



NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
REFUGE SYSTEM

Cultivating Community Through Conservation

Yvette Carrasco

Urban Ranger

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge



Mission of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

"Working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

Urban National Wildlife Refuges

Work with community partners to expand outdoor recreation and education for Americans living in and around cities. They strive to dismantle historic barriers to access and make all visitors feel welcome.



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The "What"

Know and Relate to the Community



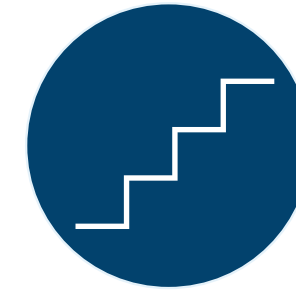
Ensure Adequate Long-term Resources



Connect People with Nature



Provide Equitable Access



Build Partnerships



Ensure Visitors Feel Safe and Welcome



Be a Community Asset



Model Sustainability



Standards of Excellence

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 collective impacts of conservation efforts.

**What barriers have you seen in
your own community when it
comes to access to nature?**



1. Know and Relate to the Community

By fostering a deep understanding of the communities we serve, through listening, learning about, building authentic relationships and collaborative partnerships with systematically excluded communities.

Visit, listen, and learn...

Meet with key community members and partners:

- Community leaders, cultural practitioners and knowledge holders
- Community-based committees, working groups and councils
- Community-based and Representative NGOs
- Local university experts, State/City/Local government officials, parks and recreation, etc.

FWAF Leadership Meetings Immokalee, FL



Farmworker Association of Florida
La Asociación Campesina de Florida
Asosiyasyon Travayè Latè nan Florid

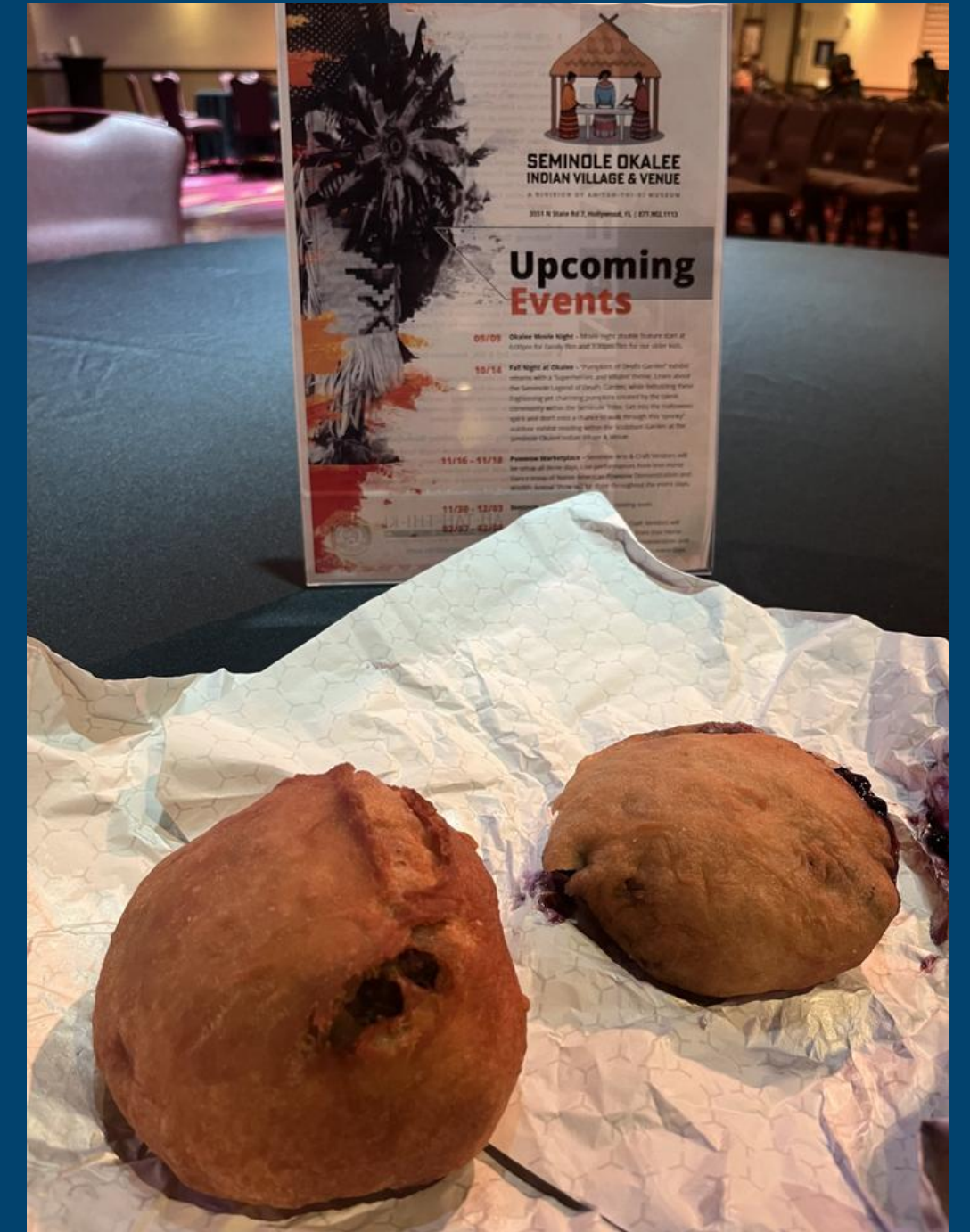


Visit, listen, and learn...

Attend culturally relevant and community-based events:

- Cultural heritage or local community festivals, celebrations, gatherings, and other related events.
- Attend as a participant, vendor or collaborative partner.

Seminole Art Fest Immokalee, FL



CASE STUDY

Immokalee Pioneer Museum at Robert's Ranch Immokalee, FL



**Robert's Ranch, Cultivate Abundance, FWAf,
Florida Panther NWR, "Ding" Darling NWR**





Department of the Interior

US Fish & Wildlife Service

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

1 Wildlife Dr.

Sanibel, FL 33957

239-472-1100

April 21, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is an active partner with ongoing collaboration between the J.N. "Ding" Darling and Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuges and the Immokalee Pioneer Museum at Roberts Ranch.

Our collaboration builds trust and mutual respect between our teams and have allowed us to work together in ways that benefit the public. Part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's mission is to connect people with nature and conserve wildlife for the benefit of current and future generations. Our collaboration with the Museum has supported progress toward that mission in Immokalee.

The garden space at Roberts Ranch has become a hub for community engagement, where high school students, residents, Florida Gulf Coast University students, and our staff have collaborated to foster dialogue around nature, community, and shared stewardship.

We value our ongoing partnership with the Museum and appreciate the opportunity to participate in efforts that promote community connection and environmental awareness.

Sincerely,

Yvette Carrasco

Refuge Ranger

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

1 Wildlife Drive, Sanibel Island, FL 33957

Student- led organization



Immokalee High School Key Club



Building character



Developing leadership skills



Florida Gulf Coast University FGCU Honors Service-Learning



Students receive class credit/ service-learning hours while assisting the refuge with various tasks. **We learn from & strategically assist each other.**



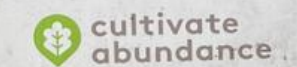


cultivate abundance



Plant Propagation

Seeds and seedlings of crops valued by our Haitian, Guatemalan and Mexican neighbors are not always easy to find, leading us to save various types of seeds. Certain hard-to-find perennial varieties evaluated for our hot, humid climate or for container gardens are also vegetatively propagated,





[Cultivate Abundance Video link](#)

Practices of collaborative leadership



Knowledge
e



Empathy &
Values



Tangible
action

**Have you worked with a
community where trust had to
be earned? What worked?**





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Which Critical Element Are You?

*Created by Rae Milmore, Urban Park Ranger
ARM Loxahatchee NWR, Southeast Region*



Critical Elements = "the HOW"

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What item would you bring to a remote island that you are stranded on with a group of strangers?

A. Toolbox

B. Boat

C. Large tent

D. Gardening kit



What is your favorite form of mass transportation?

A. Train

B. Airplane

C. Bus

D. Boat

Which of the following animals do you most identify with?

A. Penguin

B. Lion

C. Capybara

D. Honeybee

Your friends would best describe you as a...

A. Good listener

B. Driven leader

C. Welcoming person

D. Team player

Which of the following desserts would you bring to a potluck?

- A. Chocolate cake**
- B. Tiramisu**
- C. Dozen assorted donuts**
- D. Gingerbread house**

**If you had mostly A's...
You are
community-focused!**

**The community-focused
element prioritizes
community needs with
long-term commitments.**



*PHOTO: Brian Gratwicke
(Flickr Creative Commons)*

If you had mostly B's... You are intentional!

**The intentional element
adopts community
engagement methods that
are well-informed,
purposeful, and
measurable.**



*PHOTO: Dominik Kreutz
(Flickr Creative Commons)*

**If you had mostly C's...
You are inclusive!**

**The inclusive element
implements equitable
solutions to involve the
community in solving
conservation challenges.**



PHOTO: Murray Foubister
(Flickr Creative Commons)

**If you had mostly D's...
You are collaborative!**

The collaborative element forms long-term transformational relationships with the goal of increasing collective impacts of conservation efforts.



PHOTO: Brad Smith
(Flickr Creative Commons)

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