

Plenary Speakers

Ariel Elliott and Jennifer Owen-White
Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Ariel Elliot is the Wildlife Biologist and lead for the Biology Program at the new Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. They joined the Service through the first year of the Directorate Resource Program (DFP), working with small mammals and prairie dogs at Sevilleta NWR in the summer of 2014. Then in 2015, they were hired has a full-time biologist for Valle de Oro NWR, where they are helping to build the refuge, its habitats, and its biological program from the ground up. Ariel has Bachelor's of Science in Wildlife and Fisheries Science with a minor in Forestry from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.



Jennifer Owen-White is the first refuge manager of the new Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in Albuquerque. Valle de Oro is the first urban refuge in the Southwest and part of a larger push by U.S. Fish and Wildlife to reach urban audiences and connect them to the important habitats and wildlife that the Service protects. Jennifer is proud to be both a biologist and visitor services specialist. She was born in Chicago, grew up in Houston, and has a B.S. in Biology as well as an M.S. in Wildlife Science from Texas Tech University. Jennifer is completing her PhD in Forestry and Natural Resource Interpretation from Stephen F. Austin State University where she has focused on connecting urban communities to conservation and the outdoors.

Title: Community Based Conservation: Creating a Shared Vision for Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge

Abstract: We have all heard that engaging the communities we serve leads to greater buy in, increased support and overall greater success in our conservation efforts, but how does that work in the real world? How do you engage community members when all the decisions are already made? How do you build trust with communities to start with? How do you keep community members engaged throughout the lifespan of a project?

In this presentation Ariel Elliott, Wildlife Biologist and Jennifer Owen-White, Refuge Manager tell the story of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in Albuquerque, New Mexico and its mission to be built “by the community, for the community”. After completing community-based site planning for the refuge, the staff had the difficult task of bringing the shared vision to life. Learn how the refuge continues to engage community members and how those relationships have shaped the refuge’s programs, partnerships and workforce.