

Experience the National Wildlife Refuge System by Bob Duke

Wildlife conservation is community driven. Local communities poses individual and unique conservation issues, and the National Wildlife Refuge system works to understand these issues so that the needs of fish, wildlife and people may be addressed on a local level. This is where the non-profit Friends groups fit in as liaisons between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife program and the local communities.

The Friends of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge support the local community by hosting public events, coordinating volunteers and even leading hikes, trail maintenance and invasive plant eradication. In cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, programs like our annual Wings Over Willapa event in September, promote nature based tourism, spurring the local economy and adding jobs.

In addition to building relationships between refuges and communities nation wide, friends groups contribute millions of dollars for conservation and recreation projects, and donate tens of thousands of volunteer hours, with 1.3 million annual volunteer hours valued at \$24.69 per hour; \$33 million in total volunteer value per year, and \$15 million raised for conservation by friends.

The Friends of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge group is fortunate to be surrounded by a devoted volunteer corps that includes parents who want to model stewardship, retirees who wish to pass on knowledge, outdoor enthusiasts sharing their passion for wildlife refuges, and young people interested in serving a worthy cause while learning job skills.