and online channels

### PSA Contest Winner Announcement

Once a winner is selected, NWRS will publically announce the winner by:

- Issuing a press release
- Conducting outreach in the media market most appropriate for the contest winner (based on where they live)
- Encourage film schools and other partners to promote the contest winner through their existing channels

### PSA Launch

Following the selection of the winning PSA, the NWRS will proactively promote the launch of the PSA through a coordinated campaign. NWRS will conduct the following activities:

- Issue a press release announcing the campaign
- Conduct outreach to national consumer, outdoor and conservation publications
- Utilize social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube
- Coordinate a satellite media tour and radio media tour (SMT/RMT) with the featured spokesperson to help raise awareness of the Refuge System and meet objectives
  - A SMT is a media tactic which provides an expert to a local television news broadcasts for often live interaction, with the goal of disseminating a specific message
  - RMTs are a similar tactic designed to reach radio outlets, and are often booked during the satellite window to create a combo SMT/RMT

The combination of these activities will help ensure NWRS reaches key audiences and increases exposure of the winning PSA, and as a result, the Refuge System as a whole.

## III. Refuge Live! Local Showcase

To help engage new audiences in new places, we will create a series of traveling exhibits that illustrate the uniqueness and awe of the NWRS. The NWRS will select a pilot site from each region, and expand to more communities over time.

NWRS will work with local refuges to determine the best locations for the



traveling exhibit, ideally high pedestrian traffic urban gathering places, such as shopping malls, sports arenas, concert venues. While this activity is designed to reach individuals of all ages, a key audience for the NWRS is those reaching retirement age. As such, the NWRS will work with local pilot refuges to ensure at least one area is chosen that appeals to this age group.

The mobile exhibit will include displays of plant and wildlife, information about the Refuge System and local Friends organizations, directions to the nearest refuge and other educational materials. Virtual QR codes will be incorporated on all materials to draw website traffic. In addition, visitors will be able to opt-in to receive more information via email and social media channels. The call to action on each of these materials and the exhibit overall will be to take a trip to a refuge — either in person or online — which is in line with campaign objectives.

In addition to the mobile display, a wildlife/environment-themed 3D sidewalk art show adjacent to the exhibit will help capture attention and drive visitors to the exhibit for more information. Visitors will be encouraged to pose with the art and post pictures on Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels expanding the reach of the exhibit.

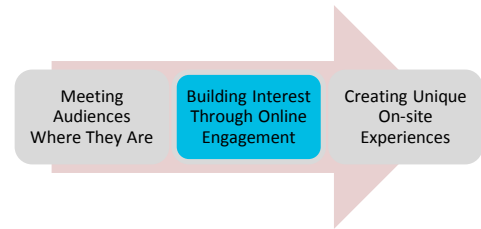
#### IV. Ticket Giveaway



Using the same pilot markets as the traveling exhibit and PSA contest, NWRS will recruit local outdoor/sports stores, such as The North Face, REI, Dick’s Sporting Goods, Sports Authority, to distribute “tickets” to a local refuge in store. These “tickets” will invite store customers to visit the nearest refuge, and provide information about the recreation activities available at that refuge. QR codes will also be incorporated here to drive visitors to the website.

## Journey Stop #2: Building Interest Through Online Engagement—Refuge Live! Online Experience

The second stop of our campaign journey will help increase interest in the Refuge System by engaging people online, which will subsequently increase both overall awareness and also interest in potentially visiting a local refuge. These activities are designed to build on those outlined in the “Meeting Audiences Where They Are” section of the plan to create an integrated online/offline campaign. The following activities will entice people to learn more about the Refuge System through a series of contests and games.



### I. PSA Contest Entries and Voting

To support the PSA contest mentioned previously, NWRS will create a page on its existing website or develop a separate microsite for online voting to determine the winning video. Capitalizing on connections made during the initial contest announcement, NWRS will connect with local college film programs, social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Twitter and YouTube), and Friends organizations to publicize online voting. Integrating social media here as well will allow people who have voted to promote this opportunity to followers, thereby increasing NWRS’ reach to key groups.



In addition to online voting, refuges will be encouraged to provide paper ballots to refuge visitors, or setup on-site kiosks for additional voting opportunities.

### II. Refuge Live! Activity Center

This activity center will be a comprehensive and interactive site to get people excited about the Refuge System and increase interest in visiting a local refuge. It will contain three main components:

#### Showcasing Refuges Online

Creating a unique online experience where people can learn more about the Refuge System in a fun and interesting way will help further entice them to visit in person. To do so, NWRS will incorporate the 3D sidewalk art from the mobile exhibit to create virtual puzzles and get people excited about their local refuge. These puzzles will depict plant and wildlife as well as activities available on refuges. With in-person visitors uploading pictures from their community exhibit to the online activity center, others can view the collections of art appearing in different regions. This will entice people to see the 3D sidewalk art and mobile refuge for themselves. Social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, will help expand NWRS’ reach as people share their pictures and experiences to like-minded followers.

### Take Visitors on a Virtual Fieldtrip

For each of the pilot refuges, NWRS will develop a “Virtual Fieldtrip.” This interactive fieldtrip will include items such as:

- An interactive map/refuge locator to find the refuge closest to home
- Audio/video footage of unique animals, plant life and available activities
- Fun facts callouts
- Educational games and quizzes with the ability to track scores and promote on social media
- Pictures from mobile exhibit, including 3D artwork, and refuge visits



This virtual fieldtrip will be designed to entice target audiences to visit a local refuge by showcasing what refuges have to offer. As this tool would be particularly useful for schools, it will be actively promoted through local refuges to this audience.

### Virtual Scavenger Hunt Headquarters

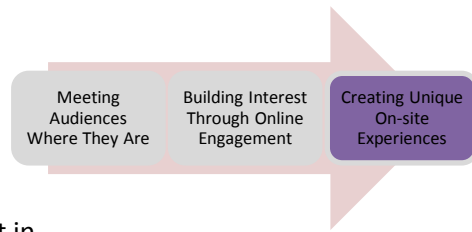


For the selected pilot refuges, NWRS will develop virtual scavenger hunts. Each scavenger hunt will include an online checklist of seasonal “items” to find and images from pilot refuges in the form of 360-degree videos with clues for scavenger hunt participants. Players can click on various map locations and will be taken virtually to that spot, which could be a hiking trail or a bird-watching location where they will search for key items such as birds or other animals that are special to each of the pilot refuges. For this online experience, individuals will have the opportunity to form teams and compete with others in the hunt.

To expand the scavenger hunt beyond the pilot communities, on-site scavenger hunt templates will be available for local refuges to create their own hunt (see On-Site Scavenger Hunt).

### Journey Stop #3: Creating a Unique Onsite Experience

After promoting the Refuge System through local community events and engaging key audiences online, it is time to shift focus to the onsite experience at local refuges. The following activities will help accomplish the end goal of this plan —increasing visits and cultivating an interest in returning.



#### I. National Marketing Partnership

There are a number of large, national organizations that have existing relationships with our target audiences. By developing partnerships with these national organizations, we hope to extend the reach of the NWRS to reach our new and diverse audiences, as well as existing audiences.

The first organization we will target for a national marketing partnership will be the National Basketball Association. The NBA and other sports leagues are notably active in the communities in which they reside, and can play a large role in influencing individuals in our target audience. As such, the NWRS will seek a partnership with the NBA to integrate the Refuge System into its current Green initiative. This program encourages each team to participate in an environmentally focused activity the week of Earth Day.



The NWRS will aim to leverage this potential partnership to draw attention to and increase interest in visiting a wildlife refuge — both in person and online. Potential partnership activities include arranging a series of refuge cleanups and habitat restorations or teams participating in exiting refuge activities such as sing-alongs and bird watching tours.

To promote Refuge System integration into the Green Initiative, NWRS would encourage teams to share refuge videos and advertisements during games and also link to the Refuge System’s website from team pages. NWRS will also work to publicize this partnership by conducting national and local media outreach to print and broadcast.

Over the course of this five year plan, the NWRS may also identify additional organizations for potential partnership such as the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), the National Football League (NFL), Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Big Brother Big Sister, relevant Greek and fraternal organizations and more.

#### II. On-site Scavenger Hunt



Leveraging the online scavenger hunt mentioned previously, an on-site version can be developed for people visiting their local participating refuge that can help make the in person experience more interactive and promote repeat trips. NWRS will provide a toolkit for local refuges with the materials needed to execute the scavenger hunt.

Just like the virtual experience, the on-site hunt will include a checklist of seasonal “items” for participants to find, but this time, in person on the refuge. The on-site scavenger hunt will help visitors get better acquainted with their local refuge and learn all the refuge has to offer.



NWRS will initiate the program in the specified pilot markets and encourage schools, recreation centers and community programs to form teams. Participants would find and document designated refuge highlights, such as specific animals, plants and fun facts. This not only gives visitors a chance to learn more about the refuge but also interact with the staff.

As an added incentive, regional team winners will win a prize, such as tickets to an NBA game during Green Week or another equally appropriate prize.

### III. Champions Academy

Repeat visitation by youth populations can help drive appreciation and love of their local refuges. We recommend developing a “Champions” program in which high school aged individuals from throughout the country to participate in a Champion Academy. At this academy, these high school aged individuals would not only learn outdoor and communication skills, but also provide input on how to instill a love of the outdoors in their peers. Meeting others who are passionate about conservation and outdoor activities would help enhance their refuge experience.



In order to apply to participate in the Champions program, youths will need to show dedication both through online engagement and refuge visitation through the Refuge Live! initiative. For example, participants can earn “credits” by taking and uploading photos from refuge visits to their social media assets, encouraging others to engage with the Refuge System in person or online, or volunteering at their local refuge. When youths have earned a specified number of credits, they receive a gift from their local visitor center (t-shirt, pin, etc., if possible) and also become eligible to apply for the Champions Academy. With this membership, participants may be eligible to earn a college scholarship and/or meet a celebrity, such as a local NBA player through the potential “Green Week” initiative.

### IV. Facilitate Local Outreach



To promote the pilot activities and national programs proposed, NWRS will develop toolkits for local refuges to use for implementation. They will be able to easily tailor these resources to suit individual needs. Each toolkit will include materials such as:

- Template ads
- Sample tweets/Facebook posts
- Template for press releases
- Fact sheets
- Sample pitches
- General media outreach tips

All of these materials will ensure local refuges have the tools to implement this plan and adapt to individual capabilities and goals. The resources will be provided to make it as easy as possible for local refuges to participate in national activities. They can choose to use any of the items as stand-

alone initiatives, but will be encouraged and supported in robust utilization and implementation of a comprehensive program. Coinciding with the activities outlined in this plan, NWRS will develop the following toolkits:

- “If, this” campaign toolkit
- PSA contest promotion toolkit
- Refuge Live! promotion kit
- Scavenger hunt toolkit
- Champion Academy program toolkit
- Schools outreach toolkit

## Other Supporting Elements

Supporting and building relationships with our traditional and current audiences remains of critical importance, and as such the NWRS will continue to conduct communications activities designed to reach these audiences, such as the continuation of traditional, successful products and congressional communications.

### I. **Traditional, Successful Products Have Relevance**

The Refuge System's traditional audiences are generally in their late middle age, often living in rural areas. They became avid birders, hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts in their youth, and have found National Wildlife Refuges in their communities as the perfect places to continue their avocations. NWRS will continue producing the traditional media it has been successful in reaching these traditional and critical audiences:

#### **Newsletters**

##### ***Refuge Update***

This bimonthly newsletter that covers topics concerning the people, places, challenges and conservation work of the Refuge System. It serves both an internal audience of Service employees and an external audience of refuge Friends, volunteers, supporters, NGOs, Service retirees, Congressional offices and districts, and others. It seeks to keep readers informed of successes and challenges in the Refuge System and to help employees gain new ideas. Its articles are varied: cutting-edge science and ecological research; large-scale conservation and partnerships; distinctive hunting, fishing, photography and wildlife observation opportunities; innovative approaches to visitor services and environmental education; refuges' historical and cultural resources; endangered species; and more. Each issue contains a column by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Chief of the Refuge System. Issues are mailed and are available online at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges>.

##### ***Friends Forward***

This quarterly newsletter is a singular information source for nonprofit Friends organizations and members, who work with individual wildlife refuges. It offers information about national Refuge System programs, policies and initiatives that directly affect Friends. The newsletter also offers resources to Friends organization, including information about the activities of other Friends organizations, deadlines for grants, news about Service and Refuge System accomplishments, and an understanding of the challenges facing the Refuge System. Each year, a special issue is published, focused on single areas of interest, such as membership retention and recruiting, arts in refuge programming, and use of social media, among others. The newsletter is mailed to members and officers of Friends organizations and available online at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges>. The Refuge System seeks to increase the mailing list by 25 percent by Spring 2013.

#### **Social Media**

##### ***Facebook***

Having launched the Facebook site in December 2010, the Refuge System had more than 11,200 fans at the end of October 2012, reaching people with a conservation message and inviting them to get to know our wildlife work. NWRS posts original content with photographs one to three times per day, seven days a week. Those in the 13 to 24-year-old age group comprise 27 percent of the NWRS Facebook fan base.

Analytic data show the Refuge System's engagement levels average 7 to 10 percent; 1.5 percent of fan engagement is considered successful by industry standards.

### **Twitter**

The Refuge System "tweets" one to five times per day, six days per week. NWRS Twitter content falls into two categories: "news you can use" about upcoming events; and educational/engagement on features, news, trends and fun facts. NWRS has 2,806 Twitter followers and a Klout score of 54. NWRS seeks to use Twitter more strategically to target high-profile bloggers, journalists and others in social media who are influential in the conservation world.

### **Friends NewsWire**

Created monthly, the Friends NewsWire is a dedicated, non-public Web site that provides ready-to-use Service and Refuge System news to the nation's 220 nonprofit Friends organizations, which can download the stories and place them in their printed or online publications. Friends editors and organizations are notified by e-mail each month that a new supply of stories and accompanying photos are ready for their use. The NewsWire is a direct means to repurpose news releases and stories from the Refuge Update newsletter to audiences who might not otherwise see them. It is also a Refuge System service to its Friends organizations, which generally rely on volunteer labor. The story selection includes bylined columns by the Chief of the Refuge System and the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service as well as feature and news stories.

### **National Wildlife Refuge Week**

Celebrated for more than 15 years, National Wildlife Refuge Week has become a staple in the Refuge System arsenal of events that invite visitors to learn about wildlife refuges. Scores of wildlife refuges hold special events for the Week, celebrated during the second full week of October. The Refuge System Headquarters will continue to provide tool kits, posters and other "ever green" products that can be used during Refuge Week and beyond. The toolkit will continue to include fill-in-the-blank news release; sample letters to the editor and op-eds that Friends organizations can use; media tip sheets; and other elements that give wildlife refuges materials for outreach and communications.

In years past, the Refuge System has provided decorative and educational banners that are not tied inextricably to celebration of Refuge Week. The products – including a wingspan banner that has educational benefits – have been popular among wildlife refuges.

### **Internal Audiences Served Electronically**

**News from Washington** is monthly, news-you-can-use roundup from the Refuge System's Headquarters to Service employees nationwide. It is e-mailed from the Refuge System Chief and provides, among other items:

- Status of federal legislation related to refuges.
- Headquarters initiatives, products and services
- Announcements, policy directives and personnel moves that affect field staff
- Listings of requirements, application procedures and deadlines for grants, contests, awards, and other opportunities pertinent to employees and the Refuge System's Friends and volunteers.

While *News from Washington* is written for Service employees, the Refuge System has every reason to believe that it is forwarded to other publics.

## **Web**

The Refuge System's Web site receives about 38,000 unique visitors a month. It is an enormous source of information, offering Web users a map of the Refuge System and links to individual wildlife refuges' pages; news stories on the homepage; an events calendar and quick information about outstanding activities on wildlife refuges; and in-depth information about the work of the Refuge System Headquarters and divisions. Whether a Web user wants fact sheets about the Refuge System, help in identifying a trail to hike; the latest list of newly-established wildlife refuges; information about invasive species or marine mammals; or to find a place to hunt or fish, they will find the information on the Refuge System Web site: <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.

A Content Management System (CMS) was implemented in 2011 for individual refuge Web sites, maintained by the wildlife refuges themselves. A similar system was not implemented for the Refuge System's Web site. As of October 2012, a relatively small number of wildlife refuges have used the CMS to update Web sites. CMS not only enables individual refuges to upload the latest information, but it also creates a uniform graphic design among the Web sites of wildlife refuges. The graphic design was not applied to the Refuge System Web site.

In light of significant proposals from *Conserving the Future* implementation teams and other demands on the Refuge System Web site, the Refuge System Web site should be wholly redesigned and revamped by late 2014, as funding permits. The CMS for individual Web sites should be fully completed by the same deadline.

Even before the complete redesign of the Refuge System Web site, the current Web site will be refreshed with new homepage stories uploaded four to five times per week. That pace will continue for the foreseeable future.

In addition, some targeted redesign Web site was undertaken in 2012; several sections were updated in 2012: National Resource Program Center, wilderness, migratory birds, climate change and air quality. Among the other sections that will receive special attention in 2013-2014: volunteers, education/interpretation, and kids.

## **Media Relations**

The Refuge System, working in concert with the Service, will continue to undertake media relations to increase public awareness of the Refuge System. The following activities will continue and be enhanced:

- Event listings distributed monthly to about 3,000 journalists, offering a three-month look ahead about events on refuges. Listings are posted on the Refuge System Web site.
- News releases issued when warranted and electronically distributed to journalists nationwide. In 2012, news releases included announcement of celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week; visitor satisfaction survey; and opening of new refuges to hunting, among others.
- Monthly feature stories shared with national and local journalists. A yearly feature calendar is organized to ensure that the Refuge System reaches a mix of media segments, such as travel, science, children, and families.

- Pitch story ideas to national, regional, or local reporters. The Refuge System will cultivate strong professional relationships with key journalists and bloggers.

## **II. Congressional Communications**

Ensuring congressional leaders are aware of and support the NWRS will also continue to be critical moving toward the future. Through the tactics outlined below, the NWRS will aim to:

- Increase awareness and support for the NWRS among members of Congress, especially among Members who have a wildlife refuge in their districts and those serving urban districts.
- Seek re-establishment of the Wildlife Refuge Congressional Caucus, with special emphasis on broad bi-partisan and membership of those Members who have a wildlife refuge in their districts.
- Seek increased awareness of the effect of natural disasters, including floods and hurricanes, on the operations and maintenance of National Wildlife Refuges.
- Create awareness of need for special legislation, when appropriate, on behalf of National Wildlife Refuges.

### **Congressional Communications Tactics**

- Provide an annual report to Congress, highlighting FWS accomplishments and challenges.
- Conduct an annual Congressional briefing on the Refuge System at the start of each Congress.
- Organize at least two Congressional briefings each year, focusing on topical interests.
- Organize an annual (or twice-yearly) Congressional informational trip to a select group of refuges.
- Encourage continuation of a Senate resolution each year to recognize National Wildlife Refuge Week, with an increase in number of bi-partisan signers
- Create support for the first-ever House of Representatives resolution in recognition of National Wildlife Refuge Week, and subsequent increase in bi-partisan support for such a resolution.
- Work to seek a similar Refuge Week resolution in the House of Representatives, with special emphasis on Members who have a national wildlife refuge in their districts. Provide basic informational fact sheets to CARE on various aspects of the Refuge System
- Schedule at least six visits by the Chief of the Refuge System and division chiefs with members of Congress, with special emphasis on explaining aspects of the Refuge system as they manifest themselves in their districts.
- Encourage members of Congress to write for *Refuge Update*, the bimonthly newsletter of the Refuge System.

## Measurement, Evaluation and Mid-Course Correction

In order to ensure that the communications activities proposed and executed are successful, NWRS will conduct an ongoing evaluation and adjustment process to ensure maximum success. Metrics will include, but not be limited to, the following:

### Online share of voice measurement

- Use original results from initial digital listening as benchmark for campaign success
- Continue monitoring relevant online conversations and adjust tactics as needed
- Engage in dialogue with online influencers as appropriate based on continued findings

### Materials distributed

- Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of materials distributed to target audiences in terms of conveying key messages and producing desired results
- Create new and edit existing materials if intended outcome is not achieved

### Media analysis

- Monitor online and print news stories mentioning FWS/NWRS directly or discussing relevant issues to ensure messages are resonating properly
- Stay current and engage relevant media as appropriate
  - Offer third-party commentary
  - Promote latest news for potential features

### Local Refuges' Involvement in National Programs

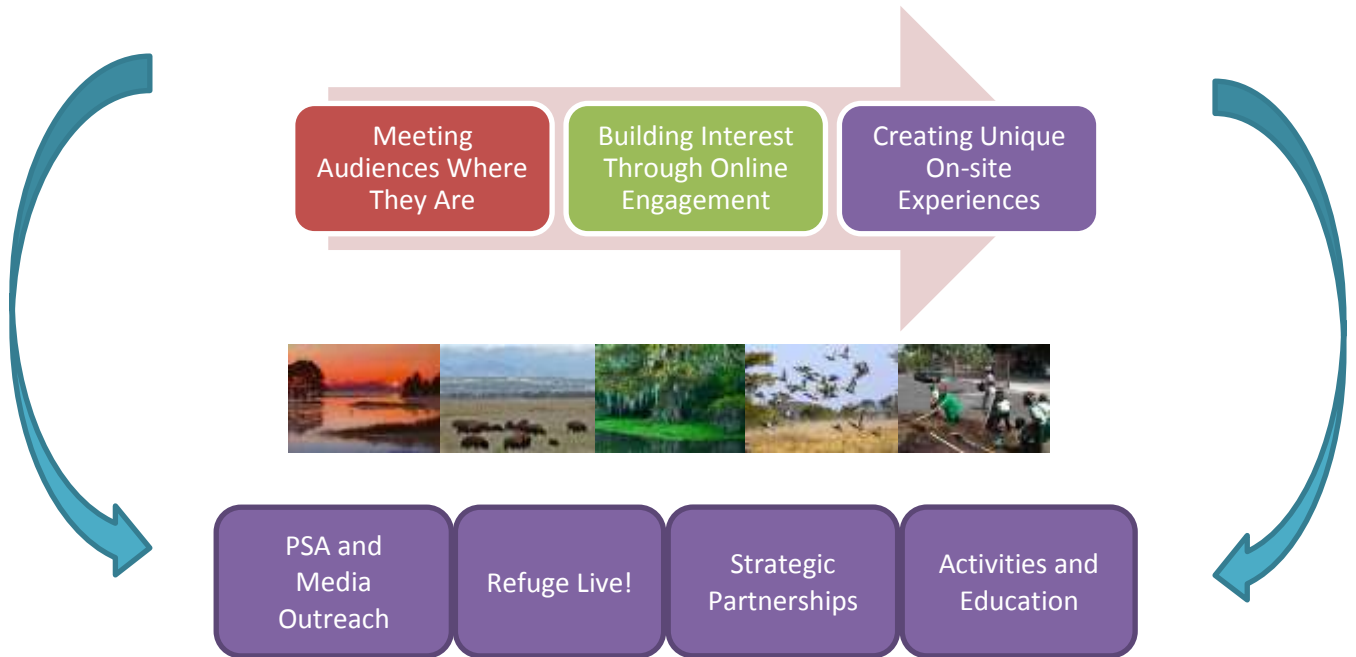
- Increase participation in related national awareness programs, specifically in the conservation space
  - Sponsor programs
  - Host special events (e.g., talks with refuge employees, viewings of Refuge System video footage)
  - Promote visits to the refuge, volunteering opportunities and participation in Friends organizations
  - Engage youth ambassadors

### Research

- Gauge awareness and/or interest in the Refuge System among the pilot communities through online research
- Conduct follow-up Focus Groups to determine if attitudes/beliefs are shifting in the pilot communities

## APPENDIX

### A Complete Look at the Strategy





## Consistent, Mandatory Refuge System-Themed Exhibits

**Task:** At least one kiosk at each refuge and every visitor center/administrative office should have national messages and a map of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

**Background:** Until 1998, the headquarters realty office periodically shipped Refuge System maps to field stations, for display in offices and visitor centers. The large size (about 40 x 66 inches) and scale of these maps allowed visitors to easily view the Refuge System unit nearest to their home or along their vacation route. It was a compelling element and surprisingly interactive for a simple piece of paper.

Since 1998, field stations have worked with graphic designers or exhibit contractors to replicate maps for publication and display. These are often based on the map in the Refuge System visitor guide (which is a smaller scale and puts a large emphasis on Alaska) or from the USGS (which has great detail and topographic elements, but was last printed in 2002).

Ironically, as GIS technology has improved and nearly every field station can produce and print detailed maps it is difficult to find a good, current, appropriately scaled Refuge System map for publication or display.

Based on feedback from focus groups conducted recently, the fact that refuges are part of a national system is an important element for communications. The report states:

*Longevity and dedication: People are glad to know that the Refuge System has been around for more than 100 years, and they want to know that it will remain long into the future. They appreciate hearing about the personal dedication of the System and its people to protecting wildlife.*

Furthermore, the report states:

*These urban residents were intrigued by the proximity of refuges and the possibilities that await them there.*

Both of these responses indicate that simple map, showing urban users their proximity to refuges and emphasizing the heritage of the system, is an important element in communications.

### Action Items:

There are two major elements to this task:

1. Evaluate current policy and develop new policy so that within 5 years each visitor center has an exhibit that includes a Refuge System message and map

The team has been unable to find written policy stating that there will be a Refuge System map in each Visitor Center/Contact Station or Administrative Office. This team will draft a clear policy to address that.

2. Provide field stations with actual tools to implement this policy once it is developed.

This includes providing access to a current map in multiple formats (printed, digital, etc.) with a system to provide updates to the field on a regular basis. It would also include options to adapt the map for different color schemes/themes in visitor centers (so that colors/fonts/layouts are consistent). There will also be an option for outdoor kiosks and entrance stations, since many visitors are on refuge lands after hours or on weekends, when offices are typically closed.

## New Media

*“The scientific community needs to understand what ethical practitioners of public relations have long known: trust is not about information; it’s about dialogue and transparency.”* — Rick E. Borchelt

New media and social media are integral parts of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century communications strategy outlined in *“Conserving the Future,”* the strategic vision document for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Though these terms seem interchangeable, they are different. “New media” is an umbrella term for on-demand content accessible any time through the Internet or mobile devices. New media may or may not involve two-way communication. “Social media” is a subset of new media— sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr — which are interactive. Content producers give up some control of what appears on their page in return for the ability to have a “conversation” with users.

For generations, the majority of visitors experienced national wildlife refuges through direct contact. Today, more and more visitors experience their first contact with refuges through new media. By 2015, 65 percent of Americans will have smartphones. Today, 53 percent of U.S. internet users employ social media, including 49 percent of seniors and 86 percent of millennials.

Social media allow us to reach the public directly, sharing our mission and work in forums that are jargon-free, informal, interesting and popular. We can create awareness about refuge issues, build support and receive immediate feedback. We can connect with nontraditional audiences that we cannot reach through customary communication avenues.

New and social media enable the Service to market its work, and expand outreach, visitor services and interpretive programs without additional staff. Depending on the tool, we can provide visitors with relevant information, outreach, interpretation and programs directly to their homes as a location-based communication tool.

Advanced communication with potential visitors enhances their visits and fosters a deeper bond with the Refuge System. We can build a constituency for refuges and teach the public about wildlife, habitat, and scenery they may value and support even if they never see it in person. We can use social media as an interpretive tool, awakening a sense of wonder, a desire to spend time outdoors and a willingness to support conservation.

Finally, by engaging the social media community in highly charged situations — such as natural disasters or management controversies — we can help keep the public and refuge resources safe, avoid misunderstandings and address the public’s concerns. When citizens can discuss their concerns with agency staff directly and immediately, they feel empowered. Listening makes us relevant and can go a long way toward preventing or defusing crises.

A positive online experience may result in a visit to a refuge, where an individual’s experience with the Refuge System will only be enhanced. Visitors pleased with their Refuge System experience — both virtual and actual — are more likely to support the Refuge System. Without the support of the American public, our actions — however well intended — will fall short.

New media can foster a relationship between national wildlife refuges and visitors; be both informative and interpretive; involve and engage visitors; and create an effective experience. Appealing social media content encourages repeat online visits and allows for visits 24 hours a day, with little staff time required.

Digital technology provides a multitude of products without requiring more staff. Downloadable products can provide relevant information, important safety concerns, special event details, presentations of Service work, vital outreach messages, environmental education, and interpretation. Audio and video downloads, such as podcasts or YouTube videos, can reach a greater spectrum of visitors than older technologies. We can expand the reach of traditional print products by posting them to our websites. By making websites interactive, we can also invite visitors to explore areas that are normally not accessible or closed to visitation.

New media tools can also reduce the cost of printing. Through print-on-demand and e-publishing, products can be made available to the public free or at a fraction of the cost to the Service.

New and social media are constantly changing; the Service must stay up-to-date on these technologies to remain relevant in a changing America. Below are actions that the Service can take to enhance its virtual presence using new and social media.

- Develop Service-wide solutions and standards for new and social media, video streaming, photography, blogging, media monitoring, and web analytics.
- Develop regional social media strike teams that will help refuges set up social media pages promptly and efficiently to further Service outreach efforts.
- Develop training on the use of new media tools and integrate social media and new media into daily work plans and outreach. Include these topics and tools in Refuge Academy and any training that involves interaction with the public. Create a refuge-specific online training webinar on new and social media.
- Create web-based resources and media technologies to educate people about the value of refuges and conservation of natural resources, and how they can participate.
- Use interactive technologies to provide views of refuges not normally accessible to the public.
- Use new and social media tools to enhance visitor services programs for traditional refuge visitors (birders, photographers, hunters, educators, etc.).
- Set up social media emergency communication plans for use during severe weather events and similar fast-changing situations; train new-media staffers in effective, appropriate emergency communications.

## Social Media Introduction and “How To” Guide

What can we gain by using social media?

How do potential new visitors find out about refuges? Increasingly, it’s by surfing the Internet — the most popular way to plan leisure trips, used by about 68 million Americans in 2011, according to the U.S. Travel Association. And social media is an important part of users’ Internet experience. The Pew Research Center reports that two-thirds of all adults who go online use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Of those, 49 percent said they use social media to connect with others who share common interests or hobbies.

With these dynamic communication tools, the Service can reach the public directly, sharing our mission and our work in a setting that is informal, interesting and popular. We can create awareness about refuge issues, build support and get immediate feedback. This nontraditional form of communication can help us reach nontraditional audiences – like the 13- to 24-year-olds who made up about one-third of Facebook users, or the Hispanics and African-Americans who accounted for a combined 36.2 percent of Twitter users, as *Advertising Age* reported in May 2011. These audiences can be difficult to reach through our customary communication, environmental education and interpretation tools, but may already be using social media.

By virtually “meeting” potential new visitors on Facebook, Twitter or customized apps such as myRefuge, we encourage and enhance their visits. By staying in touch via social media afterwards, we foster a lasting bond. We build a constituency for refuges that are closed or in remote locations, teaching the public about wildlife, habitat and scenery they may value and support even if they never see it in person. We use social media as an interpretive tool, awakening a sense of wonder, a desire to spend time outdoors and a willingness to support conservation.

By engaging directly with the social media community in highly charged situations, such as natural disasters or management controversies, we can help keep the public and refuge resources safe, avoid misunderstandings and make it clear to people who care about refuges and conservation that their concerns are heard. When citizens can discuss their concerns with us directly and immediately, they feel empowered – and that can go a long way toward preventing or defusing crises.

When crises happen, social media play a vital role in getting accurate information to the press and the public promptly. In fact, a Service pilot program using Facebook proved so effective during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010 that the DOI quickly approved Facebook as an official communications tool.

New media is an integral part of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century communications strategy outlined in “Conserving the Future,” the strategic vision document for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

What is the difference between “social media” and “new media”?

“New media” is an umbrella term for websites and apps that provide information or entertainment on demand — everything from online news sites and content streaming to blogs and social media. New media are sometimes, but not always, tools for two-way communication. “Social media” such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr are interactive sites that encourage two-way communication.

Which social media sites can I use?

These are the most common DOI-approved tools:

The social media environment is evolving at breakneck speed, with new sites springing up, becoming popular, and making frequent changes to hold users’ interest. Most social media sites require users to accept lengthy “terms of service” agreements, which may conflict with government policies or legal obligations. To resolve these issues, DOI negotiates agreements with social media companies; these must be in place before USFWS can use a social media site for official business. See “Links and Online Resources” at the end of this guide for Service policies and examples of Service social media sites in action.

The following sites are currently approved for official use.

**Facebook:** Users create profiles, then build connections by becoming “friends” with people or “liking” pages. Refuges that create Facebook pages can share status updates, links, photos, videos and events that appear on their page and the Facebook news feeds of people who like their page.

**Twitter:** Users send out (“tweet”) messages of 140 characters or less. Followers subscribe to a Twitter stream to get all the tweets posted by that person. Hash tags are Twitter’s version of keywords. They use the # sign followed by a word or a short run-together phrase, with no spaces, such as #wildlife or #LondonOlympics. Hash tags help users follow trending topics.

**Flickr** is a public photo-sharing site. Users can see photos that others have posted and download copies for their own use. There is one official USFWS Flickr account/photo stream for each region, within which separate collections can be set up. If you want to add photos to Flickr, contact External Affairs in your region.

**YouTube** is a public video-sharing site. There is only one official USFWS YouTube account/channel, managed by External Affairs at Headquarters. Videos need to be captioned and include the FWS intro (“bumper”). If you want to post a video to this channel, contact External Affairs in your region.

**Blogs** are web sites where a person or group posts opinions and information – a sort of digital journal or column. Each entry is a “post.” Effective blogging calls for frequent, regular posts, and most blogs take time to build a following. USFWS has a national blog called “Open Spaces.” Any Service office can add a blog to its website. Contact your regional Web Council representative for blog approval and set up help.

<b>Social Media</b>	<u>Frequency:</u>	<u>Content Requirements:</u>	<u>Potential for</u>	<u>Accessibility:</u>
---------------------	-------------------	------------------------------	----------------------	-----------------------

<u>Options:</u>			<u>Interaction:</u>	
Facebook	medium high (at least weekly, better 2-3 posts per week)	posts of 2-3 sentences or less (usually with pictures)	High	account needed to comment or like pages, and to view some pages
Twitter	high (daily or multiple times per week)	very short (140 characters max)tweets	High	users typically need Twitter account to participate
Flickr	can be low, medium or high	number of pictures can vary; need to be good quality images	Low	anyone can view without Flickr account
YouTube	can be low, medium or high	good quality, edited video. Any audio track must be captioned. Highest viewership: 2 minutes or less	Medium	anyone can view, but use is impractical on slow internet connections
Blogs	medium (once per week at minimum)	several paragraphs (more content and editing involved)	Medium	anyone can view

What are some other types of new media?

- Your **refuge website** is an essential communication tool, and the NWRs’ new content management system (CMS) makes it easy to keep it up-to-date and inviting. Here’s an example:



- **QR (quick response) codes** are printed bar codes that smart phone users can scan to display text or open a web page. They can be used creatively – to play a bird song, for example, or stream a video.



- **Apps** (applications) are specialized pieces of software, often used on mobile devices, which can enhance a refuge visitor’s experience. Examples include *iBird*, a digital bird guide with sound and pictures, or *myRefuge*, an app developed in cooperation with the NWRs that displays maps, photos, and information for more than 300 refuges. [MyRefuge](#) is currently available for iPhone or iPad only. In its first year after launch, users downloaded it more than 15,000 times.
- **Widgets** are small pieces of code added that can make something interesting appear on your web page – clocks, hit counters, music players or features on special topics. One example is [“Endangered Species Act De-MYTH-ified,”](#) a widget created by Region 7.

Should my refuge use social media?

Any refuge can use social media, but plan carefully before deciding whether it’s right for your refuge. Also remember that there are members of the public who are not using social media, or do not have high-speed internet access, and we do not want to neglect them; you need a balanced communication strategy. When considering social media, think about:

**Time:** Social media is fast-moving, with many users posting once a day or more. If you want people to stick with you, your social media presence needs to be active and current. Plan to post at least 2-3 times per week, and to invest time in developing quality content. If this is more than you can manage, consider feeding content to a regional page or account.

**Staffing:** Social media staffers must write in a style that balances informality with professionalism. They must be committed to accuracy and comfortable with public criticism. They must understand what makes your refuge and audience unique. Creativity and a good eye for choosing photographs also come in handy. One way to create a well-rounded social media team is by matching an intern or volunteer with an experienced staffer.



**Potential fan base:** Who are you trying to connect with? You may get users from all over the world, but it is important to focus on your main audience. What kind of content will meet their interests and concerns?

**Goals:** What do you want to communicate? Do you want to promote events, educate the public about a specific issue, or make your refuge more visible in the community? Deciding what you want to achieve will help you focus your content and track your success.

Getting started

1. Get a feel for new media by feeding some content to your region’s new media point of contact, an experienced professional who can help you learn these tools. You’ll get a sense of the process while spreading the word about your refuge to a wider-than-local audience. Browse [other USFWS social media sites](#).
2. Familiarize yourself with the Service’s new media policy and best practices (see links below). Talk to colleagues at other refuges about their experiences and the lessons they’ve learned.
3. Think strategically. A written plan (formal or informal) will help you get started, make sure your plans are realistic, and track your progress. Questions to answer include: What are your goals? How will you define success? How many staffers and how much time can you dedicate to new media? How frequently will you post? How will you cover for a social media staffer who is away? Do you have (or can you find) terrific Service photos to illustrate your posts? If not, will any of the photographers who visit your refuge give you permission to use some of their photos? (All federal government photos are in the public domain and anyone may use them, but use of an individual’s or business’ photograph without permission may violate copyright law.) How will you handle controversial topics and critical comments? Can you maintain an active social media presence in future years?
4. Before launching your new media account, put together a collection of “evergreen” posts and/or tweets – items that can run any time, such as tidbits about your refuge’s animals, plants, special places or history – and photos to illustrate them. This stockpiled content will make your social media launch much less stressful. It’s a good idea to keep some evergreen content handy for those inevitable stretched-too-thin days.
5. Important: **You must go through your social media point of contact to set up your refuge’s social media accounts**, so you will be protected under the “terms of service agreements” – DOI’s formal contracts with social media providers. These ensure that the Service retains ownership of content posted through our accounts. Your social media contact person will also help you avoid pitfalls such as duplicate or misnamed accounts, which can be hard to correct.

These are the new media points of contact as of September 2012:	
Region 1: Scott Eckert	Region 5: Keith Shannon
Region 2: Nicole Osbourn (N. Haskett in Lotus Notes)	Region 6: Ryan Moehring
Region 3: Courtney Celley	Region 7: Rose Primmer

6. The Service's [comment policy](#) should be posted on all social media pages.
7. Follow the Service's [graphic standards](#), which spell out the proper use of the USFWS and NWRS logos, approved typefaces and badges.
8. Make sure you have a way to keep track of where your content comes from. This ensures that you are complying with copyright laws - posting only content that is the property of the federal government (i.e. was created by a federal employee in the course of their work), or was provided to you with the photographer's or writer's permission for use on new media.
9. Learn how your chosen sites' analytical tools can help you track your progress. You can learn more about how many people you are reaching and where. The Service's newest social media tool, Sprout Social, can help you schedule posts in advance, tailor them to specific audiences, and track your success in reaching and engaging the public. Ask your new media point of contact to arrange a Sprout Social training webinar.

Some suggestions on content:

**Short is sweet** in the social media world. Twitter's 140-character limit forces users to be brief. Facebook posts of one to two sentences are ideal. Studies show you have five seconds, on average, to grab the viewers' attention, so try for a catchy opening. Some techniques that work are:

- Wordplay and puns — *"Bear with us,"* with a photo of a bear
- Questions that ask the viewer about experiences or opinions — *"Have you ever seen an eagle egg hatch?"*
- Short phrases that telegraph a post's emotional impact — *"Good news for endangered songbirds!"*
- Phrases spelling out what audience would care most about the information — *"Hey Alaskans! If you're planning to hunt sheep... here's something you need to know."*
- Mini-stories about individuals — whether people or animals. Avoid: *"The National Wildlife Refuge System's first game warden was Paul Kroegel, who began working at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge in 1903."* Try this instead: *"Who would work full time for \$1 a month? That's what Paul Kroegel did."*

**Write informally**, using language that anyone can understand. Aim for a tone that's warm, but professional. A classic rule of thumb is, Write as if you were telling your mother about something that happened to you. (That's assuming your mother is not a PhD. conservation biologist.)

**Check facts** before posting them. If you make a mistake and catch it quickly, delete the post and re-write it. If your viewers catch the mistake before you do, post a comment owning up to the error with a minimum of fuss, and giving the correct the information.

**Don't post press releases** or report on official meetings, rules, etc. With very few exceptions, the public cares about nature and wildlife, not the federal bureaucracy. The Service has a special Facebook page, USFWS News, where press releases of more-than-local interest can be posted. If you must write about official activities, use plain language and focus on what these events or activities will mean to people, wildlife or landscapes. If you use Facebook or Twitter to distribute a press release, summarize one main point and post a link to the full document.

**Connect viewers** to the natural, historical or cultural assets that make your refuge special. For example:

- Alaska's Selawik National Wildlife Refuge is on land that has been home to Native Alaskan Iñupiat people for thousands of years. Education Specialist Brittany Sweeney posts about Iñupiaq tools, special foods, words for different kinds of snow – teaching Facebook fans in the Lower 48 about this culture in an engaging, respectful way. These posts build understanding about life in rural Alaska, and demonstrate why the refuge is a special place worth protecting. Local people also enjoy seeing their world reflected in a positive light.
- At Edwin B. Fosythe National Wildlife Refuge in NJ, Visitor Services Specialist Tiffany Kersten posts engaging photos of refuge animals with a few facts about the animal's life history. It doesn't have to be charismatic megafauna; Kersten recently did a post about snails. "I know nothing about snails- but I googled snails and learned some interesting tidbits and posted that," she said. "I have been getting very positive feedback. People say they learn one new thing about nature almost every day from our page. "

**Use your imagination.** A photograph in a magazine inspired Aaron Mize, acting refuge manager at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, to create a series of posts that featured scenic photographs of refuges all across the country, each with an arrow and the words *"This person loves refuges"* superimposed on top. Viewers were simply asked to share the posts. "It went viral because no one had seen it before and it was a cool concept," he said.

**Know your audience.** Mize says Bosque's Facebook fans are "99 percent non-consumptive users." Many are strongly anti-hunting, so "I keep my posts about hunting factual and don't post pictures of dead animals. ... As a hunter with dead animals all over my office and house, this goes against my nature ... but we must be strategic and smart about engaging our stakeholders."

**Watch your timing.** Use Sprout Social or Facebook's Insights function to keep track of the days and times when your page gets the most viewers, and try to post during those times. Don't deluge your audience: if you have a lot of events to post, space them out over several days, one or two at a time. If you have a regular feature (like a caption call, photo mash-up, or a refuge notebook), try to post it on the same day every week; this will keep viewers coming back to your page regularly.

**Post and tweet with all deliberate speed** when events are happening that affect your audience. Here are two examples of refuges that used social media wisely in a crunch:

- When the State of Alaska announced a change in hunting regulations just as hunting season was about to start, Interpretive Specialist Cathy Curby at Arctic Refuge didn't have many ways to get the word out to the rural communities whose residents hunt on the refuge. "I was nervous about putting the info on Facebook because a majority of our Facebook followers are from outside AK and like cute and cuddly animal photos," Curby wrote. She opened the post with a targeted appeal to Alaskans who hunt on the refuge. She kept it short and specific, and included a map. "To our surprise we received a number of 'likes,' didn't receive any negative comments, and had 3 shares."
- When the Honey Prairie fire burned across Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge from April 2011 to April 2012, roads, waterways, the visitors center and the entire refuge were closed at various times. With help from two interns, refuge ranger Sarah Olscamp worked alongside the fire incident commanders and public affairs staff, posting information on Facebook and Twitter as soon as it was approved for release. The team posted photos, videos and human interest stories of firefighters at work. Some of the content was picked up by state and national news media, and the local community came to rely on the refuge's Facebook page for fresh, accurate information. "I realized people were using it to follow their family members who were fighting the fire, to find out what they were doing and know that they were safe," Olscamp said. "We'd get posts on Facebook saying, 'please tell us how we can help you.' "

We've saved what we believe to be **the most important suggestion** for last:

**"Photos, photos, photos,"** says Don Freiday, visitor services manager at Forsyth NWR. "A post with a great photo will get six or seven times as many 'likes' as a post with no photo." The managers of the USFWS Headquarters page and the USFWS Refuge page almost never put up a Facebook post that does not include a photo. When you find a *good* photo, we have found that it pays to take a few more minutes and look for a really *great* photo.

Tap the NCTC Digital Library, the Service's national and regional Flickr pages, and your refuge's photo archives for the best photos you can find. It is OK to download photos from other Service Facebook pages and use them in your posts, but be careful not to misuse a copyrighted photo. If you are in doubt, contact the original poster and ask where the photo came from.

Avoid so-called "grip and grin" photos of important people shaking hands or giving speeches. You can make an exception for celebrities, but be sparing with photos of government officials who aren't known outside the Service. Most people aren't interested in pictures of people they don't recognize.

Use photo credits and credit the photographer by name whenever possible, especially if he or she has donated an image to you. This will ensure that photographers are happy to continue working with you. Photo credits should, at a minimum, name the agency that owns the image. Sample credits:

Photo: USFWS

Photo: Roy W. Lowe/USFWS

Photo: Fred Smith, Friends of Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge

## Social Media Etiquette

Between regions, programs and field stations, the USFWS now has more than 100 official social media pages and streams. We encourage you to follow these, and share their content whenever your audience will find it relevant, interesting or fun. Sharing is the life blood of social media.

When you re-tweet someone else's content on Twitter, 'netiquette' considers it good manners to include the original poster's content as is, with minor changes to save space or fit it to your audience, or with a short comment if space permits. If you re-tweet someone else's content unchanged, put the letters RT followed by an @ sign and the person's Twitter handle at the start of the tweet, like this: RT @USFWSSoutheast. This is the Twittersphere's way to credit the creator of the content. If you change it slightly, use the letters MT for 'modified tweet' at the start of the post.

When sharing or re-tweeting content from another Service social media stream, it is courteous to keep the original URL web address instead of replacing it with your own link. URLs created by bit.ly and other such sites can be tracked using analytic tools built in to the website that created them, or using Sprout Social. By leaving the original poster's URL unchanged, you allow them to see how far their content has spread – valuable information that can help that person use social media more effectively. If you change the URL, you break that information chain.

Friends groups' Twitter streams, Facebook and Flickr pages are not official pages. Service employees should not manage Friends' social media content during working hours. Since the Friends group may hold the copyright to content on their page, and may plan to use it on products for sale, get permission before re-purposing their content.

Support one another. Each refuge has its own social media community, and we also belong to the bigger, Service- and government-wide social media community.

Join the Service's new media managers group on Facebook to stay in contact with others doing similar work. We share content, technical tips, and ideas. The group is open to anyone working with social media – just ask your regional contact or a social media colleague to add you.

If you get really interested in new media, consider joining the New Media Working Group. Members hold conference calls roughly once a month to help keep the Service up to date in this fast-changing field. See "regional points of contact" above.

Links and Online Resources:

### Social Media Guidance and Policy:

- USFWS-approved social media sites, official policies and best practices:  
<https://inside.fws.gov/index.cfm/go/post/newmedia>

- “Conserving the Future” website: <http://americaswildlife.org/vision/>
- Interior Department social media policy: <http://www.interior.gov/notices/Social-Media-Policy.cfm>
- USFWS blog policy: <http://www.fws.gov/policy/115fw9.pdf>
- Social media comment policy: <http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/comment-policy.html>
- USFWS graphic design policy and graphics standards: <https://inside.fws.gov/index.cfm/go/post/printing-and-publishing>
- GSA guidance on using social media and websites in the federal government: <http://www.howto.gov>

#### USFWS Social Media Sites:

- USFWS social media hub: <http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/>
- “Open Spaces” – USFWS’s national blog: <http://www.fws.gov/news/blog/index.cfm?reinit=1>
- Links to the Service’s HQ and regional Flickr pages: <http://digitalmedia.fws.gov/cdm4/flickr.php>

#### Tutorials and how-to info:

- Information, tutorials, webinars and tips on social media for government: <http://www.govloop.com/>
- Best Practices for using FB in government: <https://www.box.com/shared/idnp0hs026>
- Guide to FB Insights (statistics about visits to your page, known in new media jargon as “analytics”) <http://www.facebook.com/help?page=percent20168695703191089>
- Twitter basics: [https://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics#topic\\_114](https://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics#topic_114)
- 15 commandments for government on Twitter: <http://www.govloop.com/page/15-commandments-for-government-agencies-on-twitter>

#### Tools and Resources:

- Digital photo and video library at the National Conservation Training Center: <http://digitalmedia.fws.gov/>
- URL shortening: The USFWS uses <https://bitly.com> .  
It is easy to set up a bit.ly account, and “hits” to your bit.ly links are easy to track.
- “New Media for Interpretation” has information on digital tools for creating new media products: <http://newmediaforinterpretation.weebly.com>

## Interactive Map Viewers

Many times a Refuge System database is developed to help with resource management duties by capturing refuge information, but lacks the crucial ability to be seen on a map. Although databases are good analytic tools, especially if the user is familiar with the data, an interactive map viewer can help a user visualize locations and trends across a landscape. This is particularly valuable when the user is not familiar with all aspects of the landscape, such as political boundaries, natural resources, structures and resource management units. Interactive map viewers provide visual communications that give people ready access to key information without having to know how to mine the data or ask someone to mine the data for them. This is useful both to internal Service audiences and externally to partners and the public.

For an internal database where an interactive map viewer may be helpful, consider a database which contains information about refuge surveys. Currently, the database can provide reports. However, if a user wants a landscape view of where the surveys are occurring for a specific species, or to know if those surveys are in multiple landscape conservation cooperatives (LCCs), or if the surveys are cooperative, etc., a person with database and GIS skills is needed to present the data in a map-based view like the one shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Refuges shown in red are conducting surveys for a particular species.

Instead, if the survey database is presented in an interactive map viewer, the information can quickly be accessed and understood by a refuge employee without his needing first to prepare the data or find another employee to do this.

The Refuge System already has an interactive map viewer – the Service Lands Mapper. The public can display refuge boundaries, and – where available – trails, boat ramps, fee stations, headquarters and administrative buildings, along with other background information. In the future, this map viewer or a similar interactive mapping platform can be used for communicating popular information like hunting unit boundaries or photography locations that are useful to a refuge visitor. This would provide an additional way for the public to access refuge information.

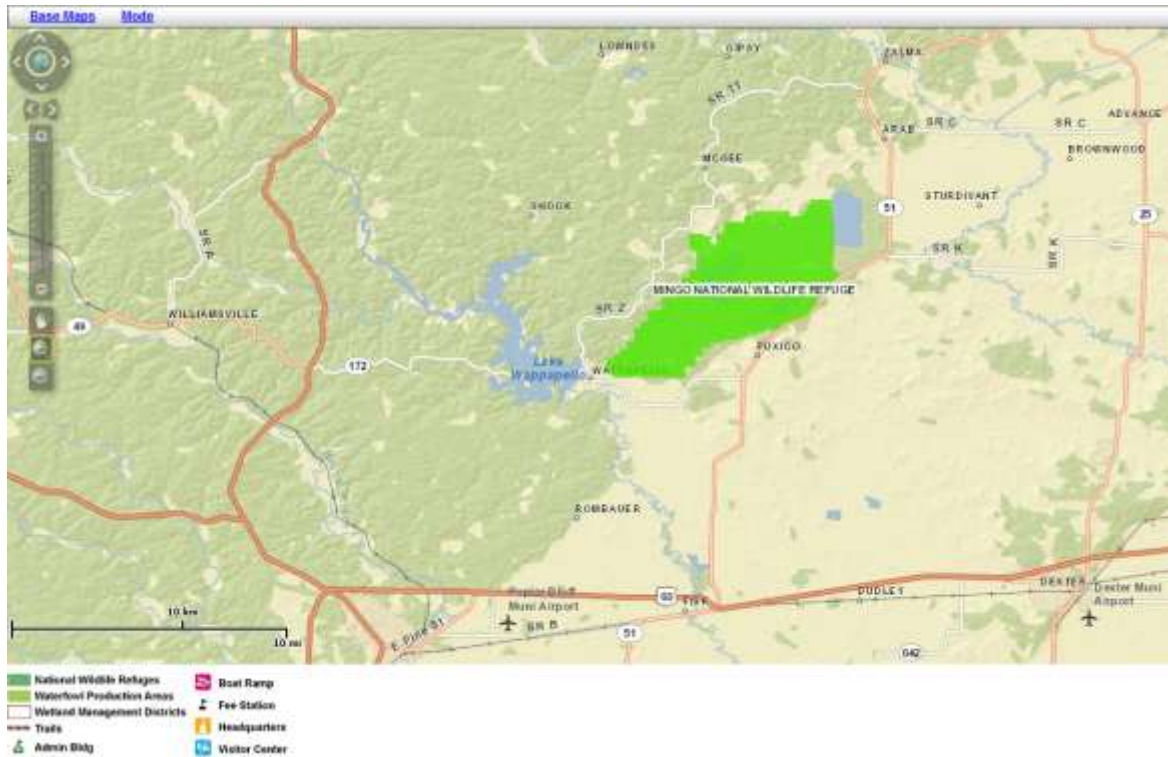


Figure 2: Service Lands Mapper ([http://gis.fws.gov/FWSLands\\_Mapper\\_Lite/](http://gis.fws.gov/FWSLands_Mapper_Lite/))

Internally for Service employees, this interactive mapping platform or a similar one can be used to display information such as fire management units or invasive treatments, showing where surveys are occurring as discussed previously, etc. An interactive map viewer is meant to quickly provide visual information and reports for all employees regardless of GIS or database skillset using standard web browser software on the employee's computer.

#### Action Items:

1. Coordinate with the Refuge System GIS coordinator and Geospatial Advisory Committee (GAC) to understand the Refuge System geospatial capacity survey results. The survey results contain data quality and availability and will guide where geospatial data needs to be created or updated for management units, fire management units, hunt units, etc. according to GAC priorities. The Refuge System geospatial data integration strategy is a model for making data available in mapping viewers.
2. Work with the Refuge System GIS coordinator to develop guidelines for core fields such as or code, Service Literal and real property IDs in databases that involve locations on the ground for inclusion into web mapping. The Refuge System GAC and the GIS Steering Committee Locations Task Group can provide guidelines.
3. For the internal mapping viewer, work with core groups of Service employees, including the Refuge System chief cartographer and Refuge System GIS coordinator to determine what information they would like to display, and what reports they would like to be able to print or import into other Service databases. (i.e. real property, invasive treatments, etc.). Follow



guidance for contracting when building data systems, such as developed by Region 8 for the GIS Steering Committee.

Whether communicating with an internal or external audience, interactive map viewers help people visually comprehend the data stored in the Service's databases. The Service is data-rich, but the massive amount of data can be overwhelming. By having interactive map viewers accessing and displaying Service data, that data becomes readily accessible in a visual context of the landscape. This can reduce the time needed to find information, so people can focus on resource concerns instead of struggling with a database.

### **Staff Locator**

In an organization as large and spread out as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it is sometimes hard to find out which Service employees specialize in particular areas and how to contact them. Creating a web-based tool to locate staff and subject matter experts will help Service employees better interact and work collaboratively. It will also help external audiences, such as the media, obtain contact information more easily and efficiently. Service staff, media and partners should be able to identify and find staff and subject matter experts quickly.

The Service has several current avenues, such as SharePoint, *InsideFWS*, and the external Service website that could potentially serve this purpose. But the best possible option at this point is the new Bison Connect e-mail system. The system provides not only e-mail and calendar systems, but other applications that will enhance our collaborative abilities and allow employees to work together from any location. Once the new system is fully optimized, we will be able to explore our options and more decisively establish what application(s) could be used for our staff and subject matter expert locator tool.

## Refuge Boundaries within Google Maps

### What is covered, what is missing, and strategies for moving forward

#### Background:

Google Maps is arguably the most widely used online mapping software available in the United States. In addition to being available on a computer screen, Google's maps and data are standard on all Android- powered phones and on all iPhones prior to the recent release of the iPhone 5. Because of Google's ubiquity, it is critical that boundaries of the National Wildlife Refuge System appear on Google Maps. This not only allows residents to find their local national wildlife refuge, but it also gives them directions to that refuge and can point them to the official refuge website as well as other information that may be linked to that location on the map.



#### The Problem:

The problem with the use of Google Maps is primarily missing or incorrect data, but it may also be the inclusion of data that should not be made widely available to the public. For example, easements on private land that are held by the Service should probably not appear on Google Maps. The more common problem, however, is that refuge boundaries are missing from the maps. For the two Service regions surveyed for this white paper, Regions 2 and 8, eight of the refuge boundaries were missing from Google Maps as of early November, 2012. This is a major improvement from just a few months prior when roughly half of the refuge boundaries for Region 8 were missing. However, Google agreed to have the boundaries for California added and that state is now complete save for just a single refuge boundary.

The issue of easement holdings appearing on public maps such as Google Maps is a slightly contentious one because some regions feel that showing easement boundaries as official Service lands is not a problem. However, in the western states in particular, where government land holdings can outnumber private holdings, the decision was made to not show easement holdings as Service lands on public maps. Mapping platforms such as Google Maps make no distinction between fee lands and easements; these different categories will show up as exactly the same color and designation on Google Maps. This is not only confusing for the public but it also creates a problem if a landowner sees his privately owned land with a Service label on it and with a designation that makes it appear to be public land. To avoid such problems, the chief of realty in Region 9 recently announced that easement data should not be made widely available to outside agencies and on public sites such as Google Maps.

#### The Solution:

Solutions to the primary problem of missing data are twofold: the first is for Google to take the lead on entering the missing refuge boundaries. The Service has been working with Google for many months on this. Chris Lett in particular, deserves credit here. Within the past several months, much progress has

been made. For example, 21 of Region 8's 46 wildlife refuges (excluding wildlife management areas) were not included in Google Maps on September 7, 2012. By November, only three of those boundaries were missing. This is a major accomplishment because inputting those boundaries would have required many hours of work. We are now corresponding with Google staff to see if they can continue the same efforts throughout the rest of the country.

The earlier work was done by a group of international volunteers, at no cost to Google. However, because the work is done by volunteers, there is also less quality control. Qualified Service staff will need to check the accuracy of refuge boundaries and information about the refuges.

In addition to the recent updates in California, Google has added several refuges in Nevada. This appears to signal that Google is actively building its collection of refuge data. As of November 2012, however, the complete status of those efforts is unknown, because the contact at Google is very difficult to reach. We hope that Google will add the rest of the missing wildlife refuges over the next several months. We will continue monitoring to assess progress.

If Google fails to continue to add missing refuge boundaries, the next option is for Service staff to do it. This process is rather tedious, however, and should be done by a GIS specialist or someone working under the supervision of a GIS specialist. Detailed instructions will be provided to those who choose to add refuge boundaries internally.

In addition to creating missing boundaries, edits to the current boundaries or attached information will also be required in some cases. For example, one of the key requirements for use in Google Maps is for the name of the national wildlife refuge to be searchable. This helps potential visitors locate the refuge. (If the refuge name is not directly searchable in Google Maps, people may be deterred from visiting.) Therefore, it is important for Service staff to perform two quality checks for each refuge. They may also want to add additional information as shown below:

1. Ensure that the refuge boundary is both complete and accurate. This includes ensuring that no portions outside of the acquired fee lands are displayed as being Service property.
2. Test to see that the refuge name is searchable within Google Maps. Add the name if it is missing. Verify that the refuge name is spelled correctly in Google Maps.
3. (Optional but encouraged) Add the location of the refuge visitor center so that potential visitors can use this location for a destination when Google generates directions to the refuge.

For all of these tasks, Service staff will use the mapmaker portion of Google Maps (<http://www.google.com/mapmaker>). Through either a new or existing account, the user is able to add and modify boundaries, add a point location for the visitor center or the building footprint, add an address, contact information, pictures and hyperlinks to the official Refuge System website. In many cases, changes to the attached refuge information may be needed without modifying the boundary. These changes should be very fast to implement, whereas boundary additions or modifications will be more time-consuming.

We propose that this work be implemented on a region-by-region basis either by GIS staff or with their supervision. For example, this type of project would be suitable for a volunteer or intern, assuming they are provided training and oversight. Although not critical to the business of the Service, this effort is important for improving refuge visitation and enhancing public knowledge of the Refuge System.

## Performance Standards

To get all refuge employees involved in implementing the Refuge System Strategic Communications Plan, we suggest including this plan in all refuge employees' performance plans. Rather than develop a new "critical element," we propose using existing critical elements (i.e., those that involve communication/outreach/partnerships/employee excellence, customer service) and inserting one or more of the following phrases into the "fully successful" section of the performance standard.

<b>Critical Element #:</b>	<b>GPRA or Strategic Goal (For example: Employee Excellence; Communication and Outreach; Serving the Public; Partnerships; or Customer Service)</b>  <b>Performance Measure:</b>
<b>Performance Standards</b>	
<b>Exceptional</b>	
<b>Superior</b>	
<b>Fully Successful</b>	<p><b>In addition to the benchmark standards, the following measurable criteria apply:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and discuss the Refuge System Strategic Communications Plan with all staff. Take positive and measurable steps to implement the Refuge System Strategic Communications Plan by sponsoring # programs, hosting # special events, actively promoting new visits to the refuge, and/or engaging # youth ambassadors.</li> <li>• Use the Refuge System Strategic Communications Plan as guidance for traditional and new media "conversations" with partners and the public.</li> <li>• Use state-of-the-art social media tools to communicate the Service and Refuge System core messages to the public, partners, and staff.</li> <li>• Lead a group discussion on the Refuge System Strategic Communications Plan.</li> <li>• Use the Refuge System Strategic Communication Plan as guidance for talking with refuge visitors on a regular and recurring basis.</li> <li>• Use Refuge System strategic plan messages in exhibits, press releases, presentations, refuge websites, and other communication media.</li> <li>• Use the Refuge System Strategic Communication Plan to seek at least # opportunities to reach out to or attract target audiences identified in the Plan.</li> <li>• Use the Refuge System Strategic Communications Plan and the standard messages to develop and maintain good working relations with Congressional contacts by providing at least # of outreach efforts annually.</li> </ul>
<b>Minimally Successful</b>	
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	