The Bear River and its tributaries form the largest freshwater system feeding into the Great Salt Lake. From its headwaters in Utah’s Uinta Mountains, the river flows north into Wyoming and Idaho before returning south through Utah’s Cache Valley and into the Bear River delta as it enters the Great Salt Lake. Along this 500-mile path, the river includes three national wildlife refuges, flows through both remote and populated communities and serves people in three states with water, wildlife habitat, and abundant outdoor recreation opportunities.

The water of the Bear River supports many uses—from irrigation to drinking water supplies, from coldwater fisheries to wetlands for migratory birds, from boating on Bear Lake to waterfowl hunting in the Bear River delta. All of these uses depend on the water quality and water quantity of the Bear River—and in order to secure these, we must educate surrounding communities, from schoolchildren and university researchers to developers and industrial users, so that we all understand how to best balance water use and conservation to benefit all.

The learning experience my students received was invaluable. It provided hands-on learning that I cannot provide in a classroom setting. — Box Elder County Teacher

Achieving the Conservation Education vision of the James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

Opened in 2006, the James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Brigham City, Utah was built by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to:

- Provide opportunities for the public to learn about the National Wildlife Refuge System and the value of conserving the wildlife and habitat in the Great Salt Lake ecosystem; and
- Serve as a regional resource for environmental education with school districts, youth organizations, universities, conservation organizations and other groups interested in conserving the Bear River watershed and associated wetlands for to benefit people and wildlife.

With the support of the Friends of the Bear River Refuge and a host of partners, more than 10,000 children participated in environmental education programs in 2009. This included every 4th grader in Box Elder County, as part of the Utah Core Curriculum Standards, as well as early childhood programs and youth hunting and birding days for older kids. As a result of these programs, fourth grade students showed a 30-35% increase in understanding of wetland and watershed science, based on evaluations by Utah State University.

Also in 2009, the Friends of Bear River Refuge produced the film “Wings of Thunder: A Portrait of Life” as an education and outreach tool, and the Friends now seek to take a further step by endowing the environmental education program through the Enduring Legacy Campaign.
Our Vision

We envision a conservation education program that:

- Builds on a 5-year track record of success in engaging and educating schoolchildren and expands to a larger geography throughout the Bear River Watershed;
- Expands programs to include a greater depth and diversity of participants, from urban schools to rural communities;
- Expands current internship and career training programs by working with universities, the National Conservation Training Center, the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) and Student Conservation Association (SCA) to train students for conservation careers;
- Complements land and water conservation efforts in the Bear River Watershed, and
- Provides a regional conservation center for professional training, conferences and workshops, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service workshops and career training.

Our Challenge

In a society increasingly removed from nature, the National Wildlife Refuge System provides a national network of outdoor classrooms that we need now more than ever. To fully realize the outreach and education potential of the James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center requires creative partnerships and a combination of public and private funding to complement the Center’s annual operating budget. To date, local school districts have been able to provide in-kind matching funds—however, in a time of tight budgets at the federal, state and local levels, education programs are severely threatened with cuts and even elimination. This campaign seeks to bring stability to the education program at Bear River.

Our Window of Opportunity

The Friends of the Bear River Refuge is launching a capital campaign to establish a permanent endowment to support conservation education programs led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Bear River Watershed. With the facility of the James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center at the core, the program will reach outward to engage people of all ages in conservation education and on-the-ground experiences.

The Enduring Legacy Education Fund would help provide important stability to the Bear River watershed programs by offering an annual funding source that could in turn be matched by other federal, state, local and grant funds.

Our Goal and Timeline

The Friends of Bear River Refuge aspires to raise $1.5 million to establish the Enduring Legacy Education Endowment. We hope to reach this goal by December 2012, and once established, the fund will continue to accept gifts and bequests over the long term.

How You Can Help

The Enduring Legacy Education Endowment is a way of providing high quality and vibrant education programs that will train tomorrow’s conservation leaders. The Bear River, its watershed, its delta, and its meeting with the Great Salt Lake, offers an ideal outdoor classroom—a place for learning, sport, recreation, and contemplation.

To learn more about supporting the Bear River Watershed Enduring Legacy Campaign, please contact:

Jon Bunderson, Friends of the Bear River Refuge, pbundy6@msn.com
Bob Barrett, Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, (435) 723-5887
Anne Truslow, National Wildlife Refuge Association, (202) 292-2423 or atruslow@refugeassociation.org
The National Wildlife Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the world’s premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve America’s fish, wildlife and plants. Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida’s Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the System has grown to more than 150 million acres and 554 national wildlife refuges in all U.S. states and territories. The Bear River flows through three National Wildlife Refuges: Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. For more information please see www.fws.gov/refuges/

Friends of the Bear River Refuge

Established as a not-for-profit charitable organization in 1998, The Friends of the Bear River Refuge is devoted to the promotion, appreciation, and conservation of the wildlife, birds, and habitat of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. For more information, please visit www.friendsofbearriverrefuge.org

National Wildlife Refuge Association

The National Wildlife Refuge Association is a national nonprofit organization with the mission of conserving American wildlife for future generations through strategic programs to protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond refuge boundaries that secure the ecological integrity of the System. For more information, please visit www.refugeassociation.org