
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center

Albuquerque, New Mexico



An engaging wetland habitat feature and a water-wise approach are key features of a center serving visitors to the first urban wildlife refuge in the Southwest.

SERVICES

Ecological Restoration
Water Strategies

In 2014, a group of conservation organizations and federal, state, and local partners acquired 570 acres of agricultural land along the Rio Grande and transformed it into the Southwest's first urban wildlife refuge. The Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge restored riparian wetland habitat, ecological function, cultural connection, public access, and stewardship to a site adjacent to the Isleta Pueblo community. The Refuge provides residents of this dense urban region with opportunities to encounter and enjoy nature. One such opportunity is the Refuge's LEED-certified visitor center and its wetland habitat.

The Visitor Center was designed and constructed by native-owned joint venture CF Padilla-Brycon. A key member of the team, Biohabitats designed the wetland and an onsite system to treat wastewater and reuse it to recharge groundwater. The wetlands absorb rainwater, with a cistern and existing groundwater well supplying makeup. The bosque-inspired wetland enables visitors to experience a southwestern riverine ecosystem and supports an array of native plants that provide habitat for wildlife. Non-potable, recycled water from the regional wastewater recycling plant irrigates most of the landscape and flushes toilets. Harvested rainwater and onsite well water feed the edible and cultural gardens.

By creatively using this mix of water supplies to meet most of its demands, the Refuge dramatically reduced its reliance on municipal water. Native and local residents helped build the visitor center and grounds, learning construction and green jobs skills in the process.