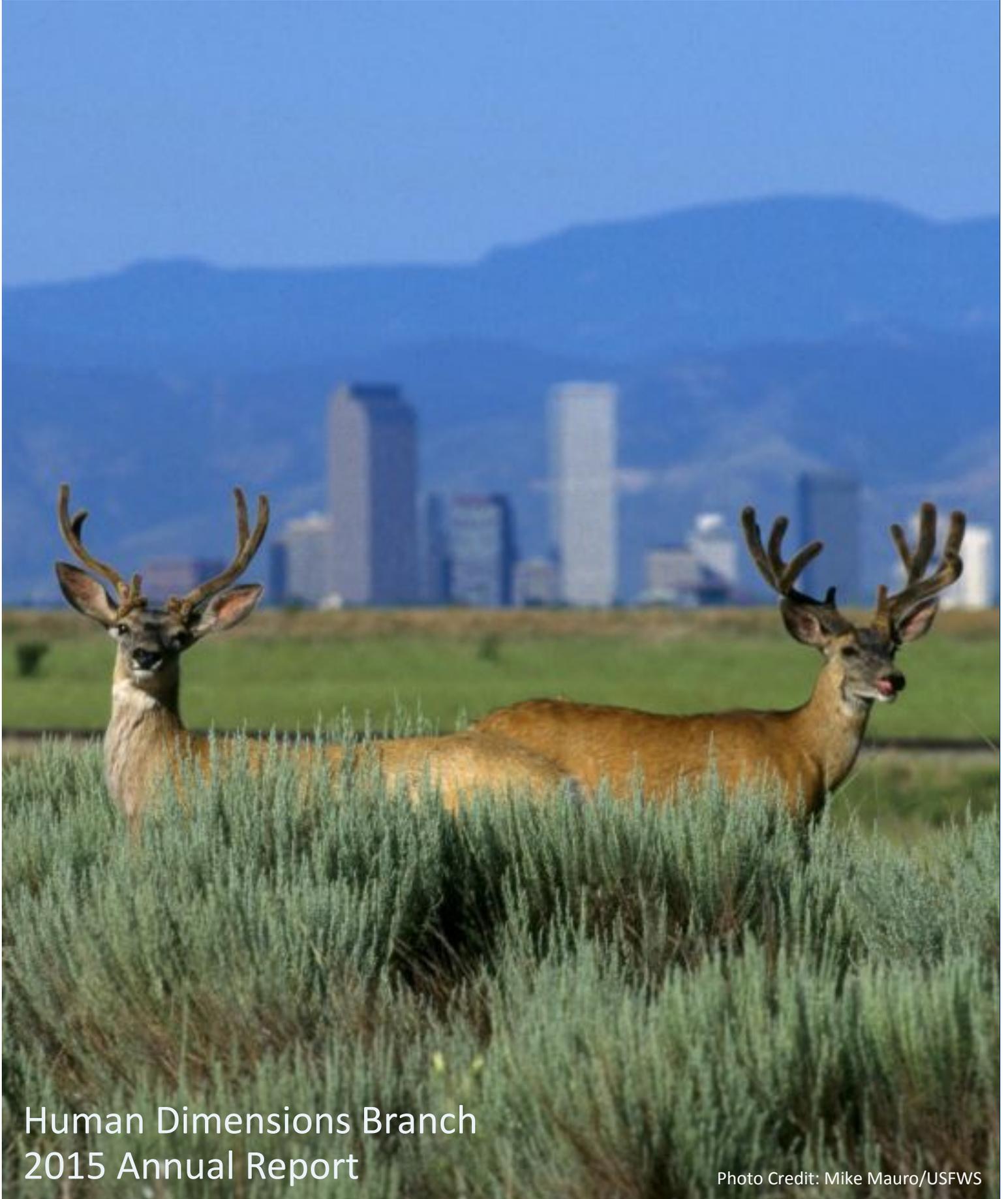




U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Natural Resource Program Center



Human Dimensions Branch
2015 Annual Report

Photo Credit: Mike Mauro/USFWS

“One of the anomalies of modern ecology is the creation of two groups, each of which seems barely aware of the existence of the other. The one studies the human community, almost as if it were a separate entity, and calls its findings sociology, economics and history. The other studies the plant and animal community and comfortably relegates the hodge-podge of politics to the liberal arts. The inevitable fusion of these two lines of thought will, perhaps, constitute the outstanding advance of this century.”

- Aldo Leopold, 1935





HD Branch and other NRPC staff putting up an elk enclosure fence at Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge.

“Human Dimensions,” in concept, is not new. When it comes to effectively managing National Wildlife Refuges (Refuges), we have always had to consider people and how they value natural resources in our conservation work. It is becoming increasingly evident that this is no longer a necessary burden driven by legislative requirements like NEPA, but an imperative piece of the management puzzle that must be informed by science.

In articulating his vision for Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) to staff at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in 2013, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Director Dan Ashe recognized that 21st Century conservation challenges are exacerbated by human population growth and related competition for water, land, food, and space. He said, “We can’t address the enormous conservation challenges we face, such as climate change, habitat fragmentation, water shortages and invasive species with the tools of the past. We need a strong vision for the future.” Meaningful, sustainable progress in conservation depends on public and institutional support, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the social aspects of natural resource management.

Established at the Natural Resource Program Center (NRPC) in 2012, the Human Dimensions (HD) Branch supports the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) and other programs of the Service by integrating social science with biological science to inform conservation delivery and by putting training, tools and resources in the hands of practitioners. The following is an overview of some of the HD Branch’s key accomplishments over the last year.

Thank you to all those who worked with and supported the HD Branch last year, including the following partners outside of the Service: U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Cornell University, Colorado State University Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources, North American Bird Conservation Initiative, committees of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Revision, Partnership and Community Collaboration Academy, D.J. Case and Associates, National Wildlife Refuge Association, and Industrial Economics, Inc. We appreciate these relationships, as they are instrumental in ensuring the social sciences are integrated into our shared conservation efforts. Thanks also to the champions inside the Service for helping to make 2015 such a successful year. We’re looking forward to another productive year in 2016!

Natalie Sexton, Human Dimensions Branch Chief
human_dimensions@fws.gov

Improving Decisions with Social Science

Many conservation practitioners, agencies, and organizations recognize that the social sciences can improve the understanding of the relationship between humans and conservation outcomes. However, there is still a lack of understanding of the depth and diversity of the conservation social sciences, the questions that each field of social science can answer, and the methods that can be applied (see [The Conservation Social Sciences: What, How? and Why?](#)).

Last year the HD Branch provided social science expertise to the Service through facilitating research and providing technical assistance. We received nearly 30 requests for social science assistance from inside the agency, helping the field integrate human dimensions considerations into their wildlife management issues. From assistance with stakeholder engagement processes and strategic communications, to identifying appropriate social science methods and researchers, the HD Branch assisted in conducting focus groups, communication outreach, facilitation, proposal writing, survey review, and securing funding for social science research.

Getting the Lead Out

One aspect of effectively managing refuge lands is to reduce hazards to wildlife. A large body of evidence has shown that an unintended consequence of hunting deer is bald eagle exposure to lead. Eagles and other birds may consume lead bullet fragments when scavenging on deer offal piles (internal organs and entrails of a butchered animal) that are left in the field, resulting in cases of lead poisoning and even fatalities.



Photo credit: George Gentry/USFWS

The Service's Midwest Region conducted a risk assessment for bald eagle lead exposure on Refuge System lands. Based on the risk posed, consideration of the human dimensions of lead ammunition use, and guidance from regional Refuge System leadership, a non-toxic Implementation Team was formed to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategic communication and outreach strategy to encourage deer hunters to use non-toxic ammunition on refuges in the Midwest Region.

As a member of the Implementation Team, the HD Branch helped to identify relevant social science research, successful strategies used by other agencies and organizations, and the relevant stakeholders who may be impacted or impact management activities. This has built a greater understanding of the diversity of beliefs and attitudes surrounding the use of lead ammunition and the potential for controversy surrounding various management activities. The HD Branch is involved in the development of the communication and outreach strategy and will help devise an evaluation plan to monitor the success of reducing lead exposure for bald eagles on our lands.

Growing the Refuge System Strategically *Getting the Most for Our Conservation Buck*

Growing the Refuge System requires strategic planning, design and implementation. The HD Branch has been involved in strategic growth and landscape conservation design (LCD) efforts, including supporting the Policy and Planning Branch with the creation of the Service's Land Protection Planning (LPP) policy document. To further the understanding of social science needs for LCD, the HD Branch also partnered with researchers at Cornell University Department of Natural Resources to explore the role of local stakeholder engagement and social data integration in LCD processes through evaluation of pilot projects. Results will provide the Service and participating Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) with insights to social science data and stakeholder engagement considerations to improve future LCD efforts.

Co-Existing with Key Deer



Key deer are a charismatic species that people delight in viewing...and sometimes petting and feeding. National Key Deer Refuge staff want to facilitate positive viewing experiences for visitors, but these other types of interactions have long been a concern. Feeding wildlife can be harmful for many reasons—it can compromise the “wildness” of animals and their health by changing their natural behavior. Key deer, for example, are often fed from cars, so instead of foraging on mangroves they are attracted to roads and this has led to an increase in automobile strikes. Even though it is illegal to feed Key deer, it is still a common occurrence. The HD Branch worked with refuge staff, local stakeholders, and consultants to build knowledge and understanding of motivations for feeding among various audiences—e.g., visitors to, and residents of Big Pine Key—and to identify potential strategies to minimize feeding. To learn more about this project listen to our podcast: [Human-Wildlife Interactions: Coexisting with Key Deer](#).

HD Branch Publications in FY 15

- Sexton, N.R., D. Ross-Winslow, M. Pradines, A.M. Dietsch. 2015. [The Urban Wildlife Conservation Program: Building a broader conservation community](#). Cities and the Environment (CATE): Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 3.
- Sexton, N.R. and D. Ross-Winslow. 2015. [What social science says about reaching new audiences](#), Refuge Update, November/December 2014.
- Stevens, S. and N.R. Sexton, *The social implications of surrogate species*, in Real-world Applications of Surrogate Species: Insights and Lessons Learned. The Wildlife Society, Pittsburgh, PA, Oct 25-30, 2014.
- Thompson, E. and M.F. Floyd. 2015. [Race, ethnicity, urban populations, and wildlife-dependent recreation: a review and synthesis of the literature](#). North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service (Service sponsored research).

The Urban Wildlife Conservation Program: *Evaluation for Excellence*



The Urban Wildlife Conservation Program (Urban Program) was established to engage and inspire people who live in urban areas to become part of a conservation constituency, so that together we can leave a legacy of abundant and healthy wildlife and wild lands for future generations of Americans to enjoy. Helping adults and children who live in urban areas develop a love for the land is a 21st century priority for the Service.

In implementing the Urban Program, the Service is committed to taking a [Strategic Habitat Conservation](#) approach where planning and evaluation promote strategic, accountable, and adaptive action.

With a team of Service staff, partners, and external consultants, the HD Branch is leading efforts to design a plan for monitoring and evaluation that will help inform decisions, foster adaptive change, and take stock of progress to ensure that goals of the Urban Program are met.

It has been a challenging undertaking to develop an evaluation plan that can (a) provide valuable information to the field, regions, and headquarters, and (b) be implemented across refuges conducting many different activities to meet the goals of the Urban Program. The Urban Evaluation Team has dedicated a lot of time and energy, not only to design the plan, but also to increasing their knowledge and understanding of evaluation concepts and practices. With outside experts, the HD Branch has facilitated this learning through a series of webinars and workshops.

We believe that the work of this team is building the capacity of the Service to conduct meaningful evaluations for the Urban Program and beyond.

Fostering a Shared Understanding of Human Dimensions

The HD Branch provides Refuge and other Service staff and partners with new and innovative resources, tools, and training to more effectively address human dimensions of natural resource conservation. Two big accomplishments for 2015 included the Human Dimensions Foundations training course and the Human Dimensions Resource Portal on HDgov developed expressly for Service employees.

HD 101- Training Conservation Practitioners in the Service and Beyond



Photo credit: Lamar Gore

Part of putting more tools in practitioners' toolbox requires integrating core HD concepts into existing training course such as Partnership Academy, Advanced Refuge Manager Academy, and Visitor Services Step-down Planning. For those looking for more, we partnered with NCTC to offer Human Dimensions Foundations of Natural Resource Conservation (CLM8226) in FY 15. This three-day course provides an overview of key concepts, methods, and practical applications of the social sciences; it is based on a [human dimensions framework](#) and relies heavily on case study application. Look for the next offering of this course, November 14-16, 2016 at NCTC (open to both DOI employees and others).

Train, Don't Drain!

Looking for tips or training you can do from the comfort of your own office? Look no further. A few of the training products we developed this year include:

[Human Dimensions of Natural Resources Conservation Broadcasts](#)

- The Value of Public Lands
- Humans, Wildlife, and Their Shared Health

[Conservation in HD Podcasts](#)

- Human-Wildlife Interactions: Coexisting with Key Deer
- Human Dimensions Resource Website for USFWS

Conservation in HD Newsletter

Each issue focuses on a specific topic of HD application. Email

human_dimensions@fws.gov to subscribe.

- [Stakeholder Engagement](#)
- [Science Communication](#)
- [Values, Beliefs, and Attitudes](#)
- [Influencing Conservation Behavior](#)
- [FWS HD Resource Portal](#)



The [Human Dimensions Resource Portal](#) was created for Service employees by the HD Branch in partnership with USGS and launched last year. The portal provides convenient access to HD tools and resources applicable to the Service's conservation work. It also encourages a community of practice for conservation practitioners through a blog and conversation forum; upcoming events; news and announcements; and a directory of social science experts in the Service. The Resource Portal can be accessed from computers and mobile devices. Check it out and share it with your colleagues!

HD Search Tool

stakeholder engagement x

Start a new search

communication community strategic planning human dimensions stakeholder analysis public engagement stakeholder i

RESULTS

Does Endangered Species Protection and a Healthy Economy go Hand in Hand?

Expert Directory

In this expert directory you can browse Service HD experts or filter by region, program area, area of expertise, or a combination of these.

Filter by Region

Filter by FWS Program

Environmental Education

Filter

Reset



The HD Resource Portal is available at:
<https://my.usgs.gov/hd/team/usfws>