

2024

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# FINAL REPORT



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

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**LISTENING TO COMMUNITY PROJECT**

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**Client Team**



**Consultant Team**



**Partner Organizations**



## Part 1

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2021, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge was designated a Flagship Urban Wildlife Refuge. This honor recognizes the many important roles that conservation areas play in an urban context and provides additional financial resources to incorporate the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program *Standards of Excellence* and *Critical Elements* into everyday decision making and long-term community engagement strategies (Page 5). This designation also recognizes the need for more intentional inclusivity that works to reduce barriers to participation, expand awareness, and ensure a welcoming and safe environment for all.

As part of the Flagship Urban Wildlife Refuge designation, the Refuge is allocated additional funding to support planning, action, and implementation in support of community engagement and relationship building goals. Refuge staff recognized that merely increasing promotion and visitation would not necessarily result in stronger relationships with nearby communities. To ensure that this additional funding could help reduce access barriers, strengthen trust, and expand awareness, the Refuge embarked on a multi-year process to learn more about the surrounding communities and to create facilities, activities, and programs that better serve their needs and interests.

In a joint effort between U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges, SE Group, Lacy Consulting Services, Watson Wenk Group, and GenWild, a multi-year project was designed to learn about - and to learn from - the communities surrounding the Refuge and identify actions that could be taken to address the identified barriers. This project team developed and refined a set of project goals and desired outcomes (Page 5) that are informed by the Standards of Excellence, Critical Elements, and the unique context of the Refuge.

The following report outlines a brief history of the Refuge, a Community Profile, a recap of external engagement events, and a review of the tools and resources created to support ongoing outreach with the community, partners, and educators.

***This designation recognizes the need for more intentional inclusivity that works to reduce barriers to participation, expand awareness, and ensure a welcoming and safe environment for all.***

## STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

- ◆ Know and relate to the community.
- ◆ Use stepping stones to engage people in nature.
- ◆ Build partnerships.
- ◆ Be a community asset.
- ◆ Ensure adequate long-term resources.
- ◆ Provide equitable access.
- ◆ Ensure visitors feel welcome and safe.
- ◆ Model sustainability.

## CRITICAL ELEMENTS

- ◆ **Community-focused:** Prioritize community needs with long-term commitments.
- ◆ **Intentional:** Adopt community engagement methods that are well-informed, purposeful and measurable.
- ◆ **Inclusive:** Implement equitable solutions to involve the community in solving conservation challenges.
- ◆ **Collaborative:** Form long-term transformational relationships with community partners and across Service programs with the goal of increasing the collective impacts of conservation efforts.

## PROJECT GOALS

- ◆ Improve our ability to understand and meaningfully engage with neighboring communities
- ◆ Cultivate trust throughout the community
- ◆ Create deep, lasting knowledge of the community that transcends staff turnover

## DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ◆ **Enhance Physical Access:** The Refuge will reduce barriers to access and transportation to the Refuge by enhancing pedestrian entrances and community informed recreation opportunities.
- ◆ **Foster a Welcoming Environment:** The Refuge will foster and be recognized as an inclusive and welcoming space for diverse audiences to enjoy and connect to nature.
- ◆ **Maintain and Expand Partnerships:** The Refuge will commit to a new spirit of coordination, collaboration, and interdependence with others with expanded engagement with youth and non-traditional audiences through community-based partnerships and internships.
- ◆ **Reduce Language Barriers:** The Refuge will empower Spanish speaking communities to connect to nature and the Refuge by embedding Spanish language proficiency into workforce planning, communication, and outreach.

## ABOUT THE REFUGE

### Visitation

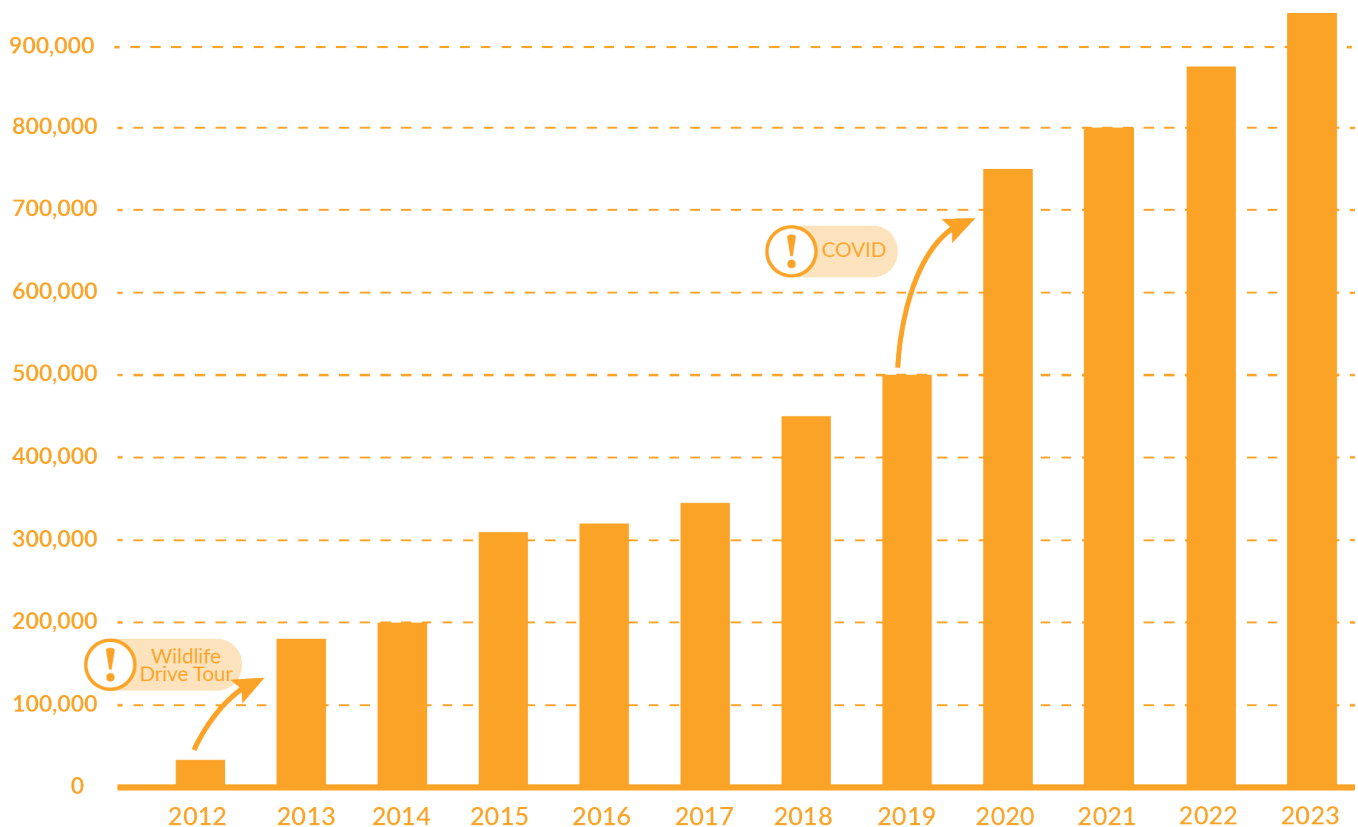
The Refuge has seen drastic shifts in annual visitation in the last 10-15 years. In 2012, the Refuge was receiving approximately 32,000 annual visits. With the addition of the Wildlife Drive Tour in 2012, visitation more than tripled by 2013. From 2013 to 2019, the Refuge saw a steady increase in visitors, growing from 180,000 to 500,000. In 2020, visitation spiked as a result of COVID and visitors wanting to find a safe open space to recreate in. Visitation from 2012 to 2022 grew approximately 1500%, a trend that has placed pressure on Visitor Services staff and visitor amenities (trails, parking, restrooms, etc.). In recent years, annual visitation has reached over 950,000.

### Land History

Located just north of Denver, Colorado, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge is a 15,000-acre conservation area and one of the largest wildlife refuges in the nation. The Refuge has a unique story – originally the lands of the Lipan Apache, Ute, and Comanche who followed large herds of bison and lived off the land, to settlers who transformed the prairie into farmland, to war-time manufacturing and chemical sites operated by the federal government, and now returned to prairie grasslands and wildlife sanctuaries.

The Refuge is now home to hundreds of unique species including bison, black-footed ferrets, bald eagles, and many different landscape types. The Refuge has a long environmental history that involves large-scale remediation efforts—the result of which is one of the most successful examples of federal land restoration and conservation (Page 7).

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL NWR VISITORS (2012-2023)



## Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge History

### 1500 AD-1850

Between 1500 AD and 1850 Prior to becoming a Refuge, the Apache, Ute, and Comanche followed large herds of bison, hunted deer, and lived off the land. As they dealt with climate changes and conflicts with European settlers, they became more nomadic and were forced from their land and left the area.

### 1850-1861

Gold was discovered in Colorado and attracted white settlers to the area that is present-day Denver. In 1851, this land was deeded to the Arapaho tribe as laid out in the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie. The presence of white settlers and land conflicts led to the 1861 Treaty of Fort Wise and the cessation of land by tribal leaders.

### 1861-1942

Homesteaders had similar challenges as the Native American's having to deal with dry land farming, securing water for crops and national and local economic troubles. By 1930 there were several hundred families living on farms at the Refuge.

### 1942

The U.S. was brought into World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor. To support war efforts, the U.S. Army designated the Rocky Mountain Arsenal as a chemical weapons manufacturing facility. The specific location was chosen because of the local workforce, railroad network, and its position along the Rocky Mountains. The land was seized by the federal government and farmers and their families were forced to abandon their homes.

### 1980-1987

Chemical production at the site stopped and the U.S. Army and Shell Oil Company began an extensive environmental cleanup. In 1986, a U.S. Army Contractor discovered a roost of bald eagles within the bounds of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. This discovery prompts U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to become involved in managing wildlife at the site. In 1987, Rocky Mountain Arsenal was placed on EPA's Superfund List.

### 1992

Congress designates the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Act and determines that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would manage the remediated land.

### 2004

The refuge was officially established on April 21, 2004, when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service accepted 4,930 acres of land in the southern and southeastern areas of the site. Additional lands were added over the years until the refuge reached its current size.

### 2021-PRESENT DAY

In 2021, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge was designated a Flagship Urban Wildlife Refuge. Over 950,000 annual visitors come to the Refuge to learn, explore, recreate, and relax.

## Part 2

# COMMUNITY PROFILE

## DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT

In 2022, Lacy Consulting Services prepared a demographic report to establish a baseline understanding of population characteristics of four adjacent communities to the Refuge: Commerce City, Aurora, Montbello, and Gateway-Green Valley Ranch. The demographic attributes reviewed included age, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, housing characteristics, poverty threshold, means of transportation, primary language spoken at home, and disability. This demographic information, in combination with the gap analysis and community member surveys, supports the need to establish effective and intentional outreach and engagement strategies to fulfill the Project Goals and meet the Standards of Excellence and Critical Elements of an Urban Wildlife Refuge.

The findings and planning considerations found in Part 2 are first discussed separately as demographic findings and findings from the gap analysis (*Community Perceptions of the Refuge*) before they are summarized as a whole in the *Community Profile Key Findings* discussion on Page 13.

### LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH SPOKEN AT HOME

Study Area	Colorado
45.7%	16.2%

### POVERTY RATE (WHITE)

Study Area	Colorado
11.8%	8.9%

### POVERTY RATE (HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN)

Study Area	Colorado
15.7%	14.8%

### POVERTY RATE (BLACK OR AFRICAN-AMERICAN)

Study Area	Colorado
21.3%	16.8%

### MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION (DROVE-ALONE)

Study Area	Colorado
75%	65%

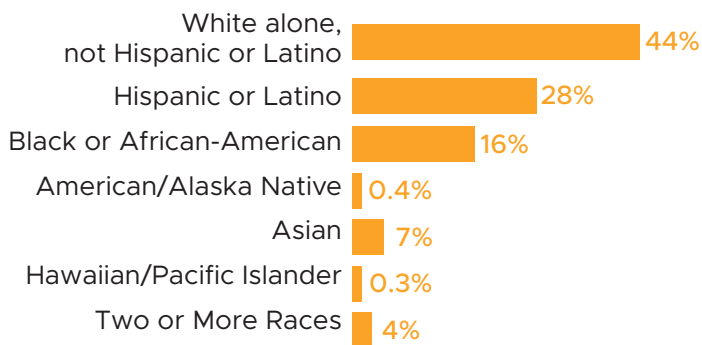
### DISABILITY (ALL)

Study Area	Colorado
10.6%	11.6%

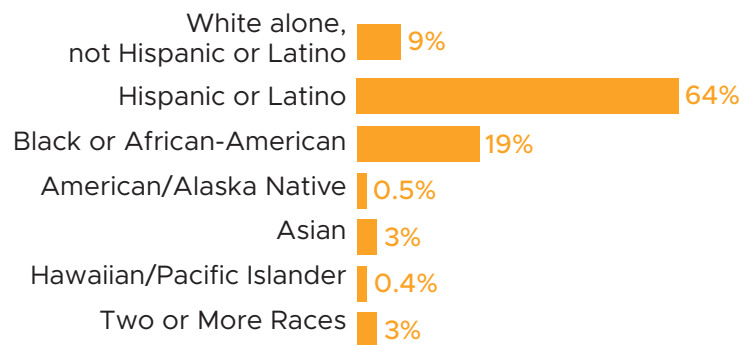




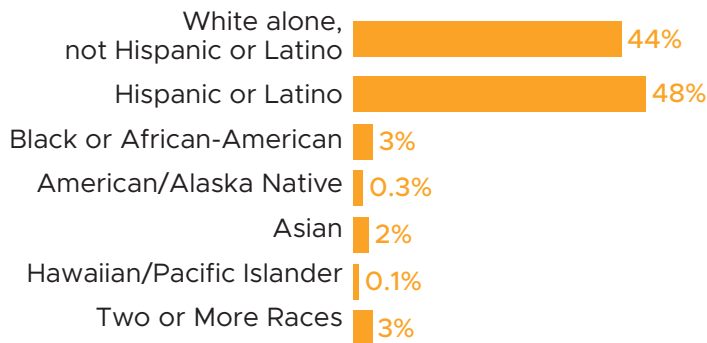
### AURORA



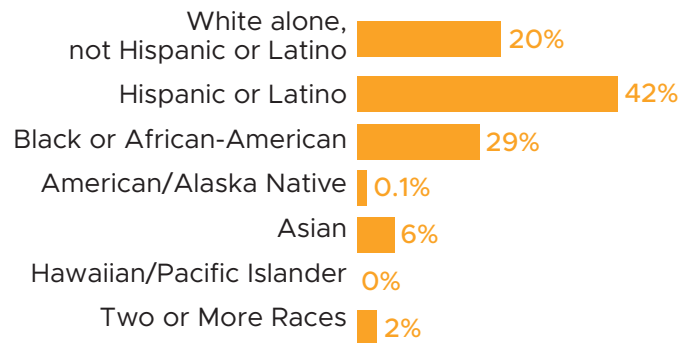
### MONTBELLO



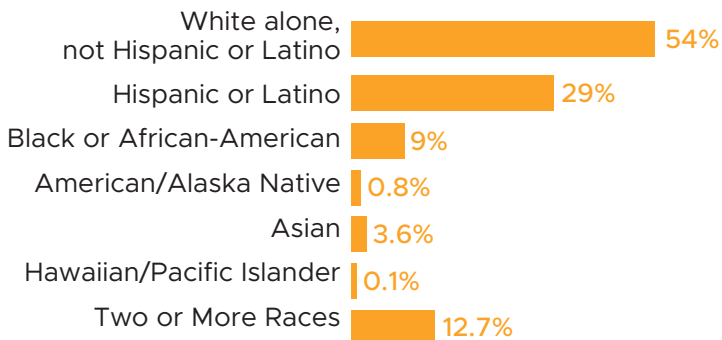
### COMMERCE CITY



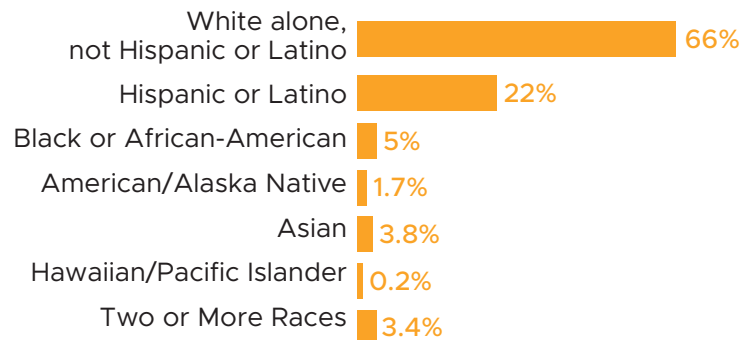
### GATEWAY- GREEN VALLEY RANCH



### DENVER



### COLORADO



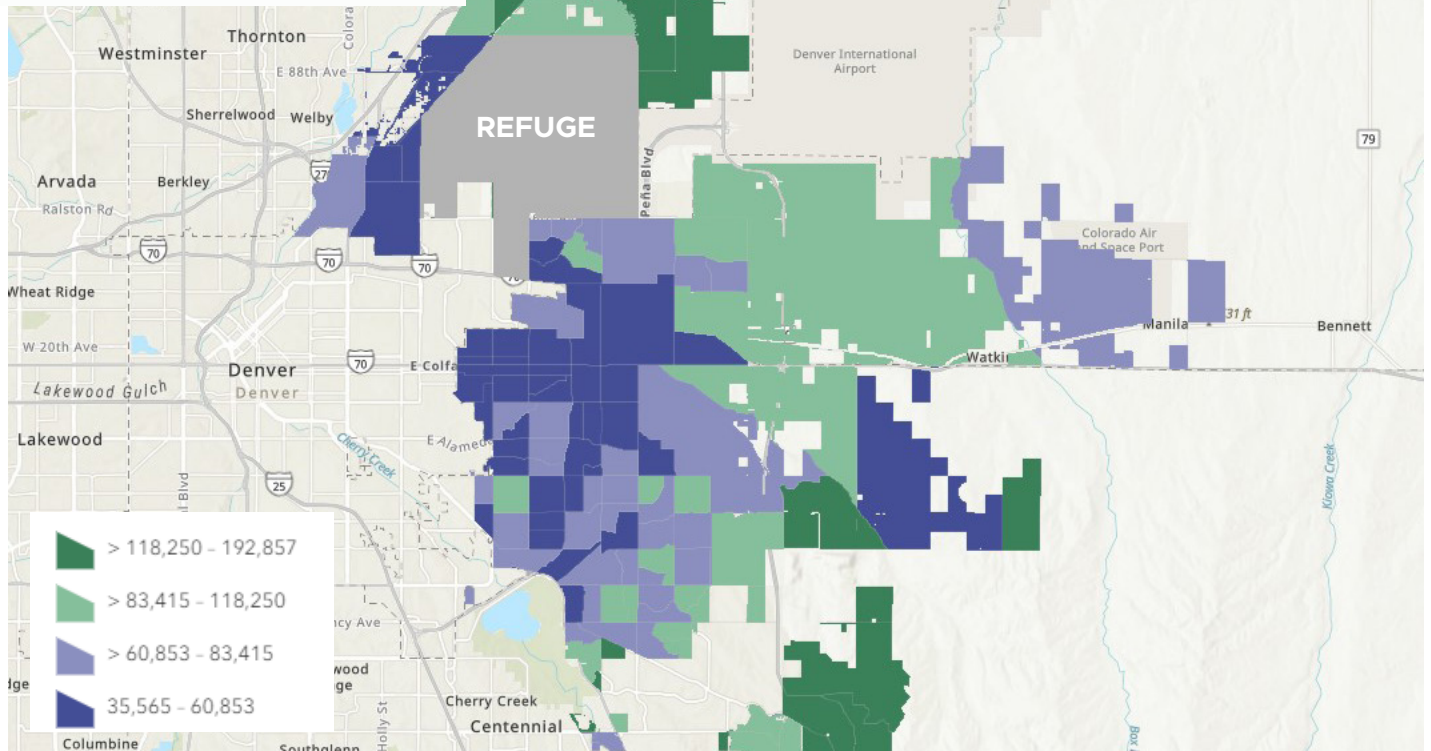
## DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

- ♦ **Racial and Ethnic Composition** - Although spatially proximate, demographic data indicated strong differences in racial and ethnic composition between the four study areas. With the exception of Aurora, the study communities are comprised of over 42% Hispanic or Latino residents, which is 20% over the statewide average. Montbello has the highest percentage of Hispanic or Latino residents at 64%. Of the study areas, Commerce City had the least percentage of Black or African-American residents, at 3%. Other study areas are comprised of 16-29% Black or African-American residents, which is in line with the Colorado average of 22%.
- ♦ **Means of Transportation** - The predominant means of transportation is through individual modes of transport, as opposed to carpooling or public transportation. Throughout the four study areas, 75% of the working population over 16 reported driving alone to work, higher than the statewide average of 65%. Only 3-5% of the study area population reported that public transit is their main form of transportation, indicating that transit is not widely or easily available in this area.
- ♦ **Disabilities** - Across the four study area communities, 10.6% of the population is living with a disability. The primary disability group is elderly adults with ambulatory difficulties.
- ♦ **Language Spoken at Home** - Approximately half (45%) of the study area community population reports speaking a language other than English at home. The predominant second language is Spanish. This is substantially higher than the Colorado average of 16%.
- ♦ **Poverty** - Poverty rates vary by racial and ethnic composition, although the rates of poverty found among the study area communities are higher than the Colorado average for White, Hispanic or Latino, and Black or African American racial and ethnic groups.

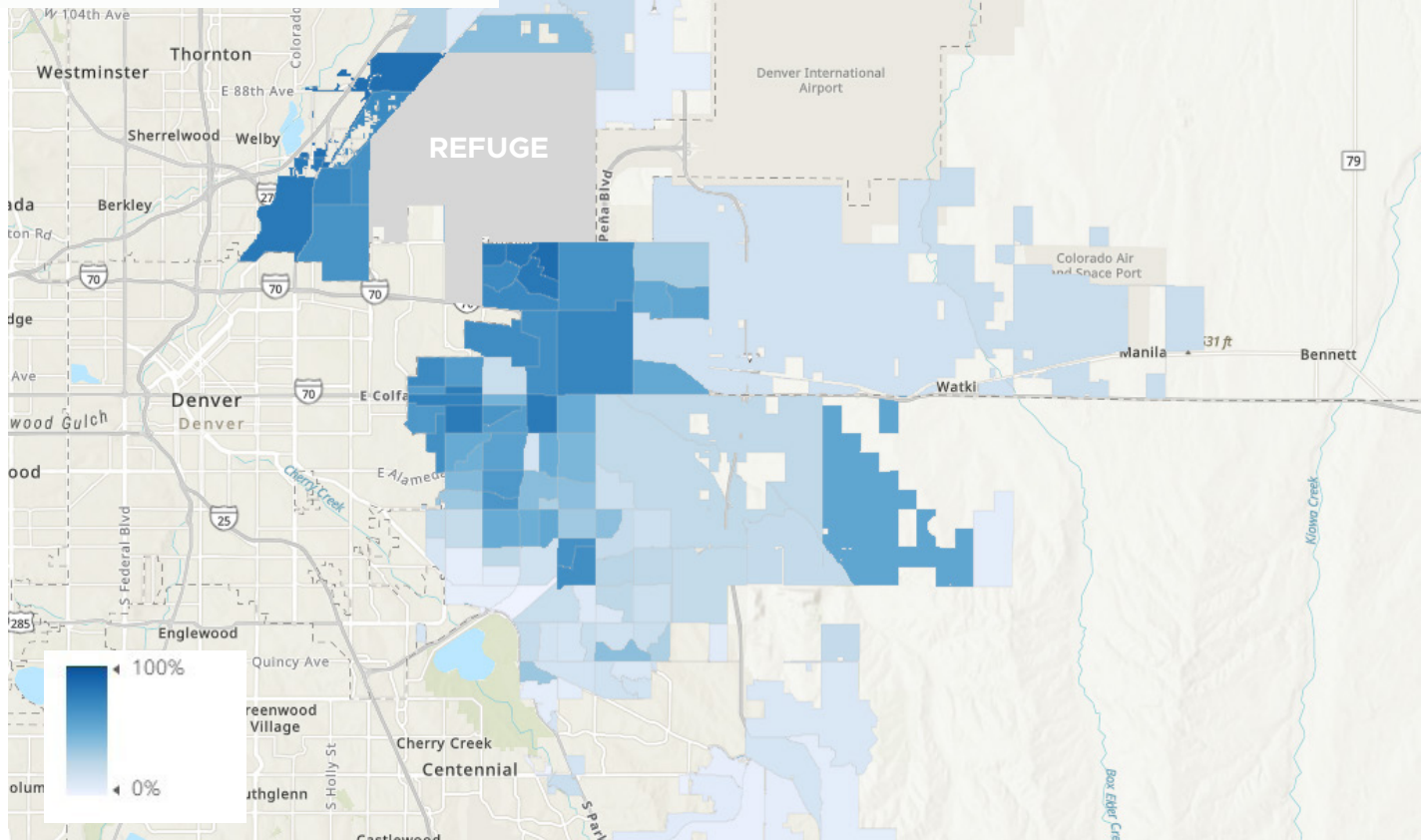
## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- ♦ **Diverse Engagement Strategies** - Because of the racial and ethnic diversity of the surrounding communities, the communication and collaboration strategies will need to be similarly diverse—a one size fits all approach will not be successful here.
- ♦ **Language Spoken at Home** - Significant proportions of the study area population speak a language other than English at home. The predominant second language is Spanish, indicating a strong need to ensure that engagement materials, program materials, and signs provide translated text. Additionally, it is important for the Refuge to prioritize English and Spanish speaking staff for public-facing positions.
- ♦ **Transportation & Access** - The Refuge is not well-served by transit. Approximately a quarter of each of the study area communities reported they use shared vehicles or transit as their primary means of transportation. Advocating for proximate transit service and upgraded pedestrian connections will enhance the accessibility of the Refuge, especially for the approximately 3-5% of the study area population that reported public transit is their main form of transportation. Additionally, identifying methods to “meet people where they are at” by organizing shuttle rides or providing in-school Refuge programming could further reduce access barriers.
- ♦ **Ambulatory Disability Considerations** - In all four areas, the largest age group with disability is ages 34-64 years. Many have ambulatory disabilities: therefore, certain measures such as wheelchair access, shaded areas, seating areas, distance between resting locations, restroom access, ramp and handrail availability are features to be considered prior to inviting these groups to the Refuge.

## MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY CENSUS TRACT



## PERCENT OF POPULATION (AGE 5+) WHO SPEAK SPANISH



# COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF THE REFUGE

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Lacy Consulting Services conducted a gaps analysis to explore the relationship between the Refuge and neighboring communities. The gaps analysis was conducted through a series of interviews, focus groups, and a review of Refuge documentation. Four key themes were identified that highlight existing perceptions as well as potential barriers and opportunities for future community engagement and education efforts. The four key theme categories include: **Accessibility; Trust; Information and Regulations; and Partnerships**. The findings from each theme are summarized, with emphasis on findings and recommendations that were particularly relevant for public engagement and community events.

## Accessibility

- ◆ Fences create physical barriers
- ◆ Location and entrance hard to find
- ◆ Confusion over public access to land
- ◆ Difficult to navigate the Refuge once onsite
- ◆ Concerns about the Refuge's environmental and land use history (federal property, former weapons and chemical manufacturing facility)
- ◆ Transportation difficulties/lack of public transit options
- ◆ Need for onsite amenities, including shade, accessible trails and pathways
- ◆ Schedule and time constraints may limit participation in Refuge activities

## Trust

- ◆ Affiliation to federal government causes a sentiment of authority and intimidation
- ◆ Refuge site is thought of as government-access only
- ◆ Confusion about Refuge's environmental and conservation goals
- ◆ Concerns about violating regulations and subsequent repercussions
- ◆ Need more transparency and communications of regulations
- ◆ Lack of diversity, representation, acknowledgment of history concerning land management and ownership

## Information & Regulations

- ◆ Confusion about what activities are allowed onsite
- ◆ Want more information about activities and events that align with their interests
- ◆ Desire for more information about past remediation and current site safety
- ◆ Schedule and time constraints may limit participation in Refuge activities
- ◆ Lack of clarity around Refuge regulations can make some visitors feel uneasy

## Partnerships

- ◆ Desire to engage schools, libraries, and local organizations – particularly those that involve underrepresented communities
- ◆ People would feel more comfortable visiting the Refuge with groups of people they already know
- ◆ Feel safety in numbers: visiting the Refuge with peer group feels more comfortable
- ◆ Interest in family-oriented activities, information about wildlife and conservation, art, history, and conservation programming
- ◆ Desire to have more picnic areas, biking trails, nature play areas, ADA accessible spaces, photography events, etc.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE KEY FINDINGS

The following list summarizes the key findings from the demographic analysis and gaps analysis, highlighting a variety of physical and informational barriers some members of the study area communities face.

- ◆ **Public Access** - There is confusion and concern about accessing the Refuge, in part due to the history and ownership of the site, the current remediation status, and the look and feel of the Refuge fencing.
- ◆ **Navigation** - Once onsite, some visitors report feeling confused about what activities are allowed and are unsure of how to navigate the site due to complicated signage relating to directions, permissible uses, and regulations.
- ◆ **Information Channels** - There is a need to collaborate with local leaders, community centers, affinity groups, libraries, and schools to reduce information barriers to the Refuge, as information is spread more organically from familiar channels.
- ◆ **Desired Activities** - There is a desire to have more activities and amenities that align with the interests of the local communities and families, including picnic areas, biking trails, nature play areas, art events, conservation programming, etc.
- ◆ **Information Access** - Providing outreach materials, interactive activities, and signs in both English and Spanish will help reduce information barriers to the many Spanish-speaking study area community members.
- ◆ **ADA Accessibility** - Pedestrian-friendly and ADA accessible spaces can reduce access barriers and provide nature-based recreation opportunities for community members with mobility devices, strollers, and ambulatory disabilities.

These main findings from the gap analysis informed group discussions, action items, and engagement approaches for the project team and Refuge staff. It was agreed that in order to best reflect the community's needs, future community engagement events, outreach strategies, educational curriculum, and physical infrastructure improvements should be informed by these findings. Parts 3 and 4 of this document provide detail on the community events and engagement resources the project team supported to address, or start to address, key concerns, barriers, and obstacles identified through the community profile and gap engagement analysis process.

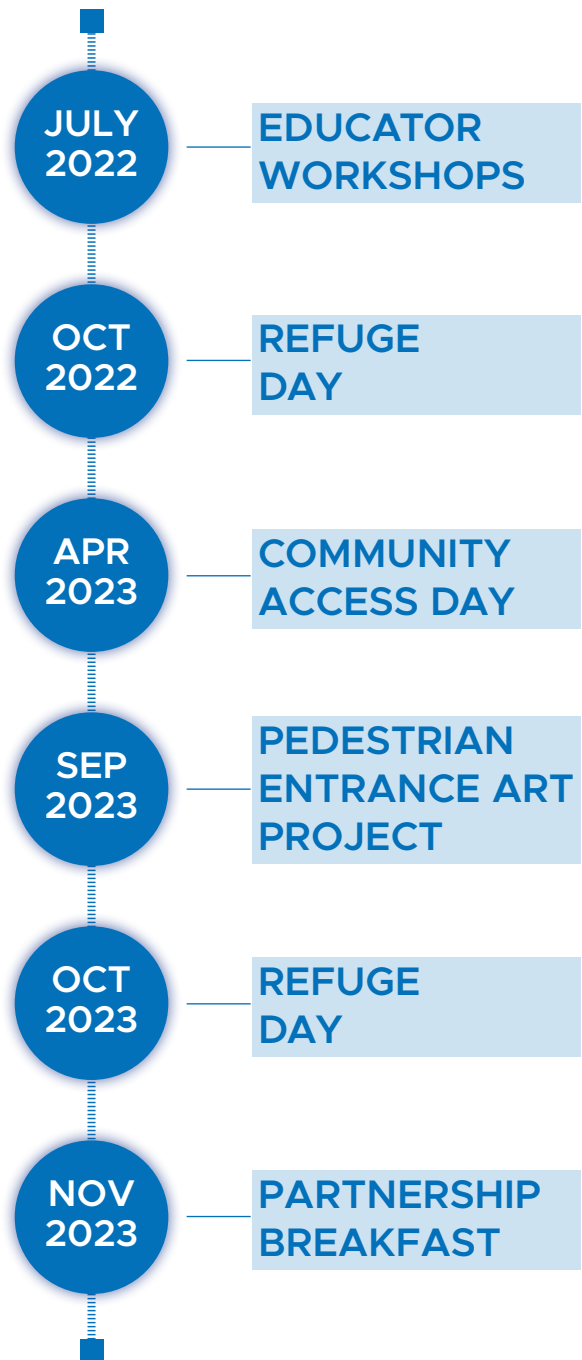
## Part 3

# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Over a two-year period, numerous activities and events were held to introduce diverse communities from the immediate area to the natural, educational, and cultural opportunities at the Refuge. In organizing these activities and events, an intentional effort was made to collaborate with local community centers, schools, libraries, and partner organizations. Special efforts were made to elevate youth programming so that young people would then encourage their families to visit. Dialogue with educators, partners, and community members centered on how to make the Refuge more inviting, as well as to educate people on initiatives at the Refuge to make the space more accessible and welcoming.

### ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

The following list of events reflect the efforts of the project team to engage with educators, local leaders, youth, artists, partner organizations, and neighboring community members. These engagement events represent new and ongoing efforts to uphold the Urban Flagship Wildlife Refuge Critical Elements of being community-focused, intentional, inclusive, and collaborative. By collaborating with outdoor education and conservation organizations, schools, community centers, art programs, and more, the Refuge is broadening its reach and exposure while reducing barriers to access.



**JULY  
2022**

## **EDUCATOR WORKSHOPS**

### **Event Rationale**

- ♦ **It is noted in the Community Profile that community members feel more comfortable visiting the Refuge in familiar peer groups and the importance of engaging with educators. Exploring the many ways educators can utilize Refuge resources facilitates group learning and can help local youth foster an appreciation and awareness of the outdoor spaces available to them.**

The 2022 Urban Wildlife Educator Workshop at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge was a dynamic, educational, and free program for local teachers who were interested in incorporating wildlife refuge resources into their middle and high school classrooms. The full-day workshop – offered for science teachers on July 27 and PE teachers on July 29 – was facilitated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff. A total of 11 educators participated in the workshops. The workshop attendees got to participate in many Refuge activities, including interacting with the Visitor Center exhibits, hiking around Lake Ladora, viewing the ferret feeding, and visiting the archery range. The attendees also got to learn more broadly about the Refuge’s history and mission, with a presentation from David Lucas on the history of the Refuge and their changing approach to community engagement.



As the workshop concluded, the educators participated in a facilitated discussion concerning connecting Refuge activities to relevant school curriculum. The group also discussed opportunities and constraints related to bringing a class of students to the Refuge, including difficulties related to transportation and chaperones/staffing for large groups of students. To fully utilize Refuge resources, teachers expressed strong interest in four areas of support: field trip support; classroom visits by Refuge staff; ready-to-go lessons and activities; and, financial support.

OCT  
2022

## REFUGE DAY

### Event Rationale

- ♦ **The Community Profile references the importance of preparing a multifaceted approach to engagement that utilizes the information channels in place already in study area communities. For the Refuge Day event, the project team created an engagement strategy to address those needs and collected data to indicate how this strategy worked.**

Every year, the National Wildlife Refuge system hosts Refuge Week, an event that encourages the public to explore their wildlife refuges and experience the many nature-based outdoor activities they provide. To cap off Refuge Week, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge hosted Refuge Day in partnership with the Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges and several Get Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) partner organizations. Together, Refuge staff and partner organizations hosted many activities and interactive exhibits including a face painting station, archery, Cheyenne Zoo animal presentations, Urban Farm petting zoo, and other wildlife, conservation, and recreation activities. As this is an existing annual event, the main focus for this event was utilizing outreach strategies informed by the demographic report and gap analysis and identifying ways to track the success of these approaches.

### Event Engagement

To encourage participation in Refuge Day from the communities surrounding the Refuge, the project team devised an engagement approach that included printed flyers, local news coverage, social media posts, and email campaigns to partner organizations. English and Spanish language flyers were printed and placed in community centers, schools, businesses, churches, and libraries in the study area communities.

English and Spanish language flyers were also posted on the Facebook channels for Friends of the Front Range and Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Additionally, event information was sent to the Colorado Parent event page and the KDVR Great Day Colorado News Channel.

On Refuge Day, the project team prepared three poster boards to collect information on where attendees were visiting from and how they heard about the event. After the event, the results of this exercise were tallied. Each “vote” represented multiple people, as only one person from each group placed a pin on the “Where are you visiting from” map. Due to the large number of families who attended Refuge Day, the project team estimate that each pin represented approximately 3 people.

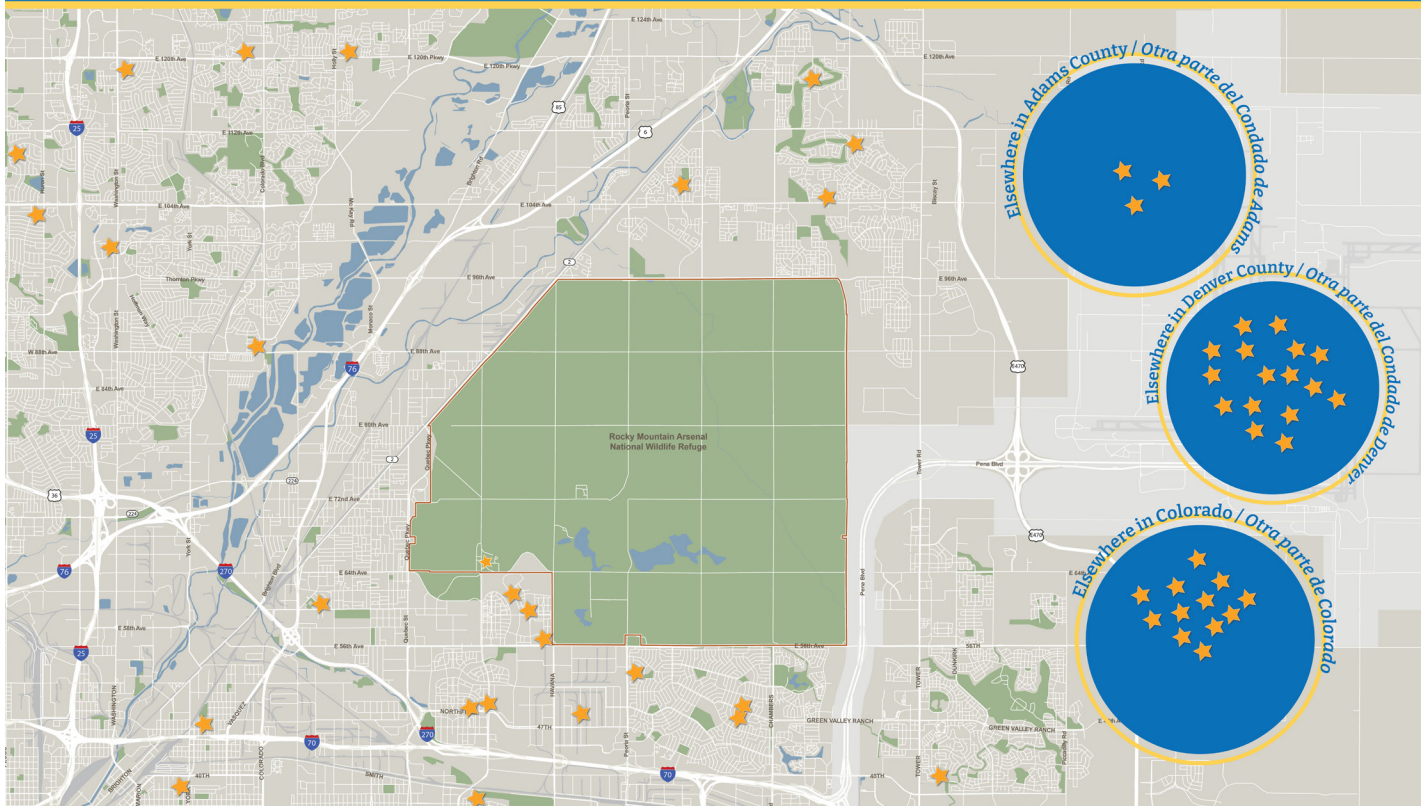
### Engagement Results

On the map of the communities surrounding the Refuge, approximately 26 pins were placed in the study area communities, 3 were placed in the “Elsewhere in Adams County” category, 16 were placed in the “Elsewhere in Denver County” and 12 were placed in the “Elsewhere in Colorado” category. In total, this map exercise represented approximately 171 people. The map exercises also had opportunities for people from other states and countries to place pins. The country map included approximately 23 pins elsewhere in the United States, with representation from California, Minnesota, Florida, Ohio, and others. 2 pins were placed in countries in North America (Mexico and Cuba) and 3 pins were placed in the “Elsewhere in the World” category. This map represented approximately 84 people.

Finally, the poster board asking “How did you hear about this event” received 32 votes, with the most votes (37.5%) going to “Printed Flyer or Newspaper” and “Email/Web advertisement” (28%). Several votes in the “Other” category indicated they heard about the event on Channel 2 news.



# Welcome! Where are you visiting from today? ¡Bienvenidos! ¿De dónde vienes hoy?



**REFUGIO**  
**FREE EVENT**  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

**SATURDAY**  
**OCTOBER 15, 2022**  
**10:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

**DIA DEL REFUGIO**  
**EVENTO GRATUITO**  
REFUGIO NACIONAL DE VIDA SILVESTRE  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL

**SÁBADO**  
**15 DE OCTUBRE, 2022**  
**10:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

**CENTRO DE VISITANTES**

**Actividades**

- ✓ Práctica Tiro con Arco
- ✓ Presentaciones de animales en vivo del Zoológico de Cheyenne Mountain a las 11:15 am y 12:15 pm
- ✓ Conoce hurones patineiros y animales de Urban Farm
- ✓ Pintacaritas & Manualidades
- ✓ Mesas con actividades
- ✓ Caminata por la naturaleza 5K

**Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Rocky Mountain Arsenal**  
6550 Gateway Road  
Commerce City, CO 80022

[www.fws.gov/refuge/rocky-mountain-arsenal](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/rocky-mountain-arsenal) 303-289-0930



APR  
2023

## COMMUNITY ACCESS DAY

### Event Rationale

- ♦ **The Community Profile indicated need for a multifaceted engagement approach, group and family-friendly activities, as well as information regarding the remediation process and status of the Refuge. This Community Access Day event was intentionally designed to fulfill many of the needs address in the Community Profile.**

The inaugural Community Access Day Event was hosted at the Refuge in April 2023. This event was designed specifically with targeted community engagement in mind and was hosted in coordination with Commerce City Parks & Recreation staff. This event had a variety of outdoor education and recreation activities, led by a mix of Refuge staff and partner organization staff and volunteers—similar to Refuge Day. From the beginning, the engagement process for this project was intentionally designed, with conversations and considerations related to timing, content, audience, and scale. Because the engagement approach was extensive, plans were in place in case more attendees showed up than the parking lots could handle.

### Event Engagement

The project team oversaw planning Community Access Day activities, coordinating the outreach strategy, and creating engagement materials. The materials created included flyers, social media posts, school newsletters, newspaper press releases, and coordination with the Commerce City Parks & Recreation staff to have the event listed in their seasonal activity booklet. Outreach for this event also included hiring a local influencer to promote the event (see sidebar).

The project team prepared two engagement activities for the event—including a Bingo activity aimed at youth engagement and a “Where are you visiting from” dot-market exercise. The Bingo activity was created to encourage attendees to visit different activity stations and participate in activities they might not have otherwise. The “Where are you visiting from” activity was focused on collecting data on the success of our outreach and engagement campaign. Being sensitive to intrusive questions was key for this activity, which is why the project team opted for an event that had more of an arts and craft feel than a standard survey.

Finally, this event was a great opportunity to communicate the community engagement aspects of the Refuge’s mission. The project team hired a videographer to film and conduct interviews during the event. [View the video here.](#)



**NELSON  
HOLLAND**

Nelson Holland—Instagram and TikTok handle @FatBlackandGettingIt is a community member and an avid recreationalist. His first experiences with the Refuge included walking the trails during lunch breaks at work. Nelson’s videos share information about the variety and accessibility of outdoor recreation sites across Colorado, and show that Black people, and people of all body types, belong in the outdoors. The project team contracted Nelson Holland to share videos and posts inviting people to the Community Access Day event. The project team felt that Nelson’s platform would reach community members that may not be aware of, or feel comfortable at, the Refuge.



## COMMUNITY ACCESS DAY BINGO

**WELCOME TO THE REFUGE!**  
VISIT EACH STATION TO GET A STAMP

**WELCOME TO THE REFUGE!**  
VISIT EACH STATION TO GET A STAMP

<p>Plant Seeds for Spring</p> <p>Text</p>	<p>Get Your Face Painted!</p> <p>Text</p>	<p>Go on a Nature Walk!</p> <p>Text</p>
<p>Practice your aim at Archery</p> <p>Text</p>	<p>Say Cheese at the Photo Booth</p> <p>Text</p>	<p>Practice your Fishing Cast!</p> <p>Text</p>
<p>Head to the Craft Room to Get Creative!</p> <p>Text</p>	<p>Touch - A - Truck</p> <p>Text</p>	<p>Meet the Ferrets!</p> <p>Text</p>

OCT  
2023

## REFUGE DAY

### Event Rationale

- ◆ Informed by the engagement strategies honed throughout the previous year, the project team created engagement and outreach templates for Refuge staff to utilize.

In October 2023, Refuge staff and partners hosted Refuge Day—an annual event held during National Wildlife Refuge Week. SE Group prepared engagement templates for Refuge staff to use for this event. The templates included an informational poster, flyers, a regional map, and the Bingo Card from the Earth Day event.



APR  
2023

## PEDESTRIAN ENTRANCE ART

### Event Rationale

- ◆ The project team heard that the gateways and fencing at the Refuge presented a barrier to access due to its unwelcoming nature.
- ◆ Some residents didn't know that the public could access the space or felt intimidated by the fencing.

In summer of 2023, the project team led an artist-selection process to commission artwork to be installed at two pedestrian entrances. Two artist groups were selected and have prepared initial concepts for gateway art. These concepts were refined through youth and community input, with visits to schools and community-resource centers in the spring of 2024. Completion of designs, fabrication of the artwork, and installation will occur during the summer of 2024.



NOV  
2023

## PARTNER BREAKFAST

### Event Rationale

- ♦ The Community Profile indicated that people are more comfortable visiting the Refuge the first time in a group of peers. This event was aimed at sharing information regarding the Refuges' new commitment to community engagement and identifying ways the Refuge and partner organizations could best help each other.
- ♦ Collaborating with conservation, restoration, and outdoor recreation organizations supports shared goals and increases opportunities for people to visit the Refuge in a comfortable group setting.

Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges and U.S. Fish and Wildlife, with coordination from the project team, hosted a Partnership Breakfast at the Refuge Visitor Center to hear from current partners, establish new partnerships, and provide a forum for discussion about the community engagement efforts of the Refuge. Approximately 50 people attended, and participants provided positive feedback about networking opportunities with colleagues and Refuge outreach initiatives. A key discussion item was introducing youth to the outdoors and conservation work early and supporting conservation-related career paths.



## Part 4

# OUTREACH TOOLS & RESOURCES

Throughout the project process, many conversations were held between the project team and Refuge staff relating to the capacity of the Refuge team to support increased visitation to the Refuge, with staffing constraints relating to managing field trips, creating marketing materials, and providing expected levels of support to partner organizations. The following materials were created to support school, partner, and community engagement. While this section provides a recap of the materials that were created as part of this process, there are several opportunities noted in the Recommendations section that Refuge staff should continue to pursue to best address the needs identified in the Community Profile and subsequent community engagement events.

## WEBSITE EVALUATION

SE Group conducted an audit of the existing Refuge website to better understand how information is currently presented and provide recommendations concerning ways to reorganize, restructure, and supplement existing content. As a federal website, there are uniformity standards that all National Wildlife Refuges have to maintain. Within those standards, there is some flexibility on the amount, type, and order of information that is displayed. The Refuge website recommendations found in the Engagement Toolkit consider these uniformity standards while providing guidance on the amount of information, graphics, photos, and navigability of the site.



**Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge**

Welcome to Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, it's free to visit! Located just 10 miles northeast of downtown Denver, you can step into nature and see the native wildlife that call the Refuge home. Bison, deer, raptors, songbirds, waterfowl, prairie dogs, and coyotes are just a few of the animals you will see on your visit. Take a nature escape and discover the variety of wildlife and outdoor recreational experiences waiting for you.

- **Attention: The Wildlife Drive is closed at mile marker 2 on Tuesday, May 14 through Thursday, May 16 to install a new cattle guard for wildlife management.**
- **Refuge Hours:** Sunrise to sunset seven days a week.
- **Visitor Center Hours:** Wednesday through Sunday 9am - 4pm (closed Monday, Tuesday, and federal holidays).
- **Work to repair the Havana Ponds ditch begins Monday, May 13.** Equipment will be staged at the **North Havana Ponds parking lot.** Disruptions may be possible in this parking area and along the **Havana Ponds trail.**
- **America the Beautiful passes** (annual pass, senior lifetime pass, military pass, etc.); Schedule an appointment by calling 303-289-0930. Pass sales are by cash or check only.
- **Temporary Trail Closure:** First Creek Trail to protect wildlife and habitat.
- Visit the [Events Page](#) for a list of fun and free nature programs/activities for all ages. Upcoming Programs: [Community Volunteer Day](#) May 18, and [Warriors in the Wild Fishing Clinic](#) May 25.
- Check out the [Refuge Rules and Policies](#) page to recreate responsibly.

Navigation: About Us, What We Do, Contact Us, Visit Us, Get Involved, Events, News, Library, Species

## FIELD TRIP RESOURCES

The project team has worked closely with Refuge staff to identify resources that would better support visiting school groups and support the Refuge in hosting field trips. Refuge staff have a goal of enhancing youth engagement with the outdoors and providing environmental education but are often overwhelmed by the demand to host school groups. This imbalance has created an environment where many school groups are doing primarily teacher-led programs as opposed to ranger-led programs.

While the Refuge has activity booklets for school groups, there is a need to provide more activities and curriculum for 7-12th grade-level students. The project team supported a curriculum development process by identifying interested teachers to create social studies, physical education, and science curriculum for school groups visiting the Refuge. This curriculum will be developed and finalized in 2024.

Additionally, the project team hired a videographer to prepare a field trip introduction video that helps students coming to the Refuge understand what to expect. This video is available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

**Trail Map**

Map showing various points of interest: Parking, Bathrooms, Information Kiosk, Starting Point (Lake Mary Learning Center), Trail Sign, Dock, Gazebo, Amphitheater, Picnic Tables.

**E Use your Imagination!**



Think of an imaginary animal that could live in this place and circle your answers to the questions below:

- Where does your animal live?
  - In Water
  - On Land
- What does it eat?
  - Plants
  - Animals
- How does it move?
  - Crawls
  - Flies
  - Like a snake
  - Like an eagle
  - Swims
  - Like a fish
  - Walks
  - Like a prairie dog
  - Jumps
  - Like a frog
- How big is it?
  - Smaller than a catfish
  - OR
  - Bigger than a catfish

Draw a picture of your imaginary animal:

**Blossoming Biodiversity**

Directions: Sit quietly with your group by the windows in the Visitor Center and observe the prairie environment outside. Use the boxes below to draw what you see. Organize the information by abiotic (non-living) and biotic (living).

ABIOTIC	BIOTIC
	

5

**Ecosystem Exploration**

Directions: Choose a plant or animal from the prairie that you might have seen in the Visitor Center and are interested in exploring more. Answer the questions below.

- What are some of the characteristics of the animal/plant?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- How is it adapted to live in the prairie ecosystem?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- What human activities take place in its habitat?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- How has it been affected by human activity?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

2



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VIDEOS

Throughout the course of this project, the project team identified opportunities to create multimedia to highlight various engagement opportunities at the Refuge. Three videos were created, each with a different subject and audience. These videos are available in the Engagement Toolkit and should be shared with partners, educators, and the broader community to help communicate the types of educational and recreational opportunities at the Refuge.

As part of the Community Access Day event, the project team hired a videographer to create a short film that highlighted the Refuge's community outreach mission. This video is available on Vimeo and can be shared with partner organizations and potential donors to communicate the Urban Wildlife Refuge mission.

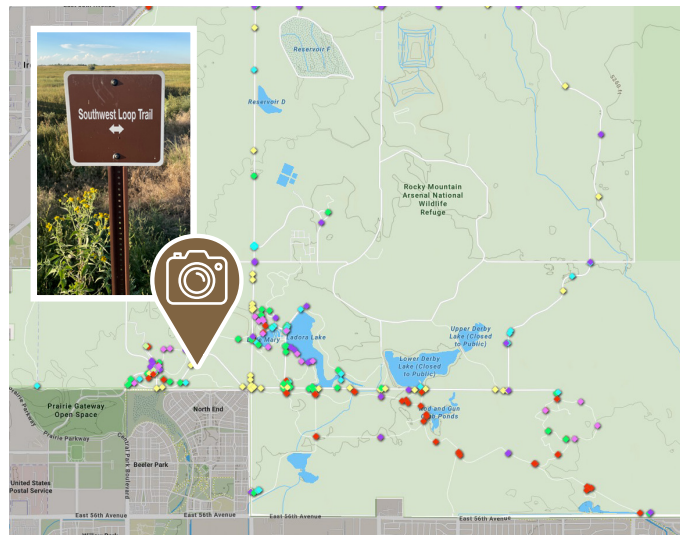
The second video was created as part of Field Trip Resources to introduce school-age youth to what they might expect on their visit to the Refuge as well as a few important rules and regulations. This video is especially useful for students who have not visited the Refuge before, or an outdoor open space of similar scale and type.

Finally, the third video was created to highlight the ongoing volunteer initiatives, express appreciation for their work, and introduce prospective volunteers to the types of activities they could participate in.



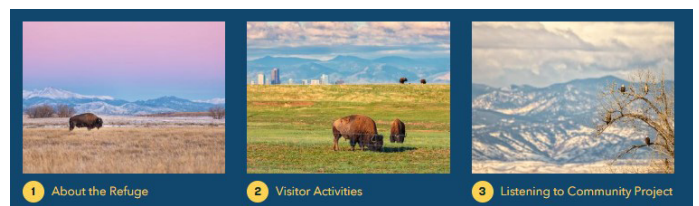
## SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING ANALYSIS

Throughout the Spring of 2023, the project team collected data on the trails and signage throughout the Refuge. This data collection process was in support of a sign and wayfinding analysis aimed at creating a consistent, cohesive, and approachable sign family. This task was informed by findings from the Community Profile, which identified that inconsistent or confusing signage at the Refuge was a barrier to feeling welcome, safe, and confident moving around the Refuge. The [sign data](#) and findings from this process form the basis of the Refuge Signage and Wayfinding Analysis.



## STORYMAP

The project team developed a [Storymap](#) to communicate the project process and showcase the various photos and videos created. This can serve as a project record and be used to communicate to partners and potential donors the community-focused mission.





## ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

In 2022, a series of focus group discussions were held to identify physical and informational barriers to access the Refuge. Through these discussions, staff learned that some community-members were unaware that the public could access the Refuge and that some would feel more comfortable visiting the Refuge in a group of peers. Other common findings included difficulty navigating the site, confusion about what activities are allowed, and an interest in family-oriented activities. Throughout 2022 and 2023, the project team tested engagement strategies designed to address and reduce these barriers, including placing printed flyers in community spaces throughout the surrounding neighborhoods. The engagement resources and strategies within the Toolkit are informed by the Community Profile focus group discussion findings, lessons learned from hosting community events, and conversations with Refuge staff. Within the Toolkit, users will find guides to engaging a variety of audiences, including community, partners, and educators as well as best-practices for websites and newsletters. To support that engagement, a Community Engagement contact database that includes over 400 contacts of educators, partner organizations, community centers, and civic leaders was built to better reach the various leaders and institutions embedded in the study area communities.



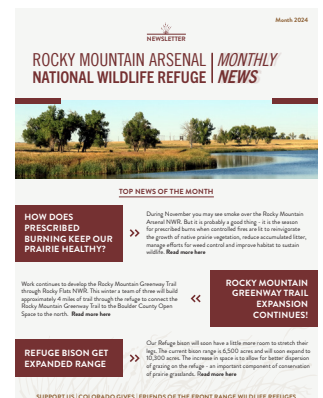
## Part 5

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Since being designated as a Flagship Urban Wildlife Refuge; Refuge staff, with support from the Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges (the Friends), have taken great care to meet the Critical Elements and Standards of Excellence of the Urban Wildlife Refuge mission. Seeking feedback from the community and reflecting on shortcomings are crucial steps to providing more welcoming and inclusive Refuge experiences.

As the Critical Elements of the Urban Wildlife Refuge are meant to be supplementary to the longstanding natural resource protection and educational mission of the Refuge—fulfilling these many goals requires Refuge staff to effectively coordinate with partners, volunteers, and educators to build engagement and outreach capacity.

The following recommendations address these coordination challenges and identify ways that the Refuge can continue to build on the engagement and outreach foundation built from this project. Importantly, the challenges these recommendations seek to address are in many cases perpetuated by structures and systems outside of the Refuge’s sphere of influence, such as the shortcomings of the regional transportation system and the systemic racism that led to people of color feeling unwelcome, or intentionally barred, from participation in federal land management, outdoor recreation spaces, and natural resource jobs. With that larger context in mind, this set of recommendations should be seen as a long-term roadmap that supports incremental gains in community awareness, engagement, and trust.



## VISITOR SERVICES

- ◆ Incorporate land history (war efforts, remediation efforts, existing land management priorities) into informational stations at community events to increase awareness of remediation activities and site safety
- ◆ Ensure that information concerning land history and remediation is available of official Refuge website
- ◆ Host ongoing Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) workshops for all staff and volunteers at the Refuge. These could be quarterly trainings with discussion components to encourage ongoing learning and dialogue.
- ◆ Create capacity within the Friends of the Front Range Wildlife Refuges and Refuge volunteers to host more school groups and partner organization groups.
- ◆ Emphasize the importance of bilingual English and Spanish-speaking staff in future Visitor Service staff positions.
- ◆ Promote Refuge events on multiple platforms (Website, Social Media, Newsletters, Community Calendars, etc.)
- ◆ Discuss ways to align conservation goals with recreation access and identify low-impact educational activities that communicate Refuge history and present operations.
- ◆ Create easy-to-read brochure that covers important regulations

## VISITOR SERVICES (CONT.)

- ◆ Ensure that staff are well versed in communicating the sites environmental history to visitors and the efficacy of remediation
- ◆ Increase volunteer coordination capabilities
- ◆ Increase staff hours dedicated to visitor services and engagement
- ◆ Create an easy-to-read trifold trail map and Refuge brochure that highlights important rules and regulations to visitors
- ◆ Evaluate the engagement strategies related to inviting community members to weekly/ monthly educational events.
- ◆ Create ongoing dialogue concerning the balance of community engagement and natural resource protection.
- ◆ Meet quarterly or biannually with other Urban Wildlife Refuges to learn about their community engagement strategies and share successes and challenges.
- ◆ Ensure that the Community Outreach, Field Trip, and Volunteer videos are easily accessible on the Refuge's and Friends website.
- ◆ Link to the Listening to Community Project materials on the Friends and Refuge website.

## PARTNER OUTREACH

- ◆ Continue to regularly convene partners to maintain engagement, understanding, and open dialogue. Coordinate with Friends to host events or activities such as:
  - » An annual partnership breakfast at the Refuge
  - » Ongoing networking events at the Refuge or offsite (perhaps hosted by a partner or held at a restaurant)
  - » Quarterly or bi-annual meetings of Gen Wild partners
  - » Smaller informational events hosted at the Refuge, such as workshops on how to achieve Youth Corps membership
  - » Focused outreach events with partners who serve and represent elders, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and/or newcomers.
- ◆ Coordinate with Gen Wild partners to increase event management and visitor management capacity at large events.
- ◆ Coordinate with partners to host regular volunteer days, educational outings, affinity group gatherings, etc., to increase group activity opportunities.
- ◆ Designate a Friends or Refuge staff member to utilize and maintain the community outreach spreadsheet.
- ◆ Leverage the community outreach spreadsheet for Friends fundraising, Friends newsletter, Refuge events, informational posts, school engagement, etc.
- ◆ Review and utilize the newsletter best practices found within the Engagement Toolkit to optimize the Friends newsletter.
- ◆ Ensure the contact information in the community outreach spreadsheet exists in other formats, such as Mailchimp, Salesforce, social media, etc.
- ◆ Update the community outreach spreadsheet with contact information from other formats, such as Mailchimp, Salesforce, social media, etc.

## SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

- ◆ Consider constructing an interpretive Walking History Tour trail experience near the Visitor Center that introduces visitors to the land history, remediation efforts, and existing land management priorities
- ◆ Identify strategies to create signage consistency to ease navigation and information accessibility
- ◆ Create a wayfinding plan for pedestrian and vehicular access points to the Refuge—with a focus on sign consistency, reducing sign clutter, and reducing text-heavy sign content. Pedestrian entrances should provide clear information about public access to the site, especially given the metal gates that may look imposing to prospective visitors. There are also opportunities to enhance signage for visitors accessing and exploring the site with their vehicle. The vehicular signage as one enters the Refuge does not conform with the sign standards found elsewhere. Additionally, there is an opportunity to construct a gateway sign or feature at the beginning of the Wildlife Drive.
- ◆ Evaluate the success of the Pedestrian Entrance Art Project and consider conducting similar projects at other pedestrian entrances
- ◆ Create trail maps with curated trail loops and supporting interpretive information to help visitors understand what types of experiences to expect out on the trails.
- ◆ Incorporate the Refuge mission and related activities, rules, and regulations at Kiosks.
- ◆ Ensure that priority regulations, especially those concerning visitor safety, are visually prioritized on regulation signage.

## ACCESS

- ♦ Work with public transportation providers to establish transportation routes proximate to the Refuge
- ♦ Pursue the creation of more family-friendly and accessible spaces within the Refuge. In particular, areas around the Visitor Center could be enhanced by a Nature Play area, shade structures, public art installations, and benches.
- ♦ Create a scheduling tool to more effectively communicate with school groups
- ♦ Create an overflow parking plan for larger annual events (Refuge Day, Community Access Day etc.)

## SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

### Field Trips

- ♦ Create a clear planning tool for field trips, including a calendar with available dates, a guide that includes resources for teachers, and a Microsoft Form to sign up for field trips.
- ♦ Hire a part-time Friends staff member to manage field trips and support other aspects of educational outreach.
- ♦ Ensure that applications for transportation funding are simplified and that funding decisions are quickly expedited.
- ♦ Grant special access (virtually and/or onsite) for secondary science teachers whose students are conducting research.
- ♦ Enhance gear libraries as needed to meet group sizes and demand.

### Educators

- ♦ Invite educators to Refuge to introduce them to the available educational and recreation resources (archery, fish pond, trails, etc.).
- ♦ Invite art teachers to a photography session with a nature photographer.
- ♦ Offer in-depth ranger talks just for science teachers or invite science teachers to collect data at the Refuge.

- ♦ Create a teacher advisory council to meet twice-yearly and discuss educational opportunities (field trips, Lake Mary Education Center, curriculum, etc.)

## Schools

- ♦ Create an internal outreach calendar with regularly occurring events and communications reaching educators at least every other month.
- ♦ Plan a few customized school visits each year so that – over a 5-year period – most schools have been personally visited by Refuge staff.
- ♦ Explore how to include school clubs in Refuge events and activities.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- ♦ For larger events, such as Community Access Day, ensure that engagement materials are available in both English and Spanish and are posted on the relevant channels and platforms. Refer to the Engagement Toolkit for more information and guidance as to the partners, community centers, and media outlets that best reach the community.
- ♦ For regularly scheduled events, classes, workshops, etc., ensure that event information is available in educator and partner newsletters.
- ♦ Continue to update and add resources to the Engagement Toolkit as they are created. Templates, inspirational examples, engagement summaries, graphic assets, and more, can be housed in the Toolkit and available for reference Friends and Refuge staff.
- ♦ Utilize the Engagement Toolkit as an introductory guide to inclusive engagement for small- and large-scale events at the Refuge.
- ♦ Ensure that all Visitor Services staff and Friends staff are aware of the Engagement Toolkit and the Annual Report as part of any onboarding process.