

FRIENDS

Engaging Local Citizens as Partners in Conservation

From its start in 1903, the National Wildlife Refuge System has depended on concerned citizens eager to help protect America's natural resources. Many conservation-minded citizens serve as refuge volunteers; others have formed nonprofit Friends organizations to support refuges. A Friends partnership is made up of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Friends organization and a refuge or complex of refuges. Their partnership is formalized and described in a Friends Partnership Agreement. All Refuge Friends organizations share the same primary mission: the support of a refuge, complex of refuges or program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Refuge Friends organizations began forming in the 1980s. Their growth accelerated with the passage of the Volunteer and Community Partnership Act of 1998, directing the Refuge System to encourage volunteer assistance, facilitate non-federal partnerships, and encourage donations by organizations.



**Huron Wetland Management District,
South Dakota**

Local Friends group and Service staff take in the view after building a new observation deck at the Maga Ta-Hohopi Wetland Production Area in South Dakota. Credit: USFWS

185

*Refuge Friends organizations support **280** wildlife refuges and Wetland Management Districts.*



*An estimated **40,000** members.*

*An estimated **\$15 MILLION** raised for conservation.*

Friends are among our most dedicated local conservation partners who work hand in hand with the Refuge System to engage the American public in wildlife conservation.

Friends contribute millions of dollars for conservation and recreation projects, they donate tens of thousands of volunteer hours and foster relationships with communities neighboring national wildlife refuges.





Friends organizations provide welcoming faces at refuges, staffing nature stores and visitor centers across the country.

What We Deliver

Partnerships as a Conservation Tool

The Friends Program provides support and guidance to almost 200 locally based Friends partnerships and facilitates the formation of new ones at all staffed refuges or refuge complexes.

Community-Centered Conservation

The Friends Program helps build on-the-ground capacity for local conservation through a Friends grant program in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. It also offers specialized training programs to strengthen Service-Friends partnerships. Friends organizations help build community by serving as liaisons between a refuge and local residents.

What Friends Deliver

Fuel to Local Economies

Friends organizations are often the lead partners alongside local Chambers of Commerce organizing birding festivals that promote more nature-based tourism in their community, spurring the local economy and adding jobs.

Enhanced Visitor Experiences

Many Friends organizations enrich visitors' refuge experience by offering educational items at nature stores that Friends manage and operate within refuge visitor centers. Funds raised at these stores help fund on-the-ground conservation and visitor facility projects at refuges.



Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Michigan/Ontario

The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, the refuge's Friends organization, helped raise \$3.5 million to build a 740-foot-long fishing pier and boat dock for the Michigan Sea Grant School. The pier is free to the public and can accommodate up to 100 anglers.



Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex Georgia/South Carolina

With the help of a generous grant from a local foundation, the Friends of Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges purchased a 15-seat electric shuttle to increase accessibility to Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge. The shuttle helps the refuge expand interpretive programming as well as access for the elderly, very young and mobility-impaired.

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