



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."



NATIONAL  
**WILDLIFE**  
REFUGE SYSTEM



# 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.



NATIONAL  
**WILDLIFE**  
REFUGE SYSTEM



# The "What"

Know and Relate  
to the Community



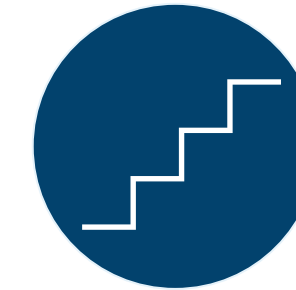
Ensure Adequate  
Long-term Resources



Connect People  
with Nature



Provide  
Equitable  
Access



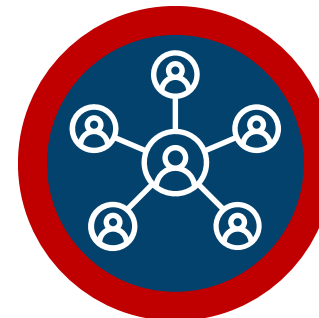
Build  
Partnerships



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?**



**NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE  
REFUGE SYSTEM**



# 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.

**Youth group  
mentoring**

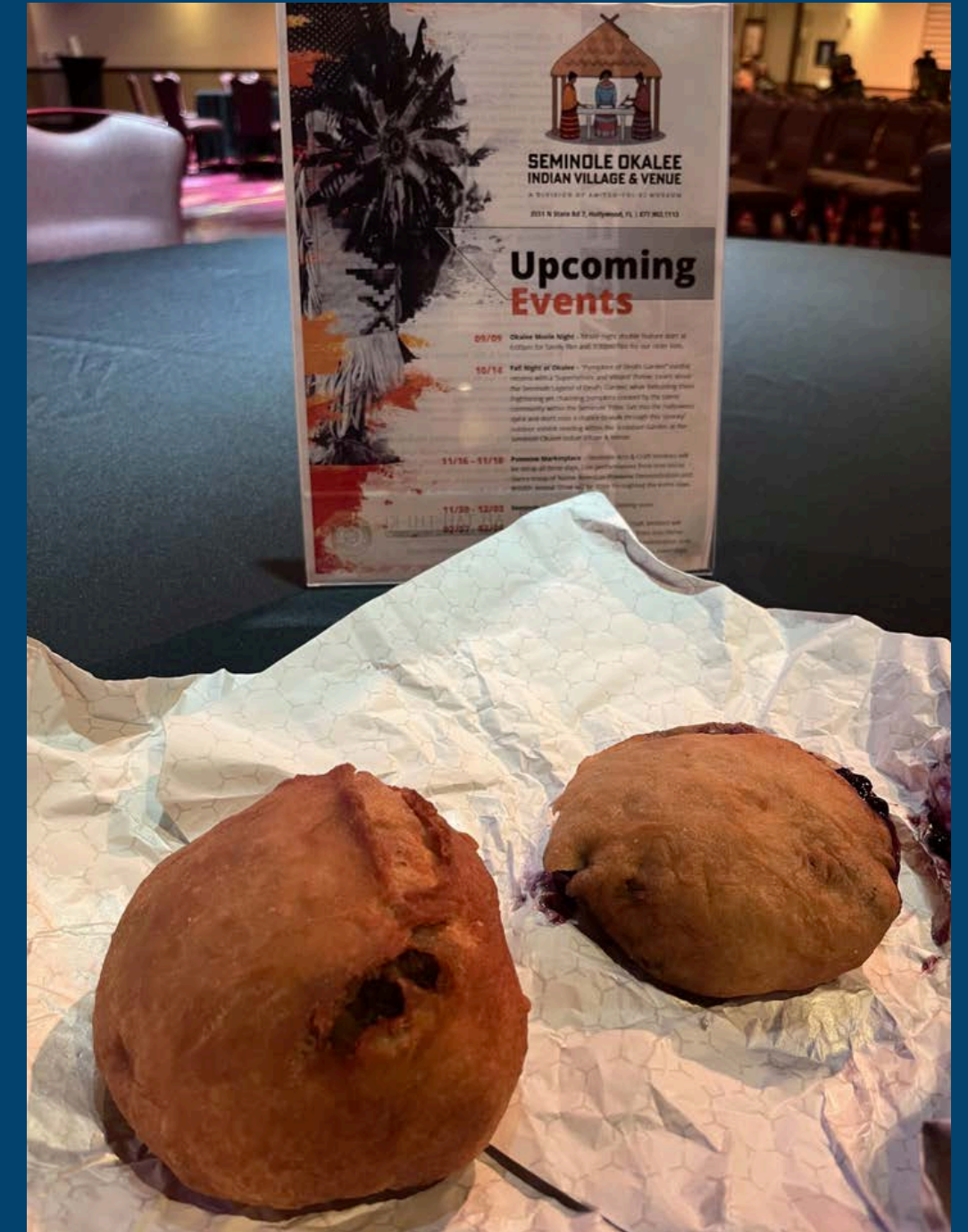


**NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE  
REFUGE SYSTEM**

**Community Health Fair**



# 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**





**Student- led organization**



**Immokalee High School  
Key Club**



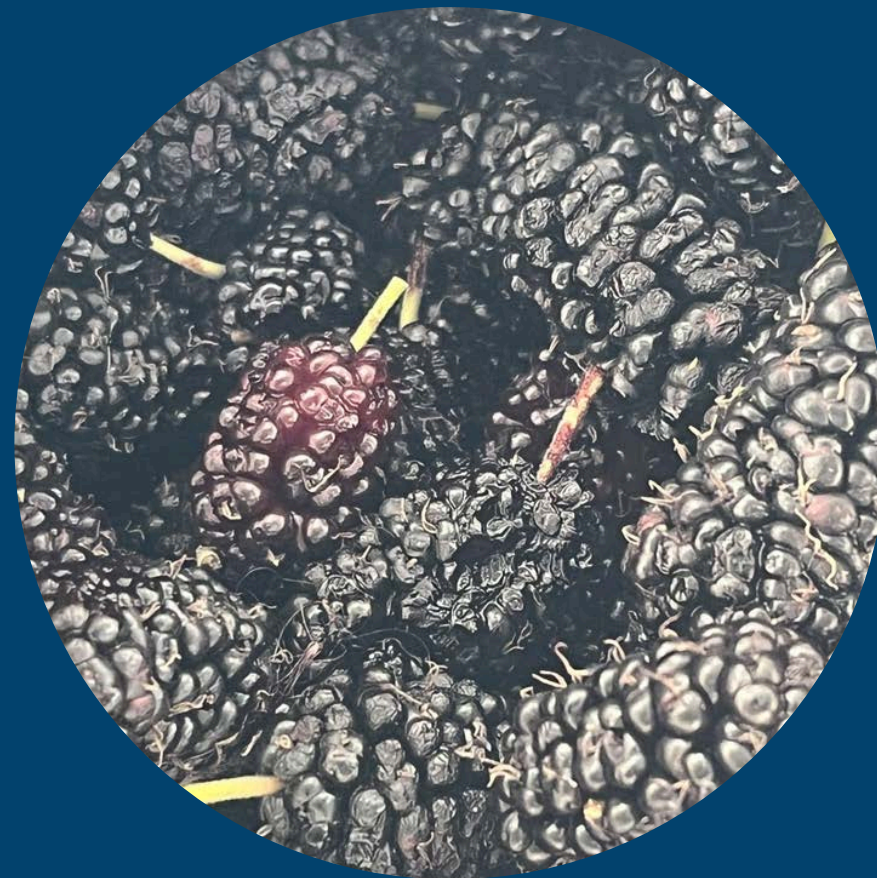
**Building character**



**Developing leadership skills**







**NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE  
REFUGE SYSTEM**



# Florida Gulf Coast University FGCU Honors Service-Learning



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







NATIONAL  
**WILDLIFE**  
REFUGE SYSTEM



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

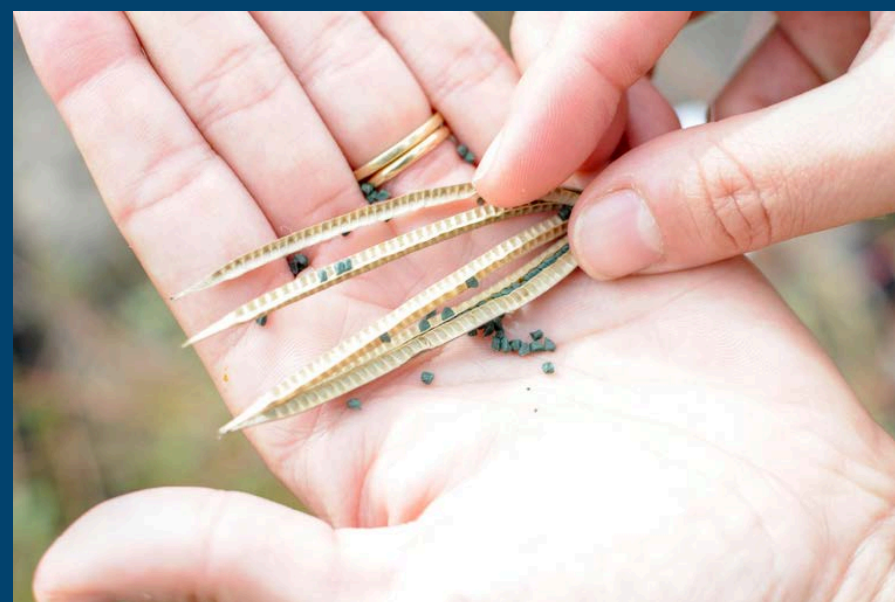
J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

1 Wildlife Drive, Sanibel Island, FL 33957



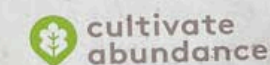


# cultivate abundance



## 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,









# FROM RANCH TO REFUGE A JOURNEY OF CONNECTION



NATIONAL  
**WILDLIFE**  
REFUGE SYSTEM





# Practices of collaborative leadership



Knowledge



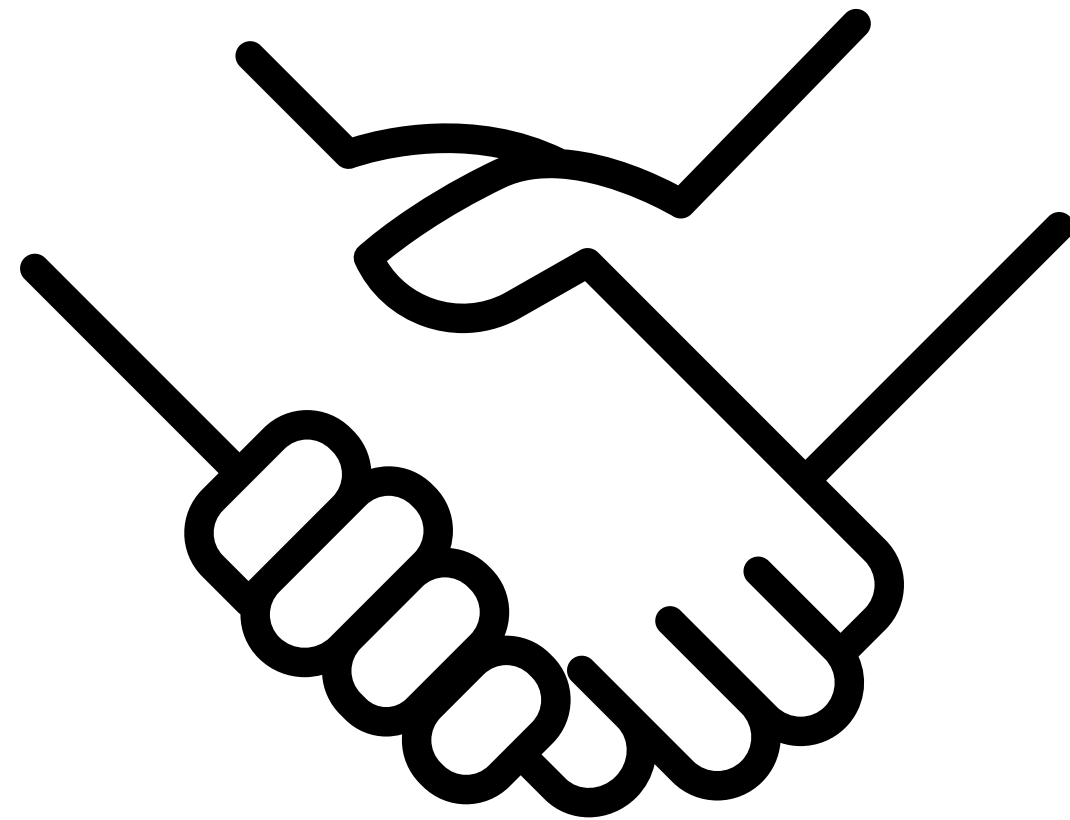
Empathy & Values



Tangible action



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







NATIONAL  
**WILDLIFE**  
REFUGE SYSTEM

# Which Critical Element Are You?

---

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





## ***Critical Elements = "the HOW"***

- **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.



**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**



**NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE  
REFUGE SYSTEM**



# **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)



**NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE  
REFUGE SYSTEM**



**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)



## ***Critical Elements = "the HOW"***

- **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.