Our Mission

The Friends of Heinz Refuge (FOHR) is a non-profit charitable organization working in partnership with John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge to connect people with nature and promote a culture of environmental stewardship through education, outreach, service and nature-based recreation for the conservation of wildlife and habitat.
Friends of Heinz Refuge (FOHR)
Annual Report

First and foremost, please allow the FOHR Board of Directors to thank you, our dedicated members, for your continued support each year. Without you, a great deal of what we do as a non-profit would simply be impossible. As we celebrate our 21st year of operation, we would like to share with you some of the amazing accomplishments we have made thus far. We would also like to share some of our goals and how we can go about achieving those goals in the upcoming fiscal year. Let us continue to work together, hand in hand with refuge staff, to promote habitat restoration, wildlife conservation and environmental education at the refuge. As always, we remain committed to implementing the FWS initiatives of "Connecting People with Nature" and, more recently, the "Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership."

We thank you, our supporters, for making our work possible!

Let us take a moment...

Dear Friends,

Before we embark on a recitation of FOHR’s accomplishments in the last fiscal year and a listing of our upcoming plans, we want to take a moment to reflect upon the positive effect our dedicated volunteers have had upon the programs, projects, events and services they have provided to the Heinz Refuge.

Did you know, for example, that nationwide volunteers provide more than 20% of the work performed on National Wildlife Refuges? At Heinz volunteers donated 8,138 hours of service to the refuge, valued at $200,927. This amount represents the cost of hiring 5 entry level staff members.

Volunteers who so generously share their skills may be seen everywhere on the refuge performing such varied tasks as walk leaders, photographers, reception and store personnel, Weed Warriors, working with community leaders, sponsoring annual events and more. FOHR works together with Fish & Wildlife to bring environmental education to largely underserved local communities, through funding bus transportation for thousands of school children to learn about nature and their place in it firsthand at the refuge. We helped out at Free Fishing Days, Creek Clean-ups, holding special events on GH Day, summer solstice events, Urban Wildlife Refuge Day, and more.

Our volunteers provide us with credibility as we strive to add sponsors, partners, and grant funding.

As we come to the end of our last fiscal year, please join us as we reflect on the lives of three passionately dedicated, long-time refuge volunteers – Chuck Lafferty, Hank Hox, and Frank Doyle each of whom lost their lives in the last few months.

Sincerely,

Jean Diehl
Co-founder of FOHR

Look for these leaves throughout the report to find out ways you can help support FOHR
FOHR board member, Chuck Lafferty, a retired Kindergarten teacher, understood the need for urban populations to rediscover the natural world. At Longstreth Elementary School, Chuck undertook a multi-disciplinary approach to environmental education while partnering with the Heinz Refuge. His approach not only embraced his students, but the entire Longstreth school neighborhood. A substantial portion of the school’s playground became a vegetable and pollinator garden complete with a pond, stream and waterfall. Children planted seeds, tended plants, harvested them and collected, counted and bagged seeds for the following year. He called his kids, “the Kinder-garden Seed Company.” From this not so humble beginning, Chuck engaged his kindergarten students in the design and development of the Heinz Refuge’s Pollinator Garden during frequent field trips to the refuge in 2010 and beyond. Always looking for more ways to bring urban youth to environmental awareness, Chuck became a year-round leader for the Student Conservation Association (SCA) for the last several years.

Frank
FOHR volunteer

Top photo: Frank snapping a photo of a musical performance at the Philly Fall Nature Fest

Bottom photo: Frank took this photo of two tree swallows in a heated conversation

Frank Doyle was one of FOHR’s first volunteers over 20 years ago when he worked alongside other volunteers with the budding “Trail Tamers” committee, clearing and maintaining various trails on the refuge. Frank’s passion for photography led him to the FOHR Photo Group, a service committee which undertakes photo documentation of refuge resources and events. Frank’s skill as a “people photographer” has been featured in many FOHR newsletters and other media publications over the years.
Hank, always interested in the natural world, was an avid bird-watcher and nature photographer. Retired from Boeing several years ago, and searching for something meaningful to do with his time, Hank became an active refuge volunteer. Volunteering was a natural instinct for Hank. Among his first volunteering efforts, he worked with a group of “Trail Tamers” to enhance and maintain refuge trails. Later, when he became the leader of the Trail Tamers, the group also refurbished several wildlife viewing structures found throughout the refuge.

Hank was a refuge ambassador without peer. He was often heard to say “This is MY refuge” as he walked the trails extolling its wonders to countless visitors that he met along the way. Some, after his introduction, have gone on to become walk leaders, while others joined our photo group, and still others eventually joined the Weed Warriors. A few subsequently served on the FOHR board of directors, of which Hank was first a member and later its president. While on the board, Hank was an avid supporter of federal legislation affecting refuge funding and made several trips to Washington D.C. to lobby legislators in support of wildlife refuges. Finally, Hank was deeply involved with FOHR’s student busing program, working with teachers from Widener Partnership Charter School for several years. Hank will be sorely missed as we celebrate our 10th Groundhog Day Festival this year. He was an integral part of the planning committee, and was responsible for stage managing our Groundhog, Tinicum Tim’s magical appearance from his burrow at the end of the celebration.

Chuck, Frank, and Hank will be deeply missed
FIELD TRIP BUS GRANT PROGRAM
FOHR has continued a 7-year tradition of providing busing grants for student field trips. This year, we were able to provide 18 buses that enabled 594 students from local schools to attend field trips to the refuge. Children who are fortunate enough to experience these field trips become attracted to nature, find themselves engaged in nature-related activities, begin to understand the role nature plays in their lives, and finally, gain the potential to become environmental advocates! Ask a FOHR board member how you can help us to increase next year’s bus funding!

ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST
The 17th Annual Nature Photo Contest was a rousing success! The FOHR Photo Group organizes this annual contest of nature images taken at Heinz Refuge. Through photography, the contest shines a spotlight on the beauty and diversity of the Refuge throughout the year. This year, 52 photographers entered their best images to compete for prizes in the Adult, Teen and Child categories. In addition, Refuge staff chose the prestigious Bill Buchanan Award for the photo that best represents Heinz Refuge, and visitors voted for the popular People’s Choice Award. With 90 wonderful images of our varied wildlife and landscapes, the choices were difficult! New this year was the participation of the Heinz Junior Ranger summer campers. Nature photography was one of the program’s activities, and many campers entered their images in the children’s division. Congratulations to everyone who participated!

AMERICORPS VISTA PROJECT
For the first time ever, FOHR has decided to sponsor an Americorps VISTA project! VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a federal program that provides full-time volunteers to work on projects at organizations like FOHR with the hopes of alleviating poverty within the community. Madilyn Schwer was chosen as the Americorps VISTA member who will be serving with FOHR for the next year. She graduated from Penn State with a degree in Biology this past May and is going to be primarily focused on capacity building and grant writing during her service. Forming community partnerships, developing new programs and events, and securing resources are just a few of the things she will be working on. Madilyn hopes to create a sustainable foundation that will allow FOHR to continue to expand their outreach efforts indefinitely.
ANNUAL GROUNDHOG DAY FESTIVAL
January 27th, 2018
The 9th Annual Groundhog Day Festival brought over 450 people to the Heinz Refuge this year to learn about weather and winter wildlife. There were activities for all ages including wildlife walks, arts & crafts, and live music! We had support from several partners including, but not limited to, the Philadelphia Zoo with a live animal program, The Franklin Institute with programs on shadows and weather, and L.L. Bean. The festival concluded with a singing processional to the groundhog burrow. Everyone booed when our mascot, Tinicum Tim, predicted six more weeks of winter. This event was entirely funded by FOHR. Thank you to our volunteers for making this day a success! We can hardly wait to celebrate our 10th Annual Groundhog Day Festival next year!

ANNUAL SUMMER SOLSTICE FESTIVAL
June 23rd, 2018
The 2nd Annual Summer Solstice Festival took place during the evening and attracted a crowd of over 100 people to enjoy food, activities, and live music organized by FOHR. The event opened with a beautiful Yoga Sun Salutation led by Deanna Santiago. Under the pavilion, people took part in face painting and bubble blowing while listening to live music by Glen Waldeck and Vincent. Barry G also shared his musical expertise in a sing-along. Although it rained on and off throughout the festival, the spirits were high! As dusk approached, L.L. Bean led a special paddle for a limited number of attendees on a first come, first served basis. We look forward to celebrating the 3rd Annual Summer Solstice Festival next summer!

ANNUAL MONARCH DASH 5K
September 29th, 2018
This year, FOHR organized their first ever Monarch Dash 5K during the very first Urban National Wildlife Refuge Day Celebration. The race took place in the morning with a total of 78 participants and was a great way to start off the celebration. Aurelia Skipwith, with the U.S. Department of the Interior, announced the congressional establishment of Urban National Wildlife Refuge Day on September 29th. She participated in the race and several other activities throughout the day. The race was professionally timed by Bryn Mawr Racing Company. Following the race, there were several other activities for people to enjoy including archery, fishing, and kayaking. Overall, the 5K race was a success!
FWS employs a myriad of programs, projects, and events in order to accomplish the congressionally mandated goals set for the Heinz Refuge. Their mission includes implementing measures to restore habitat lost in the years immediately prior to the establishment of the refuge, to improve and maintain healthy habitats, and to provide environmental education and compatible recreation opportunities for the public.

The available funds to accomplish these tasks are often limited by the federal budget. Therefore, FOHR’s monetary support for FWS programs, projects, and events makes it more feasible for the Heinz Refuge to accomplish their goals.

Aside from direct monetary assistance, FOHR also provides countless volunteer hours in support of FWS’s mission, and we publicize refuge programs and events through our Marsh Musing newsletter, our e-bulletin, Facebook page, and website. We are proud to be volunteers and proud that we make a meaningful impact!

Donations to FOHR directly support programs and events at the refuge. Together we are stronger and can make a huge difference in the world!

Implementing the New FWS Initiative

The newest FWS program initiative, “The Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership” is now in its third year and was designed to inspire highly urban populations to understand and protect the environment around them.

To accomplish this initiative in Philadelphia, the staff at the Heinz Refuge has reached out to nearby community schools and neighborhoods, forming lasting partnerships with them. These partnerships will make FWS programs more relevant to millions of urban Americans and will establish a strong refuge presence, providing urbanites with meaningful ways to participate in wildlife conservation and recreation.

FOHR welcomes the opportunity to support this amazing program by covering the cost of refuge field trip bus transportation for students in target schools and daycare centers. We pledge to expand support for this program as it further develops.

Your tax deductible donation helps to provide urban children with a chance to discover nature and to inspire them to become sorely needed advocates for a sustainable environmental future!

PHILLY NATURE KIDS (PNK)
In last year’s annual report, FOHR announced that we had received a two-year grant from the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) totaling just under 50K to continue and expand the Heinz Refuge’s PNK Program. Funding from this grant provided the refuge with iPods, bus funding, and professional development workshops for teachers. Obtaining grants for the purposes of promoting environmental education and stewardship to our youth is just one example of the work FOHR does in support of the refuge and surrounding community.
GUIDED WALKS
One of FWS’s first programs at the refuge was to establish a FREE guided walk schedule staffed by volunteer naturalists. Walk topics include a variety of interests such as birds, plants, butterflies, photography and physical fitness. Evening walks have occasionally been added to the schedule, much to our visitors’ delight. Some walk leaders have been volunteering since the program began, while others continue to be added as time goes on. **FOHR supports this program by providing volunteer leaders. We publicize the schedule of events in our Marsh Musings newsletter, as well as on our website, Facebook page, and monthly e-bulletin.**

WEED WARRIOR PROGRAM
Under the guidance of the new refuge biologist, Mariana Bergerson, Weed Warriors continues to wage a never-ending war against invasive plants species on the refuge. Brendalee Phillips previously led the Weed Warriors, but she has retired this past month. This year, the Weed Warriors focused on removing Japanese Honeysuckle, Oriental Bittersweet, and Mile-a-minute vines on the refuge. The Weed Warrior program also includes replacing invasive plant species with native plant species. **FOHR supports this program by providing reliable volunteers to do the work. We also help by publicizing the program in our various outreach media.**

SUMMER CAMP
This year, in keeping with the Urban Refuge Partnership, the refuge focus for summer camp shifted from accepting individual sign-ups to accepting children who attended inner city daycare centers. Participants were drawn from local recreation centers and PNI schools*. The program included birding, fishing and learning about pollinators and outdoor skills. Children also participated in water testing and pretended they were early colonists building their homes in the new world. **FOHR supported this program by providing the children with snacks and bus transportation.**

*Patterson and Penrose Elementary Schools and Tilden Middle School
DARBY CREEK CLEAN-UP
April 14th, 2018
Darby Creek Clean-up Day is one of the largest events organized by the Heinz Refuge. This major clean-up event is celebrated in recognition of Earth Day and is sponsored by our partner, Darby Creek Valley Association. This year, the event brought over 200 volunteers and included participation from the scouts, Boeing, Volunteers Untapped, SCA, Sierra Club, Exelon, and community service. The clean-up is always scheduled at low tide to allow volunteers to have access to the refuge’s mudflats. The refuge is a recipient of storm borne trash traveling downstream and tidal borne trash sweeping in from the Delaware River. In both cases, much of the trash settles onto our mudflats and remains there until someone comes along to pick it up. As a result, cleaning up the refuge is an ongoing challenge. This year, over 3,000 lbs. of trash were picked up! FOHR supports this annual event by covering the cost of food served at the culmination of the event, by supplying volunteers, and by promoting the event through our newsletter, website, FB page and our monthly e-bulletin.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY
May 12th, 2018
International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) highlights the importance of international efforts to conserve birds through agreements, laws, treaties, and collaborations. IMBD was celebrated at the Heinz Refuge this year with guided bird and nature walks scheduled every hour all day for the public. 2018 is deemed “The Year of the Bird” because it is the 100th Anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act! This is a landmark agreement between the United States, Canada, and Mexico to protect our mutual migratory birds. IMBD is the only international education program that highlights and celebrates the migration of nearly 350 species of migratory birds between nesting habitats in North America and non-breeding grounds in Latin America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. FOHR continues to support this event as it does every year with volunteer guides and publicity.
ANNUAL PHILLY FALL NATURE FESTIVAL

October 13th, 2018

The Philly Fall Nature Fest is a great tradition that the Heinz Refuge has upheld for many years now. The refuge hosts approximately 1,000 people at this event and there are always a number of partnering organizations and businesses that come together to make this event a success. During the festival, people had the opportunity to participate in trolley rides, kayaking, archery, fishing, guided tours, and nature crafts. In addition, people could learn about nature-related topics by visiting the many tables that were set up throughout the visitor center and refuge (some had live animals!). The FOHR Photo Group announced the winners of this year’s photo contest. These photos can be accessed on our Facebook page. This year, FOHR participated in the “United 4 The Delaware Community Forum” held in the auditorium during the festival. Panelists from several local organizations shared their thoughts on issues concerning communities in and around the Delaware River Watershed.

FOHR's Community Commitment

The Eastwick Friends and Neighbors Coalition (EFNC) was formed in response to the threat of high-density residential development on a 128-acre tract of land immediately adjacent to the Heinz Refuge. After lots of hard work, the coalition has gained respect and support including that of the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA). The coalition has consistently attended PRA and City Planning Commission meetings to remain engaged in the process of planning potential uses for the 128-acre tract. As a community partner, FOHR board members have attended Public Land Strategy meetings where residents and other supporters demonstrate strength in numbers as well as our dedication in keeping our public lands safe from misuse. On October 25th, EFNC held their 4th public meeting to address any comments or concerns related to the Eastwick Public Land Strategy recommendations that were presented at the public meeting on July 26th. EFNC greatly urged all Eastwick residents and supporters to submit comments to the plan before the deadline of the 90-day public comment period. It is of vital importance to the refuge and the residents of the Eastwick community that potential site development be planned with their best interests in mind to assure the well-being of both the refuge and Eastwick in the future.
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