

International Wildlife Refuge Alliance

Strategic Plan 2025-2029

It's the dawn of a new day . . .

See what's on the horizon!





Photo credit: Deb Hojnacki

Acknowledgements

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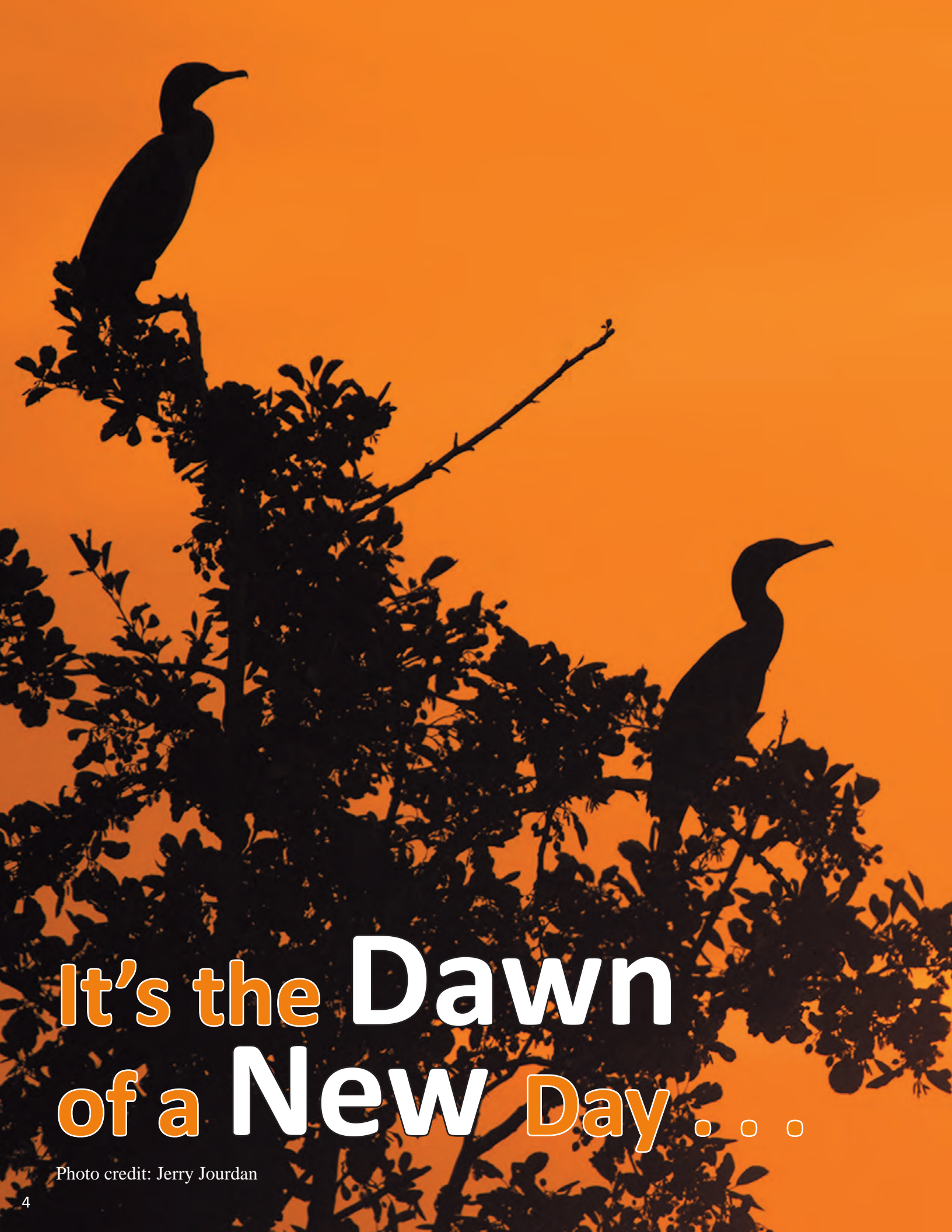
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Stakeholders & Volunteers

Thank you to all of our key stakeholders and Refuge volunteers who participated in the strategic planning survey and visioning session. Your unique insight and feedback provided important information that contributed to our planning process.

Visioning Facilitators

Special thank you to Traci Sincock, retired Maybury State Park Supervisor, for volunteering to lead us through the visioning process. Your experience and expertise proved invaluable and provided the necessary leadership to begin the planning process. Thank you, also, to Ruth Sebal, for volunteering to scribe, capturing our thoughts on paper. Well done.



It's the Dawn of a New Day . . .

Photo credit: Jerry Jourdan



For IWRA

A Note from IWRA Chair

IWRA Board members, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Staff, Community Leaders, Agency Partners, and Refuge supporters:

Thank you for the time, knowledge, passion, and expertise you have given to support the creation of IWRA's Strategic Plan. Whether you provided comments, actively engaged in the working sessions, or helped refine the draft report, your engagement was essential to reach the final document. If you did not have a chance to directly participate in the creation of the Strategic Plan, I encourage you to embrace it and help us remain focused on its implementation.

So much has been accomplished in the past 20 years and yet so many new opportunities lie before us. Without each of us moving forward, focused on the Mission, Vision and Core Values laid out in this document, we will fall short of our goals. I ask you to take some time to read the Strategic Priorities. Consider the value each priority brings to the success of the Refuge and reflect on how your time, passion, knowledge, and action combined with other Refuge supporters can make that priority a reality.

Let us move forward with a focus on removing barriers to Refuge access, expanding environmental education, restoring and creating habitat, improving community mental and physical health, and raising funds to ensure success of the Refuge for generations to come.

Yours in Service,

Gary R. Kirsh, IWRA Board Chairperson

Executive Director Insight

Dear Supporters of IWRA,

Nearly 20 years have passed since the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (DRIWR) was established as the friends organization for Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The list of accomplishments achieved in that time is long and impressive; there is so much to be proud of. It is now time to use the successes of the past to guide IWRA's future.

Since IWRA's last strategic plan, DRIWR has evolved from a skeleton crew and closed gates, to a robust team of Fish and Wildlife Service staff and volunteers and a fully functioning visitor center. DRIWR has been designated as a priority urban refuge and community partnerships are thriving.

It is time for IWRA to evaluate vision, core values, and goals to align with DRIWR's current state in order to best support their mission. The future of IWRA is bright as we continue and improve impactful work to inspire the next generation of conservation stewards.

Sincerely,

Nicole LaFleur, Executive Director



See what's on the Horizon

To envision the future of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA), we must first reflect on the journey that began over two decades ago and celebrate the tremendous achievements we have made. With the dedication of passionate community members, our grassroots beginnings set the course for the continued success of the organization.

As the only international wildlife refuge in North America, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge is located along the lower Detroit River and the western shoreline of Lake Erie, just 20 miles south of Detroit, Michigan, and 50 miles north of Toledo, Ohio. Its location in a major metropolitan area is unique, as is the history behind its creation.

In 2001, the Refuge was established by Congress, the result of collaborative efforts between U.S. and Canadian politicians, conservation leaders, and local communities, all working together to build a sustainable future for the ecosystems of the Detroit River and western Lake Erie. Recognizing that wildlife doesn't adhere to political boundaries, the Refuge was granted international status, making it the first and only Refuge of its kind in North America.

In 2006, IWRA was formed to support the Refuge. Through passionate leadership and strong partnerships, IWRA has worked along side US Fish and Wildlife Service staff to protect, conserve, and manage the Refuge's wildlife and habitats, creating exceptional opportunities for conservation, recreation, and education while developing the next generation of conservation stewards. Since its founding, IWRA has significantly contributed to the success of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, culminating in the opening of the Refuge Gateway in 2020 and the full opening of the John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center in 2022, which has brought local, regional, and national attention to the Refuge's critical work.

As we stand in 2024, IWRA embarks on a new chapter, continuing its vital support of the Refuge. With the Refuge's growth, IWRA must grow as well. Through thoughtful planning, the IWRA Board of Directors has developed a Strategic Plan to guide the organization over the next five years. This plan sets ambitious goals to maximize IWRA's impact, ensuring the organization's continued vitality and effectiveness. It also provides a framework for current and future leaders to move the organization forward.

Along with this strategic vision comes a renewed sense of purpose for our board, staff and volunteers. Clear roles and responsibilities have been outlined, laying the groundwork for sustained growth and success for both IWRA and the Refuge.

It is the dawn of a new day for IWRA . . . We are excited to reveal what's on the horizon!



Message from the Refuge Manager

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) has become a leader in fish and wildlife conservation in southeast Michigan. We continue to improve our lands for wildlife through purposeful and thoughtful wetland and grassland conservation efforts. This includes a robust program to remove invasive species on our lands and those of our partners to help restore the native plant community. Another critically important goal of DRIWR is connecting people to nature. DRIWR is one of eight flagship urban refuges across the country and this program centers on building strong, meaningful relationships with diverse communities to achieve equitable conservation outcomes. With 80% of Americans living in and around cities, ensuring a connection to nature is vital, both to people's quality of life and the future of conservation. One of our primary focuses is to connect with underrepresented communities and we are currently assessing different ways we can improve to help make all visitors feel welcome at the Refuge.

There is so much happening at DRIWR and so much opportunity on the horizon. I cannot express how much I appreciate the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA), our staff, volunteers, partners and all your dedication and commitment to fish and wildlife conservation. I am committed to ensure our growth is scalable, thoughtful, and careful, while still agile enough to adapt to changing circumstances. Change can be challenging and surprising, but with that comes tremendous opportunity. The future of fish and wildlife conservation lies ultimately in our ability to inspire Americans to connect with the outdoors and nature, and to become stewards of the environment. I am energized and excited to work alongside the IWRA to accomplish DRIWR's goals. By working together, we can help our neighbors, partners and the people of Detroit realize what nature has to offer and how spending time outdoors can improve physical and mental well-being.

We wouldn't be here without the vision, guidance and support of former Congressman John D. Dingell Jr. Mr. Dingell authored the 2001 Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act to establish the Refuge and protect over 100 species of fish and over 350 species of birds in the heart of the North American Great Lakes. He also wanted to demonstrate how public-private partnerships can be used to build an urban refuge that prioritizes bringing conservation to cities, makes nature part of everyday urban life, and inspires the next generation of conservationists.

Please take the time to read through this strategic plan and consider how you or your organization can help IWRA and DRIWR continue to meet Congressman Dingell's vision.

Sincerely,

Dan Kennedy

Our Planning Process

Just as the Mallard Duck gracefully navigates the fragile ice, every step in strategy demands both precision and patience. Success is not simply about moving forward but about choosing the right path with thoughtful intent.



Photo credit: Greg Gaskin/USFWS Volunteer



➤ Pre-planning Survey

A pre-planning survey was distributed to IWRA board members, FWS staff, community partners and key stakeholders, and Refuge volunteers. The survey asked the following questions: What do you consider IWRA's strengths? What do you consider IWRA's weaknesses or areas to be improved? What could IWRA do to become a more effective organization? What should IWRA do to remain a relevant and effective organization? The survey results were compiled and categorized into generalized themes to identify commonalities allowing more effective analysis and utilization of the data in the planning process.

➤ Visioning Session

The IWRA Board, DRIWR staff, along with interested stakeholders and volunteers participated in a visioning session, facilitated by Traci Sincock, retired Park Supervisor for Maybury State Park. The visioning process was chosen to allow participants to dream about the future of the Refuge, building camaraderie and fostering agreement on a shared vision. The goal of the visioning process was to gather as many ideas and opportunities for the future from the participants and condense them down to the most important goals determined by the consensus of the group within a limited time frame. Participants were given a vision writing exercise that allowed each participant to describe successes, attitudes, perspectives and the future that they wish to see. Participants were asked to share their responses with the entire group and they were recorded on wall flip charts and posted around the room for everyone to review. There were multiple rounds of voting that helped to narrow down the consensus of the participants, resulting in a focused consensus at the completion of the process. The results of the visioning session were compiled and used as the foundation for the next phase of the planning process.

➤ Group Planning Sessions

Three follow-up planning sessions were held with board members and FWS staff to begin developing an action plan utilizing the priority areas from the visioning session as the foundation. At each meeting, participants divided into small groups and addressed a specific priority area, breaking down the specific steps needed to achieve the desired outcomes. The groups reported out and a compilation of the work became the working action plan.

➤ Mission and Vision

The board reviewed the organization's mission statement to ensure that it continues to describe "why" the organization exists, clearly and succinctly defining its core purpose for existence. The focus then turned to writing a new Vision Statement, capturing the organization's ultimate goal and future impact to which it aspires. A draft statement was developed utilizing the survey and visioning session results and adopted with minor edits. It is formatted to inspire stakeholders by presenting a compelling picture of the future the organization is working towards. It emphasizes empowerment, opportunity, and comprehensive support, reflecting the broad and impactful goals of the organization.

➤ Core Values Exercise

A critical component of the strategic planning process included the review and refinement of core values that shape our organization. Core values are defined as "fundamental beliefs and ethical standards that define what is important to an organization. They represent the organization's highest priorities and deeply held beliefs." The 2009 IWRA Strategic Plan included a list of IWRA Beliefs and Values that have directed our work over the years. These statements were used as the starting point in evaluating and defining current core values. The board members and staff were asked to review these values and make any necessary changes or additions to ensure they reflected both the current and future identity of our organization. The planning sub-committee used the information provided to update the core values.

➤ Strategic Plan Sub-Committee

A sub-committee comprised of board members, IWRA Executive Director and Refuge Manager met several times to refine the preliminary working action plan that was generated at the group planning meetings. A draft was presented to the full board for their review and recommendations. Edits were made as needed and a completed plan was presented for formal board approval and adoption.

Our Mission

The mission of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) is to support the first international wildlife refuge in North America by working through partnerships to protect, conserve, and manage the Refuge's wildlife and habitats; and to create exceptional conservation, recreational, and educational experiences to develop the next generation of conservation stewards.



Our “Why?”

Photo credit: Tom Kachelmeyer/USFWS

Our Vision

Healthy natural areas
are accessible and safe for all.

A blurred photograph of a duck swimming in a body of water. Several reeds or sticks are visible in the water, some standing upright. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

Our Future!

Our Core Values

➤ Stewardship

We embody a passion for nature and a humble respect for the environment and value its interconnection with humans and believe in supporting stewardship of our natural resources today and for future generations.

➤ Integrity

We uphold honesty, transparency, and ethical standards in all actions and decisions and embrace our fiscal responsibility by managing our financial resources to ensure sustainability and accountability.

➤ Collaboration

We believe in the power of collaborations and value strong partnerships, through which our collective efforts will make a positive impact on the refuge.

➤ Connection

We value the deep connection between people and the natural environment, embracing the power of inclusive, diverse, and accessible opportunities that enhance community health and wellness, promote education, and remove barriers to ensure that natural spaces can be enjoyed and cared for by all.

➤ Leadership

We believe in Leadership, by being an advocate for the health of our environment, ensuring equity for those who enjoy it, and promoting innovation and respect in all of our actions.

At Our Core We Soar

Core values are the essential and enduring beliefs of an organization. They are the deeply ingrained principles that guide all of the organization's actions. Core values reflect what the organization stands for and what it considers fundamentally important, providing a moral and ethical compass.





Planting seeds for tomorrow

Photo credit: USFWS



Our Strategic Priorities

➤ **Create Organizational Identity and Culture**

Create an organization that is recognized as a leader in supporting international conservation and connecting all people to nature while cultivating a culture of invitation and education.

➤ **Invest In Long-term Financial Growth**

Champion the goal of long-term financial solvency by investing resources in building relationships and trust with donors to secure endowment fund growth.

➤ **Develop Business Plan to Increase Operational Financial Stability**

Promote organizational stability by securing new revenue generating opportunities, maintaining fiscal responsibility and efficiently managing resources.

➤ **Cultivate Effective Leadership**

Ensure leadership that embodies the values and beliefs of the organization and offers diverse backgrounds and skill sets that work cohesively to further the mission.

➤ **Build Organization Capacity and Growth through Staff Support and Development**

Invest in the growth, development, and retention of key staff positions that are necessary to build capacity to meet the growing needs of the organization.

➤ **Expand Community Engagement**

Enhance community engagement through building and strengthening partnerships and collaborations, cultivating connections through meaningful experiences, and developing relationships with community members and leaders.

➤ **Broaden Marketing and Communication Channels**

Effectively tell our story, celebrate our accomplishments, and promote an open invitation and sense of wonder through the use of creative and innovative tools and methods.



Our Action Plan

Photo credit: USFWS

Create an organization that is recognized as a leader in supporting international conservation and connecting all people to nature while cultivating a culture of invitation and education.



Create Organizational Identity and Culture

Goal 1 ➤ Ensure all IWRA decisions and actions align with core values, reflect the mission/vision statements, and align with FWS conservation and community engagement purposes

- S1: Develop IWRA annual work plan that aligns with Refuge goals, objectives and strategic plan
- S2: Develop a tool/rubric to ensure new programs/opportunities align with strategic plan
- S3: Continue to evaluate strategic plan every 5 years in conjunction with the FWS partnership agreement

Goal 2 ➤ Ensure organizational structure that promotes excellence, advocacy, and accountability

- S1: Define roles and responsibilities for board members
- S2: Develop policies and procedures that reinforce fiduciary responsibility and support best management practices
- S3: Define job descriptions for employees
- S4: Develop policies and procedures that reinforce mission and purpose, ensuring organization guidance

Goal 3 ➤ Reestablish relationship with Canadian partners to elevate international status of IWRA and DRIWR

- S1: Identify existing regulations that impede or restrict collaboration with Canadian partners
- S2: Identify Canadian counterparts and like organizations and establish an outreach strategy to build relationships
- S3: Utilize new and existing opportunities to connect with Canadian counterparts and build relationships

Goal 4 ➤ Elevate IWRA's status to be viewed as exceptional friends organization in National Wildlife Refuge System

- S1: Participate in and utilize resources and support available to stay connected and relevant in national organizations that provide advocacy opportunities
- S2: Participate in Friends Mentoring Program

Invest In Long-term Financial Growth

Goal 1 ► Update existing Capital Campaign document

- S1: Recruit subcommittee to review and update document
- S2: Research capital campaign benchmarks and best practices
- S3: Document successes and develop specific asks
- S4: Schedule meetings with Congresswoman Dingell once capital campaign documents are updated

Goal 2 ► Build endowment fund for long-term stability

- S1: Update current and potential list of IWRA Endowment supporters
- S2: Establish relationships with supporters through outreach and connection
- S3: Carry out an Endowment Campaign Initial focus - \$5 million (5 years)

Goal 3 ► Explore Legacy Giving

- S1: Research other nonprofits' legacy giving plans
- S2: Launch a campaign promoting legacy giving with resources to include IWRA in wills and trusts

Photo credit: Jerry Jourdan

Our Action Plan

Champion the goal of long-term financial solvency by investing resources in building relationships and trust with donors to secure endowment fund growth.

Develop Business Plan to Increase Operational Financial Stability

Goal 1 ➤ Develop framework for financial business plan

- S1: Develop subcommittee to produce business plan
- S2: Research other nonprofit business plans for ideas
- S3: Implement plan

Goal 2 ➤ Expand Grant Research and Applications

- S1: Set achievable annual goals for grant applications
- S2: Investigate opportunities for utilizing grant writer or fund developer
- S3: Increase grant revenue by 20% over 3 years

Goal 3 ➤ Develop Specific Fundraising Requests that Align with Refuge Conservation and Community Engagement Priorities

- S1: Work with FWS staff to develop a list of project-specific requests based on current Refuge priorities
- S2: Develop and implement campaign to promote end of year contributions (tax benefit of 501C3 Contributions)

Goal 4 ➤ Develop Annual Sponsorship Package

- S1: Feature a list of fundraising events and activities
- S2: Highlight non-funded prioritized projects identified in FWS Annual Work Plan
- S3: Implement Match Donation Sponsorship Program

Goal 5 ➤ Explore membership opportunities

- S1: Implement Partner of Refuge Program (Sticker – Newsletter)
- S2: Develop Nature store “Canvasback Club” membership – offering special discounts and perks annually



Our Action Plan

Promote organizational stability by securing new revenue generating opportunities, maintaining fiscal responsibility and efficiently managing resources.

Cultivate Effective Leadership

Goal 1 ➤ Develop an updated spreadsheet of current board members' info and skill sets

S1: Identify skills and demography gaps of current board

Goal 2 ➤ Develop application process for new board members with description of desired skill sets

S1: Develop application with position description of desired skill sets

S2: Utilize business networking apps (e.g. Linked In) to recruit new board members

Goal 3 ➤ Update new board member onboarding process and orientation

S1: Update new board member packets for purposeful onboarding training

S2: Enlist nominations committee to develop process to introduce potential new members

Goal 4 ➤ Recruit board members that reflect diverse backgrounds and possess skill sets aligned with organization's current and future needs

S1: Seek a financially responsible and trusted treasurer

S2: Seek board members that reflect community we serve

S3: Recruit experienced fundraiser

S4: Pursue Canadian involvement on board

Goal 5 ➤ Promote active participation of all board members

S1: Designate responsibility of specific tasks aligned with strategic plan objectives to board members

S2: Define expectations and accountability for board members to actively implement assigned strategies

S3: Expand opportunities for board training and education

S4: Invite board to Refuge staff functions

Goal 6 ➤ Review bylaws to ensure they are current and allow future growth of organization

S1: Develop taskforce to review Bylaws and make recommendations

S2: Change board size to 15 members to promote effectiveness and efficiency

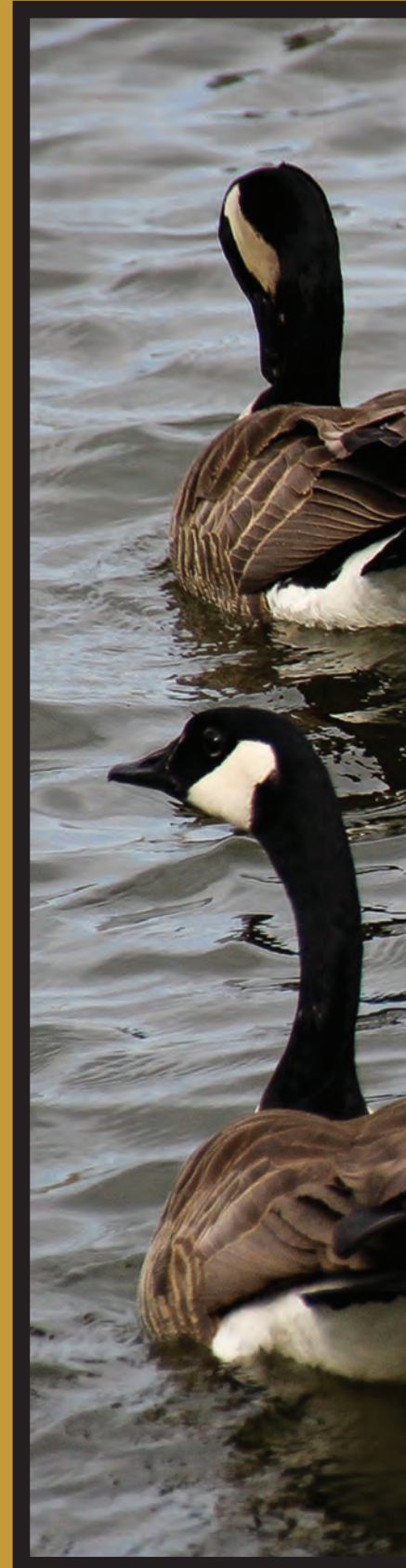


Photo credit: David Werzba
via Unsplash



Our **Action** Plan

Ensure leadership that embodies the values and beliefs of the organization and offers diverse backgrounds and skill sets that work cohesively to further the mission.

Photo credit: Anonymous



Our Action Plan

Invest in the growth, development and retention of key staff positions that are necessary to build capacity to meet the growing needs of the organization.

Build **Capacity** and growth through Staff Support and **Development**



Goal 1 ➤ Clearly define and expand benefit packages for all IWRA staff to attract talent and enhance employee wellness and retention

- S1: Define paid leave policy
- S2: Explore options for benefits

Goal 2 ➤ Expand staff to include key areas of responsibility necessary to ensure thriving organization

- S1: Identify and prioritize desired additional positions
- S2: Research cost of each position utilizing industry standards
- S3: Investigate potential for shared positions with partner organizations

Goal 3 ➤ Ensure IWRA is compliant with IRS labor policies for contractors vs. employees

- S1: Evaluate contracted positions to determine if they should be IWRA employees
- S2: Transition identified positions to employee status or partner organization

Expand community Engagement

Goal 1 ➤ Expand outreach efforts to strengthen existing and create new partnerships to increase awareness and utilization of the Refuge

- S1: Actively work to engage key stakeholders and elected officials in all levels of government within Refuge boundaries to advocate for FWS best interests
- S2: Establish effective partnerships with other agencies and organizations, including those who are underrepresented, to accomplish shared conservation goals
- S3: Consider memberships and active participation in business community groups to build relationships through networking with other members

Goal 2 ➤ Develop a Flagship Event that provides public association and recognition for IWRA

- S1: Evaluate potential flagship events to determine which would be most realistic to implement, and provide the greatest benefits for recognition and visibility. Once identified, effectively implement the chosen event
- S2: Continue Annual Benefit Dinner as main fundraiser and use creative marketing ideas to expand active participation
- S3: Expand Walk for the Wild to realize full potential

Goal 3 ➤ Connect underserved/underrepresented groups to Career Pathways in Natural Resources, Environmental, Outdoor Recreation Industry

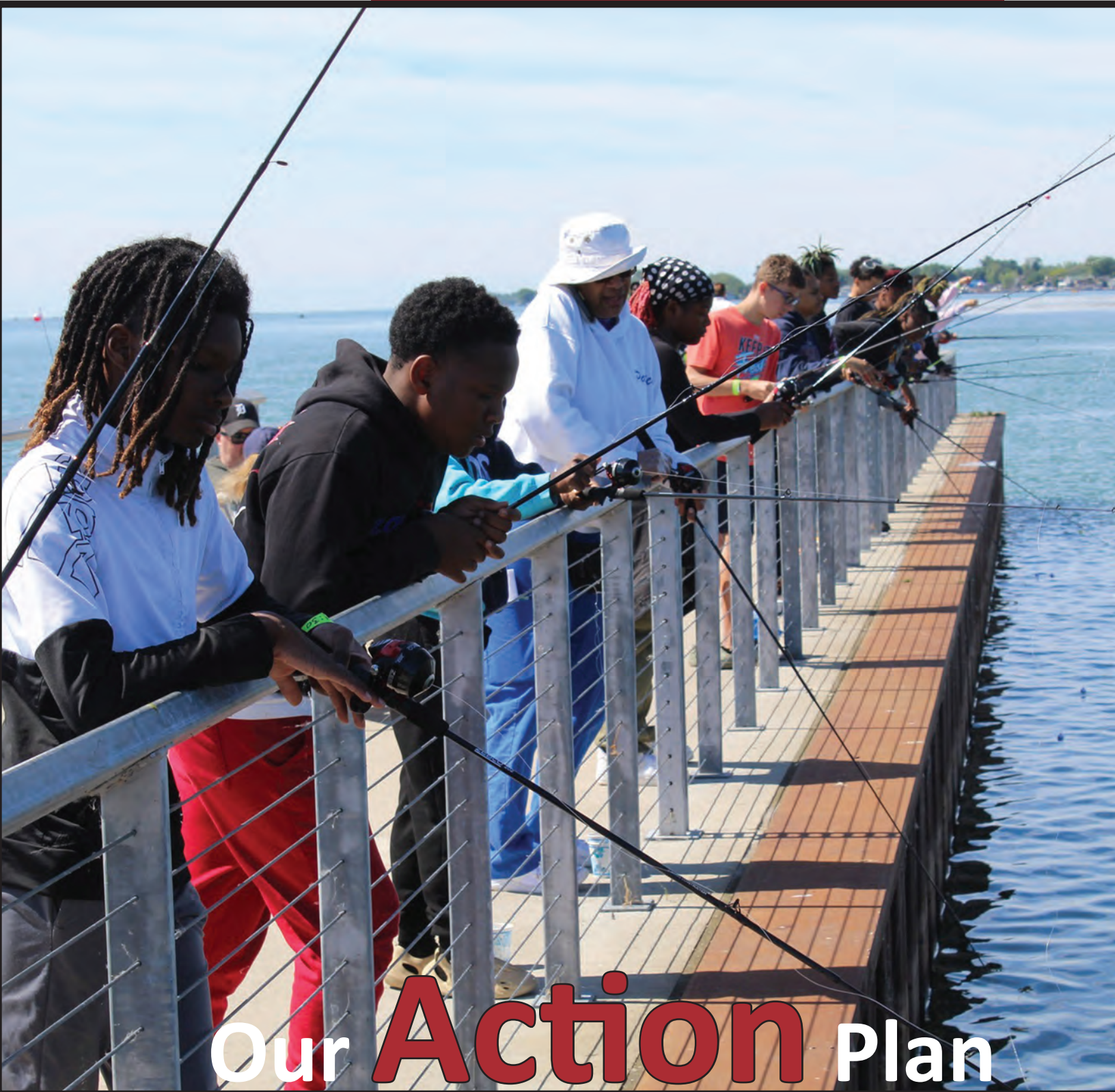
- S1: Continue the current Career Pathway Cooperative Agreement program and evaluate annually for potential growth opportunities
- S2: Increase career pathway opportunities by strengthening and expanding existing partnerships, while researching and developing new ones
- S3: Collaborate with public agencies and community partners to actively promote job openings to underserved and underrepresented groups, ensuring equitable access to employment opportunities
- S4: Develop an Internship Program to provide opportunities to increase experience in conservation field

Goal 4 ➤ Support educational outreach opportunities through partnerships with educational institutions

- S1: Support work of DRIWR educational programs in local schools and field trips
- S2: Build strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with colleges and universities to enhance collaboration and support the goals of both IWRA and the academic institutions
- S3: Utilize and promote Bruce Jones Environmental Education Fund to its full potential

Goal 5 ➤ Enhance relationship with local Tribal Units to ensure historic and cultural preservation

- S1: Reengage with the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation Tribal Leaders
- S2: Increase knowledge of Local Tribes and work to build relationships



Our Action Plan

Photo credit: Maddie Drury / USFWS

Enhance community engagement through building and strengthening partnerships and collaborations, cultivating connections through meaningful experiences and developing relationships with community members and leaders.

Photo credit: USFWS



Our Action Plan

Effectively tell our story, celebrate our accomplishments and promote an open invitation and sense of wonder through the use of creative and innovative tools and methods.

Broaden Marketing and Communication Channels

Goal 1 ➤ Develop communications and marketing strategies that tell our story and increase public awareness and involvement, and effective advocacy

- S1: Develop a standard for professional delivery of IWRA's message and image
- S2: Update IWRA website to award-winning standard to effectively showcase mission and initiatives
- S3: Improve external communication with key stakeholders and decision makers to ensure continued support
- S4: Increase distribution of Monthly Digital Newsletter by 10% yearly
- S5: Ensure social media presence is engaging and impactful

Goal 2 ➤ Ensure organizational capacity supports long-term sustainability of marketing and communication strategies

- S1: Hire communications/outreach coordinator within 5 years
- S2: Expand IWRA's limited resources through the effective use of evolving technology including search engines, algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI)

Goal 3 ➤ Provide opportunities for the public to collaborate with IWRA to expand marketing reach

- S1: Develop a photo contest as an effective tool to encourage new participation and outreach
- S2: Utilize public collaboration outcomes as fundraising opportunity

Plan Implementation

Prioritizing Goals and Strategies

When asked to prioritize the goals and strategies, each sub-committee member considered a list of questions to guide their decision-making process. While not exhaustive, this list was intended to prompt thoughtful evaluation.

Each sub-committee member individually ranked the goals and strategies for every focus area. After collecting the ranking, the scores were averaged and shared with the group. The team then discussed the results, explaining their thought processes and scoring methodology. This discussion provided an excellent opportunity for team-building and gaining diverse perspectives.

Though not intended to be rigid, prioritizing the goals and strategies helps to focus efforts and outline the necessary tactics to achieve success. The results of this prioritization exercise are included in the Action Plan Worksheets.

Action Plan Worksheets Development

Developing Specific Tactics

As part of the plan implementation process, it will be the responsibility of the board to further refine the implementation of each goal and corresponding strategy by developing or fine-tuning specific tactics or work that when taken will advance the desired outcomes. This process is critical to the success of the plan and must be completed timely to ensure priorities are met.

Determining Roles and Responsibilities

The next crucial step in moving the plan implementation forward is determining roles and responsibilities. With input from the entire board, IWRA staff and FWS assistance, a responsible individual or team will be assigned to each strategy and/or specific tactic, providing accountability and ensuring results. This determination of duties will be completed by the board during full board meetings, and in alignment with set priority.

Developing Timeline for Strategy Completion

Once the roles are determined, developing a clear and achievable timeline for completing tasks provide a measurable tool to ensure the successful execution of the specific strategy. When developing the timeline, it is important for the board to consider the priority set for each strategy, assess available resources and evaluate internal and external influences that may impact the timeline. By maintaining a structured timeline, the board can stay aligned with IWRA's mission, ensure accountability, and work toward measurable outcomes within a defined timeframe.

Progress Review and Plan Evaluation

A regular review of the plan progress will be conducted by the IWRA Board. This progress review is critical to ensuring that the strategies outlined in the plan are implemented effectively. The progress review protocol will include monitoring the steps forward, making adjustments to the implementation as needed, and being responsive to any changes that may impact the desired outcome. Periodic evaluations of the complete plan will also be performed to assess the success in moving the needle toward the desired goals. Such evaluations will ensure that the plan remains active and effective, supporting the mission, vision and core values of the organization.

Plan worksheet

Strategic Priority #1 - Create Organizational Identity and Culture

| 1 Ensure all IWRA decisions and actions align with core values, reflect the mission/vision statements, and align with FWS conservation and community engagement purposes | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Develop IWRA annual work plan that aligns with Refuge goals, objectives and strategic plan | 1 | | Utilize refuge priorities, IWRA's strategic plan and previous year's progress to develop annual work plan Present plan to board Evaluate progress | | | |
| Develop a tool/rubric to ensure new programs/opportunities align with strategic plan | 2 | | Research sample tools to gain best practices Implement best practices to develop user-friendly tool | | | |
| Continue to evaluate strategic plan every 5 years in conjunction with the FWS partnership agreement | 3 | | Develop a task-force comprised of board members, FWS staff and IWRA staff to review plan, make recommendations and report out | | | |

| 2 Ensure organizational structure that promotes excellence, advocacy, and accountability | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Define roles and responsibilities for board members | 1 | | | | | |
| Develop policies and procedures that reinforce fiduciary responsibility and support, using best management practices | 2 | | Research other non-profit organizations for sample policies and best practices Develop specific policy and procedures to effectively manage fiduciary responsibility | | | |
| Define job descriptions for employees | 3 | | | | | |
| Develop policies and procedures that reinforce mission and purpose, ensuring organization guidance | 4 | | Identify specific areas for policy implementation Research and develop policy and procedure best practices | | | |

| 3 Reestablish relationship with Canadian partners to elevate international status of IWRS and DRIWR | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Identify existing regulations that impede or restrict collaboration with Canadian Partners | 1 | | Identify restrictions for IWRA – what we can or cannot do Identify restrictions for FWS | | | |
| Identify Canadian counterparts and like organizations and establish an outreach strategy to build relationships | 2 | | Consider New Urban conservation project, Essex region conservation authority, Windsor urban wildlife conservation program, ITC Canadian Company as identified counterpart Develop and implement specific outreach strategies for each identified counterpart | | | |
| Utilize new and existing opportunities to connect with Canadian counterparts and build relationships | 3 | | Actively participate in State of the Straits Invite Canadian Consulate General to Events Engage with Elected officials to build relationships Recruit Canadian Board Member | | | |

| 4 Elevate IWRA's status within the National Wildlife Refuge System to a leading and exceptional friends organization | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Participate in and utilize resources and support available to stay connected and relevant in national organizations that provide advocacy opportunities | 1 | | CORFA – Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates NWRA – National Wildlife Refuge Association Additional opportunities – Public Lands Alliance | | | |
| Participate in Friends Mentoring program | 2 | | Apply for USFWS mentoring program | | | |

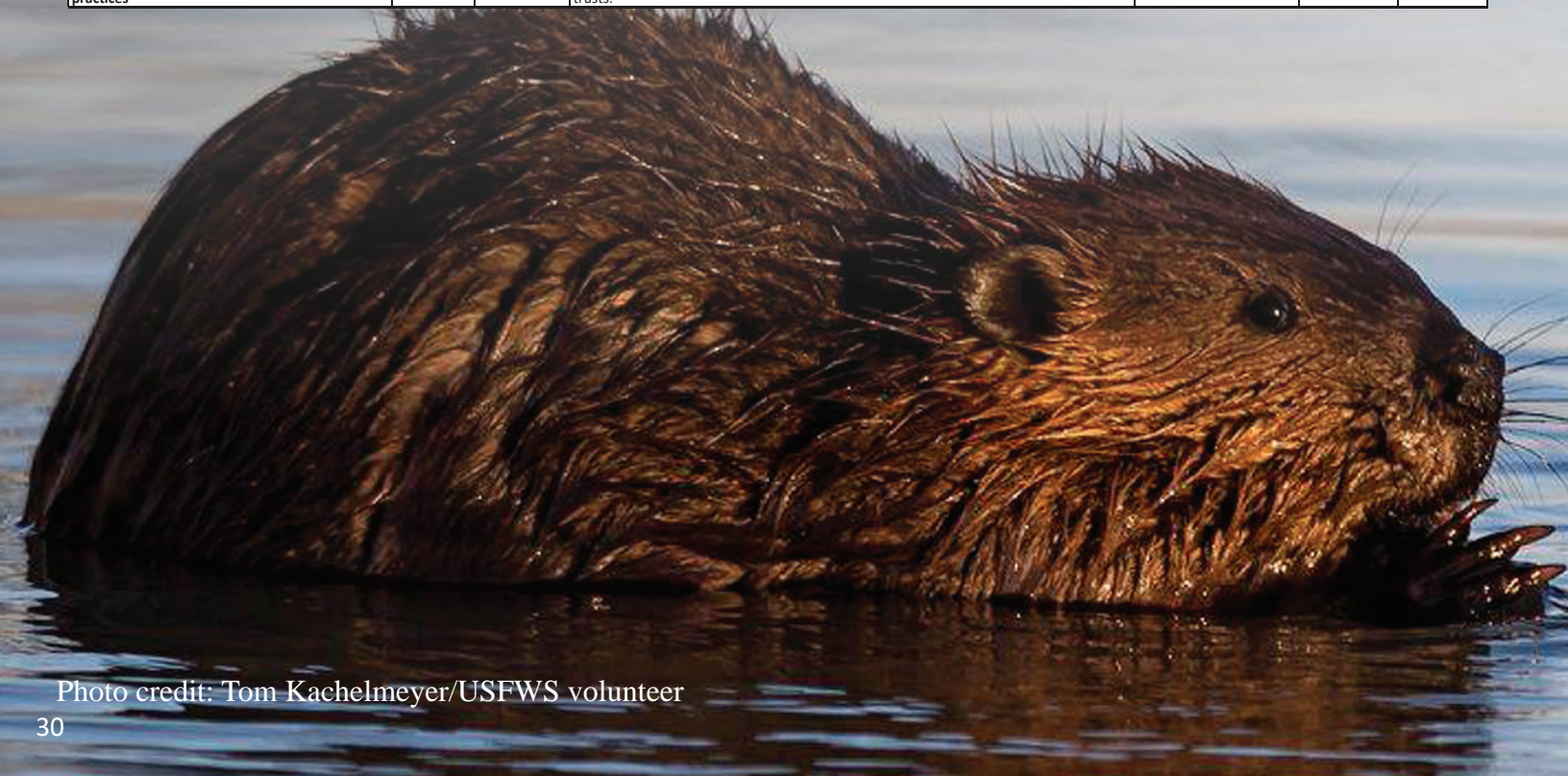
Plan worksheet

Strategic Priority #2 - Invest in Long-term Financial Growth

| 1 Update existing Capital Campaign Document | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Recruit subcommittee to review and update document | 1 | | Engage board members with access to resources and experience | | | |
| Research capital campaign benchmarks and best practices | 2 | | | | | |
| Document successes and develop specific asks | 3 | | Work with FWS Staff to identify specific asks, including cost and ROI value | | | |
| Schedule meetings with Congresswoman Dingell once capital campaign documents are updated | 4 | | Prepare meeting agenda that outlines specific requests of Congresswoman | | | |
| | | | Schedule follow-up meeting updates quarterly to maintain engagement and forward progress | | | |

| 2 Build endowment fund for long-term stability | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Update Refuge current and potential list of supporters | 1 | | Research foundations and historical giving of corporations, organizations, and individuals | | | |
| | | | Partner with Council of Michigan Foundation/ Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan | | | |
| Establish outreach connections with list of supporters to build relationships | 2 | | Schedule presentations with foundations, corporations, private individuals, legacy donations | | | |
| | | | Schedule and conduct refuge tours for potential donors | | | |
| | | | Maintain relationships through continued outreach, communication, and recognition of donors | | | |
| Carry out an Endowment Campaign Initial focus - \$5 million (5 years) | 3 | | Review existing endowment plan | | | |
| | | | Develop presentation to promote Endowment | | | |
| | | | Develop step by step protocol for ask/sealing the deal | | | |

| 3 Explore Legacy Giving | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Recruit subcommittee to review and update document | 1 | | Engage board members with access to resources and experience | | | |
| Research capital campaign benchmarks and best practices | 2 | | Launch a campaign promoting legacy giving with resources to include IWRA in wills and trusts. | | | |



Plan worksheet

Strategic Priority #3 - Develop Financial Business Plan to Increase Operational Stability

| 1 Develop Framework for Financial Business Plan | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Develop subcommittee to produce business plan | 1 | | Recruit business professional to facilitate plan development | | | |
| | | | Present plan to full board for approval | | | |
| Research other nonprofit business plans for ideas | 2 | | Review sample plans and identify components to incorporate | | | |
| | | | Compile an outline for plan based upon identified components | | | |
| Implement plan | 3 | | Evaluate plan progress quarterly | | | |

| 2 Expand Grant Research and Applications | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Set achievable annual goals for grant applications | 1 | | Determine a specific number of grants to apply for each year, based on available resources, staff capacity, and organizational needs. | | | |
| | | | Identify new grants to pursue | | | |
| Investigate opportunities for utilizing grant writer or fund developer | 2 | | | | | |
| Increase grant revenue by 20% over 3 years. | 3 | | Prioritize high-impact grants that align with long-term objectives | | | |
| | | | Regularly assess past grant performance to adjust targets and ensure continuous improvement | | | |

| 3 Develop Specific Fundraising Requests that Align with Refuge Conservation and Community Engagement Priorities | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Work with FWS staff to develop a list of project-specific requests based on current refuge priorities | 1 | | Implement Sponsor an acre seeding program | | | |
| | | | Develop project funding campaign (Marketing) | | | |
| Develop and Implement campaign to promote end of year contributions (tax benefit of 501C3 Contributions) | 2 | | Execute campaign on a yearly basis to promote annual giving | | | |
| Include "Required Minimum Distributions" or RMD s for those people with 401K retirement benefits | 3 | | | | | |

| 4 Develop Annual Sponsorship Package | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Feature a list of fundraising events and activities | 1 | | Annual Benefit Dinner | | | |
| | | | Membership/Partner Event – Yearly Meeting | | | |
| | | | Local business charity night | | | |
| Highlight non-funded prioritized projects identified in FWS Annual Work Plan | 2 | | Develop Project Funding Campaign (Marketing) | | | |
| Implement Match Donation Sponsorship Program | 3 | | Main sponsor X\$ | | | |
| | | | Support sponsorships – provide funds to match main donation | | | |
| | | | Create community interest | | | |

| 5 Explore membership opportunities | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Implement Partner of Refuge Program (Sticker – Newsletter) | 1 | | Establish guidelines outlining the program's structure, specific details, and eligibility criteria to ensure consistent implementation and compliance | | | |
| | | | Regularly review and update these guidelines to reflect best practices and any changes in policy or program needs | | | |
| Develop Nature store "Canvasback Club" membership – offering special discounts and perks annually | 2 | | Establish guidelines outlining the program's structure, specific details, and eligibility criteria to ensure consistent implementation and compliance | | | |
| | | | Regularly review and update these guidelines to reflect best practices and any changes in policy or program needs | | | |

Plan worksheet

Strategic Priority #4 - Cultivate Effective Leadership

| 1 Develop an updated spreadsheet of current board members' info and skill sets | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Identify skills and demography gaps of current board | 1 | | | | | |
| 2 Develop Application process for new board members with description of desired skill sets | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Develop application with position description of desired skill sets | 1 | | | | | |
| Utilize business networking apps (e.g. Linked In) to recruit new board members | 2 | | | | | |
| 3 Update new board member onboarding process and orientation | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Update new board member packets for purposeful onboarding training. | 1 | | | | | |
| Enlist nominations committee to develop process to introduce potential new members | 2 | | Ensure process includes attending board meeting | | | |
| 4 Recruit board members that reflect diverse backgrounds and possess skill sets aligned with organization's current and future needs | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Seek a financially responsible and trusted treasurer | 1 | | | | | |
| Seek board members that reflect community we serve | 2 | | Look to board members from partner organizations Look to current volunteers for potential new members | | | |
| Recruit experienced fundraiser | 3 | | | | | |
| Pursue Canadian involvement on board | 4 | | | | | |
| 5 Promote active participation of all board members | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Designate responsibility of specific tasks aligned with strategic plan objectives to board members | 1 | | | | | |
| Define expectations and accountability for board members to actively implement assigned strategies | 2 | | | | | |
| Expand opportunities for board training and education | 3 | | | | | |
| Invite board to Refuge staff functions | 4 | | | | | |
| 6 Review Bylaws to ensure they are current and allow future growth of organization | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Develop taskforce to review Bylaws and make recommendations | 1 | | Utilize the tools and resources provided by of COFRA and NWRA to assist with ByLaw review process | | | |
| Change board size to 15 members to promote effectiveness and efficiency | 2 | | Maintain board size as one less than full for flexibility and options | | | |

Plan worksheet

Strategic Priority #5 - Build Organization Capacity and Growth through Staff Support and Development

| 1 Clearly define and expand benefit packages for all IWRA staff to attract talent and enhance employee wellness and retention | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Define paid leave policy | 1 | | PTO, sick leave, holiday pay | | | |
| | | | Parental leave, bereavement, long-term illness | | | |
| Explore options for benefits | 2 | | Nonprofit share groups – potential health insurance or other benefits | | | |
| | | | Potential opportunities in Gusto or other payroll platforms - retirement contribution | | | |

| 2 Expand staff to include key areas of responsibility necessary to ensure thriving organization | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Identify and prioritize desired additional positions | 1 | | Fund development/grant writer | | | |
| | | | Accountant | | | |
| | | | Marketing/outreach coordinator | | | |
| | | | Assistant ED/administrative assistant | | | |
| | | | Grounds coordinator/youth development coordinator | | | |
| Research cost of each position utilizing industry standards | 2 | | Include salary and fringe benefits | | | |
| Investigate potential for shared positions with partner organizations | 3 | | Shared maintenance employee with Wayne County Parks for Refuge Gateway | | | |
| | | | DR-WLE CWMA coordinator as county position | | | |
| | | | AmeriCorp positions | | | |

| 3 Ensure IWRA is compliant with IRS labor policies for contractors vs. employees | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Evaluate contracted positions to determine if they should be IWRA employees | 1 | | Outline standard/factors that define contracted employee | | | |
| Transition identified positions to employee status or partner organization | 2 | | | | | |



Plan Worksheet

Strategic Priority #6 - Expand Community Engagement

| 1 Expand outreach efforts to strengthen existing and create new partnerships to increase awareness and utilization of the Refuge | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|--|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Actively work to engage key stakeholders and elected officials in all levels of government within Refuge boundaries to advocate for FWS best interests | 1 | | Attend governmental leadership meetings and public forums Invite key stakeholders and elected officials to the Refuge Develop welcome packet for new elected officials to introduce them to the National Wildlife Refuge in their district Create outreach luncheon to host township and city officials to tour the Refuge Re-engage elected officials' staffers in IWRA board meetings | | | |
| Establish effective partnerships with other agencies and organizations including those who are underrepresented to accomplish shared conservation goals | 2 | | Potential groups include: Monroe Ducks Unlimited, Friends of the Detroit River, Huron Clinton Watershed Authority, Semi Wild | | | |
| Consider memberships and active participation in business community groups to build relationships through networking with other members | 3 | | Sample groups: Southern Wayne County Regional Chamber (SWCRC) and Trenton Business Association (TBA) – designate representative to attend | | | |
| 2 Develop a flagship event that provides public association and recognition for IWRA | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Evaluate potential flagship events to determine which would be most realistic to implement, and provide the greatest benefits for recognition and visibility. Once identified, effectively implement the chosen event. | 1 | | International themed biking event across Gordie Howe Bridge Health and Wellness Fair Outdoors and Recreation Themed event | | | |
| Continue Annual Benefit Dinner as main fundraiser and use creative marketing ideas to expand active participation | 2 | | Plan for a special Annual Benefit Dinner in 2026 to celebrate the 20th year of IWRA | | | |
| Expand Walk for the Wild to realize full potential | 3 | | Work to expand the fundraising opportunities through Walk for the Wild | | | |
| 3 Connect underserved/underrepresented groups to Career Pathways in Natural Resources, Environmental, Outdoor Recreation Industry | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Continue the current Career Pathway Cooperative Agreement program and evaluate annually for potential growth opportunities | 1 | | | | | |
| Increase career pathway opportunities by strengthening and expanding existing partnerships, while researching and developing new ones | 2 | | Continue to partner with Detroit Outdoors and capitalize on new opportunities. | | | |
| Collaborate with public agencies and community partners to actively promote job openings to underserved and underrepresented groups, ensuring equitable access to employment opportunities. | 3 | | Craft intentional job descriptions with realistic experience requirements to ensure that potential candidates are not unintentionally excluded. Example – entry level positions don't need years of experience Apply for and establish Public Land Corps designation to improve federal job opportunities for local talent Advocate for changes to the FWS hiring practices to prioritize local talent for job opportunities by facilitating their inclusion on certification lists. | | | |
| Develop an Internship Program to provide opportunities to increase experience in conservation field. | 4 | | Utilize youth development coordinator to supervise interns and/or seasonal staff from Healthy Kidz, YCC, Youth Land Corp Develop IWRA specific internship position description and application | | | |
| 4 Support educational outreach opportunities through partnerships with educational institutions | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Support work of DRIWR educational programs in local schools and field trips | 1 | | | | | |
| Build strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with colleges and universities to enhance collaboration and support the goals of both IWRA and the academic institutions | 2 | | Identify IWRA projects and goals that provide experiential learning and promote student education | | | |
| Utilize and promote Bruce Jones Environmental Education Fund to its full potential | 3 | | Develop application process for schools and partners to apply for funding | | | |
| 5 Enhance relationship with local Tribal Units to ensure historic and cultural preservation | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Reengage with Wyandot of Anderdon Nation Tribal Leaders | 1 | | Set up meetings with tribe leaders to re-establish connection and determine shared focus | | | |
| Increase knowledge of local Tribes and work to build relationships | 2 | | Set up meetings with tribe leaders to introduce refuge and determine shared focus | | | |

Plan worksheet

Strategic Priority #7 - Broaden Marketing and Communication Channels

| 1 Develop communication and marketing strategies that tell our story and increase public awareness and involvement, and effective advocacy | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|---|------------|-----------|--------|
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Develop a standard for professional delivery of IWRA's message and image | 1 | | What is our "brand" How do we communicate | | | |
| Update IWRA website to award-winning standard to effectively showcase mission and initiatives | 2 | | Research other nonprofits for design ideas and inspiration Work with current webmaster and collaborate with local colleges to evaluate and improve website functions and facilitate redesign Evaluate contract with webmaster to determine best fit moving forward Ensure staff access and required skills for prompt editing purposes | | | |
| Improve external communication with key stakeholders and decision makers to ensure continued support | 3 | | Utilize communication tools as needed (press releases, special meetings, etc.) to share IWRA's celebrated successes ensuring they are well-informed and can make decisions that support future achievements Schedule regular updates to keep IWRA relevant and valued in community | | | |
| Increase distribution of Monthly Digital Newsletter by 10% yearly | 4 | | Ensure newsletter meets IWRA's communication standard Define what success looks like: email open rate, total number of subscribers? Utilize partnerships and Nature Store sales to increase distribution Incorporate new features to keep newsletter fresh and engaging | | | |
| Ensure social media presence is engaging and impactful | 5 | | Determine desired channels IWRA utilizes Develop posting schedule and content that best produces public engagement Consider effectiveness of boosting posts (paid advertising) Investigate the pros and cons of creating a blog as a means to raise awareness, educate and inspire support for IWRA's mission | | | |
| 2 Ensure organizational capacity supports long-term sustainability of marketing and communication strategies | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Hire communications/outreach coordinator within 5 years | 1 | | | | | |
| Expand IWRA's limited resources through the effective use of evolving technology | 2 | | Offer training to ensure staff competency and effective use of latest technology tools Evaluate effective use of search engines, algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) | | | |
| 3 Provide opportunities for the public to collaborate with IWRA to expand marketing reach. | | | | | | |
| Strategies | Order | Timeframe | Specific Tactics/Work | Lead Agent | Timetable | Status |
| Develop a photo contest as an effective tool to encourage new participation and outreach | 1 | | Conduct cost/benefit analysis of this action – is this more work than IWRA would benefit from? Research established photo contests for adaptation opportunities. (Share the Experience-FWS example) Establish contest rules and planning requirements (i.e., not one adapted from a national effort) | | | |
| Utilize public collaboration outcomes as fundraising opportunity | 2 | | Create photo book/calendar/postcards from refuge photo contest and sell in Nature store | | | |





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Cover photo: A Winter Solstice Sunrise over the Refuge
Photo credit: Anonymous