The mission of the Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates (CORFA) is to foster a network of nonprofit organizations supporting the National Wildlife Refuge System and the National Fish Hatchery System.

Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates (CORFA) is a community of Friends members collaborating to strengthen our organizations and our ability to support refuges, hatcheries, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service). Together we are creating a network of support by sharing materials and experiences with each other. This network of support fortifies our ability to advocate for our missions and ensure our refuges and hatcheries are community assets.

Our programs and activities are facilitated by a small core team that helps to jump-start programs and identify resources in the Friends community. All of CORFA’s programs and activities are possible because of partnerships with Friends, National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA), and the Service.

CORFA is all of us working together to strengthen our organizations and partnerships.
2021: A Year of Advocacy and Networking

2021 began with COVID-19 and Friends groups coping with the impacts of the Office of Inspector General audit of the Service’s Friends program that was published in the fall of 2020. The report raised questions as to whether the Service was adhering to their ethical standards and whether Friends had the necessary internal controls to ensure donations were used properly. This report could have jeopardized the partnership between the Service and the Friends, but CORFA, NWRA, Friends, and the Service united to make the partnership stronger. Together we were able to persuade the Service to modify the plan to update the Friends Policy to include an opportunity for Friends to review and submit comments. Friends submitted over 500 comments and the Service listened. The updated Friends Policy resolved many of the issues raised. CORFA is thankful that we were able to help the Friends community get the information they needed, share concerns, provide comments to the Service, and learn about the revised Friends Policy.

Webinars sponsored by NWRA and CORFA enhanced the network within the Friends community. These webinars presented by Friends, NWRA, and the Service addressed nonprofit management, legislative issues, and Service policy and priorities.

The quarterly publications of The Link contain articles on how Friends are connecting with their communities, building sustainable organizations, and implementing their creative projects during COVID.

We thank all of the Friends organizations who provided materials for the Resource Center that is part of the Coalition of Refuge Friends website. The Resource Center contains materials on governance, communications, board responsibilities, and so much more.

In 2022 we’re looking forward to creating many more connections within the Friends community in order to make each of us stronger, safer, and able to fulfill our missions.

Regards,
The CORFA Team

Joan Patterson          Linda Kilgore
Cheryl Hart            Sue Hix
Jim Stone              Barbara Volkle
Accomplishments

- Appealed to Friends to submit comments on the notice in the Federal Register about collecting documentation from Friends.
- Submitted comments, in partnership with NWRA, to the Service in response to the notice in the Federal Register about collecting documentation from Friends.
- Urged Friends groups, through Facebook posts, webinars, and our website, to submit comments on the draft Friends policy.
- Submitted 168 comments on the draft Friends policy.
- Finalized six policies to help steer and protect CORFA.
- Signed Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement with the NWRA.
- Co-sponsored with NWRA 13 webinars focused on strengthening Friends organizations and furthering dialogue with USFWS and NWRA. Subject matter included:
  - Internal Financial Controls, Friends Policy, USFWS priorities, donor-centered fundraising, GuideStar seals, cybersecurity, and more.
  - Recordings are available on our website.
- Co-published with NWRA four issues of The Link, a quarterly e-newsletter by and for Friends. Topics included: celebrating Friends, connecting with communities, sustaining your organization, and explaining who CORFA is.
- Launched the Resource Center on the CORFA website. We currently list 105 resources to help Friends manage and strengthen their organizations and partnerships. The website has been viewed almost 11,000 times in 2021.
- Friends generated over 700 posts on the CORFA Facebook group.
- Provided a weekly listing of free or low-cost webinars for nonprofits.
- Shared Friends newsletters weekly.
- Assisted numerous Friends with issues, including starting a group, training, insurance, and other topics.
- Held bi-monthly conversations with Linda Schnee, Service’s National Friends Coordinator, and Caroline Brouwer, NWRA’s Vice President of Government Affairs, on issues affecting Friends organizations.
- Initiated a monthly photo contest in the Facebook group.
Impacts

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received 60 responses from Friends and others about collecting documentation from Friends. The Service is still in the process of finalizing which documents will be collected. Initial indications are that they will focus on public documents, and guidance will be available in 2022.

- Over 500 comments were submitted to the Service on the draft Friends policy. The Service reviewed each comment, resolved issues, and updated the policy. NWRA and CORFA hosted webinars presented by Service staff that addressed Friends concerns and strengthened the partnership.

- More than 1,000 participants took part in webinars about nonprofit management and their partnership with the Service.

- Friends shared their accomplishments, activities, programs, and concerns in *The Link* and in the Facebook group.

- CORFA amplified NWRA policy messages about issues affecting Friends and the refuge system.

- We provided a centralized site for sharing Friends-specific resources.

- We worked to strengthen relations with NWRA through partnership on webinars and *The Link*, finalizing a Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement, and being a resource to assist with Friends concerns.

- We are recognized by USFWS as a partner working to support and enhance the Friends community.

You’re encouraged to get involved with CORFA! Join the Facebook group, share your ideas about how we can all help build the capacity of the Friends community. To become more involved, contact us at coalitionrefugefriends@gmail.com. We want to hear from you and learn what you need as well as how you may like to help. Hey, and a donation to NWRA to help finance and support their work with CORFA in support of the Friends community is always welcome, too!

Front page photo: Spider web by W. Lowe/USFWS