

## **Public Access Plan**

### **East Park Leadership and Conservation Center**

#### **A Collaboration of the Philadelphia Outward Bound School and the National Audubon Society**

#### **East Park Reservoir – Philadelphia**

#### **Context for the Public Access Planning Process**

The National Audubon Society (Audubon”) and Philadelphia Outward Bound School (“Outward Bound”) are collaborating to preserve a virtually unknown and inaccessible lake in Philadelphia by creating an educational center for conservation and leadership development (the “Center”) that will benefit thousands of Philadelphians every year.

Audubon and Outward Bound have formed a nonprofit support organization, East Park Leadership and Conservation Center (“EPLACC”), that will enter a lease with the City of Philadelphia and manage construction and operation of the Center. Working together through EPLACC, Audubon and Outward Bound propose to build an inspirational educational facility at the East Park Reservoir that will be the launching point for internationally recognized programs serving young people, adults, families and communities across the Philadelphia region.

The Center will be a window to the natural world of Fairmount Park that will be available to every member of the greater Philadelphia community. It will be the point of public entry to views of the lake and to walking paths on the west side of the lake that allows managed public access to the lake in alignment with public safety and protection of the site as a bird and wildlife sanctuary. [The site is currently completely fenced off and surrounded by signs that state “No Trespassing – Violators will be subject to prosecution by the Philadelphia Police” and “Danger – Deep Water.”]

Planning for this project continues to involve a unique collaboration between two internationally recognized non-profit organizations, city agencies (P&R and PWD) and community-based organizations. Audubon and Outward Bound are still at the conceptual phase of a shared vision for the Center. We plan to be flexible and responsive to community needs and public interest in the Center as we proceed through the many levels of public review for this project over the coming months.

Our goal in this document is to offer a public access plan that balances public access to the Center with serious and legitimate concerns for public safety, the safety and security of our program participants (the vast majority of whom will be public and charter school students from Philadelphia), our capacity to offer outstanding programs that will benefit the region, and the importance of preserving and restoring the site as a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

It is important to note that there is no general standard for exactly what days of the week, exactly what months of the year, and exactly how many days or how many months per year facilities in Fairmount Park must be open to the public. Most facilities have separate and distinct schedules that provide for differing degrees of public access, as may be determined by what kind of activities occur at the facility,

what resources are available, and basic security and liability concerns. Some facilities in Fairmount Park are closed completely for parts of the year.

### **Community Engagement in the Planning Process**

Audubon and Outward Bound have engaged Strawberry Mansion community leaders and organizations in the planning process, including the Strawberry Mansion Community Development Corporation and Neighborhood Action Committee, the East Park Revitalization Alliance, the Smith Memorial Playground, the Friends of the Sedgley Woods Disc Golf Course and the Mander Recreation Center. Staff members from the Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Department and the Philadelphia Water Department have made tremendous contributions to the planning and review process. We have considered suggestions from the Fairmount Park Conservancy, the Philadelphia Parks Alliance and other interested groups and stakeholders.

In addition, we are responding to public comments to the Alternatives Analysis posted on the Parks & Recreation website and testimony presented at the February 27, 2013 public hearing before the Commission on Parks & Recreation.

At this stage in the project, we offer this Public Access Plan as **our vision** for public enjoyment of the Center and as our plan for what we expect to achieve in collaboration with the community, the city agencies and supporters of the project. Support from the Parks & Recreation Department (described below) is instrumental to accomplishing our goals.

We hope this vision for public engagement at the Center will expand as support for the project grows over the coming years and as we adapt to changing circumstances and community needs.

### **The Public's Experience at the Center**

The lake at the East Park Reservoir is a unique habitat for birds and wildlife. It is a peaceful, beautiful and inspiring site. Views of the lake from a platform adjacent to the building will give people an immediate and direct experience of the beauty of nature in the urban environment.

Special places and spaces at the Center (possible examples are a bird blind or an outdoor classroom) will encourage exploration, discovery, fun and repeat visits. Some places will be designed to convey the meaning of "sanctuary" for birds and people, the importance of taking pure enjoyment from nature, and how nature helps us to relax and refresh our minds.

Public exhibit areas in the building will interpret migratory flyways, urban oases, the urban tree canopy and the critical importance of habitat protection for wildlife. They will invite visitors to connect with birds, wildlife and plants, and the experience migration throughout Fairmount Park and the city. They will inspire the public and program participants to challenge themselves, to explore healthy outdoor activities in the natural world while respecting and connecting with our shared environment and each other, and to discover their untapped potential as leaders for Philadelphia and the region.

**The Center's public exhibit areas, viewing platform and pathways to wildlife observation points on the west side of the lake will be open to the public without entrance fees or charges.**

**Days and hours for public access to the Center set forth below are based on the understanding that two Recreation Specialist Instructors from the Philadelphia Department of Parks & Recreation will be assigned to the Center, with each instructor assigned for nine months a year, for the duration of the lease term. Liability and insurance requirements related to this public access is yet to be determined.**

**(1) Days and Hours of Public Enjoyment of the Center free of charge**

**(a) Public Exhibit Area and Viewing Platform adjacent to the building (yet to be designed)**

**April 1 – September 30 (weather permitting): Five days per week, 10am – 4pm**

**October 1 – March 31 (weather permitting): Three days per week, Noon – 4pm**

These schedules will include some weekend days. Occasionally the Center will be closed to the public or hours will be limited because of special events or program activities. The Center will be closed on major holidays.

**(b) Pathway(s) to observation points on the west side of the lake for viewing birds and wildlife (yet to be designed):**

**April 1 – September 30 (weather permitting): Three days per week, 10am – 4pm**

**October 1 – March 31 (weather permitting): Two days per week, Noon– 4pm**

NOTE: Paths will not be open when the Center is closed. Occasionally paths will be closed to avoid disruption to migrating or nesting birds.

**(c) Morning Bird Walks:** From April through October, Audubon will conduct early morning bird walks (8am to 10am) twice a month for up to twenty people (based on registration) that are open to the public without charge. Bird walks will start from the Center and will include paths along the lake, except when there is a risk of disrupting migrating or nesting birds. Additional extended hours may be offered for bird and wildlife observation (e.g. sunset walks) to the public without charge as weather and seasonal conditions permit.

**(d) Number of public visitors and group visits:** Audubon and Outward Bound reserve the discretion to limit the number of public visitors when the number of visitors could result in the disruption of program activities or the disruption of birds, wildlife and habitat. Group visits to the Center (10 or more people) will be subject to prior registration and are likely to involve appropriate fees.

**(2) Community Use of Center Facilities**

Audubon and Outward Bound will offer limited access to the Center's multi-purpose room for use by community groups during regular business hours as described below as long as such use does not conflict with business, programming or staffing requirements at the Center.

Up to three hours access to the multi-purpose room may be provided from time to time for groups using the space for purposes that do not conflict with program operations at the Center. Community groups will secure access to use of the multi-purpose room and/or other public space through a reservations and rental agreement arrangement developed with community input that provides for diversity and fairness in response to requests. Discounted rentals will be available to community groups that are based within a one mile radius of the Center.

**(3) City use of Center Facility [four times a year – summarize/ track lease language]**

**(4) Summary of Outward Bound and Audubon Programming Planned for the Center**

**Note: Responding to Community Needs.**

Audubon and Outward Bound have conducted multiple meetings with community members, partner organizations, and teachers and school administrators to identify where and how our programs can best meet community needs, for example, programs for seniors, after school programs, internship programs and skill building programs for adults. **We will continue to engage community representatives in our planning process.**

**Both organizations will provide multiple programs available to the public and/or program participants that will be fee-based and/or otherwise supported by grants and designated contributions. The vast majority of program participants will be public and charter school students from Philadelphia.**

The combination of programs offered by Audubon and Outward Bound at the Center will build upon the legacy of Fairmount Park to nurture new conservation leaders from within Philadelphia who can advocate for such issues as environmental justice, better stewardship of the earth, and the embracing of the out of doors as a lifelong passion.

**(a) Audubon programs for students, adults and families at the Center.**

Audubon citizen science programs offered through the Center will provide opportunities for young people, adults and families to take part in conservation action and contribute to scientific research. Our *Audubon at Home* program is one way that people can better manage their communities for conservation, making a difference in their own backyards, local parks, schoolyards and work places. In addition, children and adults can directly contribute to research on birds through participation in the Great Backyard Bird Count, an annual winter bird survey, and through eBird, a joint venture between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon to gather data on bird populations.

Audubon programs based at the Center will include:

- **School-based environmental, science, and technology education.** Through strong partnerships with Philadelphia schools, Audubon will provide multi-series, in-depth awareness-to-action programs that are a combination of in-class programs and field experiences to the Center. School programs will take place throughout the school year with field experiences at the Center and surrounding site primarily offered in the fall and spring seasons. Weekly environmental

after-school programs may be offered during the school year. During their high school year, students will have volunteer and internship opportunities with Audubon at the Center.

- **Professional Development Programs for Philadelphia teachers.** Audubon professional development workshops will provide opportunities for teachers to become more comfortable and knowledgeable with science and technology content.
- **Skill Training Workshops.** Audubon will offer workshops for adults (including college and university students) that teach behaviors and practices that benefit birds, people and the environment with a focus on conservation and restoration of habitat in the Fairmount Park IBA. Examples include: Audubon at Home; Citizen Science training on monitoring birds and evaluating habitat restoration.
- **Habitat Stewardship Conferences.** Audubon will offer evening or half-day conferences for adults and presented with partner organizations. Examples include: Biodiversity, native plants and the urban tree canopy.
- **Restoration and Stewardship Projects.** Audubon will collaborate with the Philadelphia Outward Bound School, Philadelphia Department of Parks & Recreation, the Philadelphia Water Department and other community partners to organize habitat restoration and stewardship projects in Fairmount Park and across Philadelphia.
- **Volunteer Programs.** Audubon will recruit and train volunteers who will be weekend docents at the Center, offer bird walks from the Center, help facilitate family activities and events at the Center, and provide other support for monitoring and habitat restoration programs. Audubon will organize environmental action volunteer activities (e.g. water quality monitoring, bird counts, and habitat restoration projects) that are appropriate for young people, adults and active seniors. These activities may occur at the Center facility, in Fairmount Park and in community settings.
- **Family/Community Programs.** The Center's family programs will focus on hands-on, outdoor, multigenerational programs that explore nature in the Fairmount Park IBA. Walks along the lake, bird watching, discovery walks, and Saturday morning programs for children may be offered on weekends. Family and community programs that focus on outdoor recreation activities and games will be developed in collaboration with the Philadelphia Outward Bound School.

#### **(b) Philadelphia Outward Bound School programs at the Center**

The Philadelphia Outward Bound School ("POBS") provides programs for youth and adults in the metropolitan Philadelphia region and across the states of Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Over the past 20 years, the program has grown from serving 48 youth in 1993, to serving 4,200 youth in 2011. More than 85% of these participants are young people from low-income families and 75% are Philadelphia residents. All Outward Bound programs promote character development, the discovery of

leadership skills and an understanding of the importance of community. Two key components of all Outward Bound programs are environmental service and wilderness sustainability.

POBS is committed to finding the means to provide Outward Bound programs to Philadelphia's young people at an affordable cost. Each year, POBS raises funds from foundations, corporations, individuals and alumni that provide significant program scholarship support to deserving students from across the city and region.

In partnership with Philadelphia schools and youth organizations, Outward Bound integrates its world renowned experiential education pedagogy into classroom curriculums and youth mentoring and intervention programs. Using natural settings in both urban and wilderness settings, Outward Bound provides young people with opportunities to discover their untapped potential and to redefine their futures as engaged and active participants in their communities.

The Philadelphia Outward Bound School provides a continuum of programs and expeditions:

- Insight Programs: Young people and their teachers/youth leaders will take part in half-day and one-day programs at the Center, challenging themselves and each other through a series of activities requiring collaborative problem solving, constructive communication and team-building. The final challenge is POBS's high ropes course requiring youth to tackle their fears and to support and encourage their teammates. Youth build self-confidence, witness the value of effective leadership and develop a sense of trust and teamwork.
- Peer Leadership Expeditions: Week-long expeditions launched from the Center that engage youth with their peers in challenging environments to develop leadership and character skills. A core feature of each course is the solo experience; a segment toward the end of the expedition when students spend a half-day or more alone (discretely monitored by Outward Bound Instructors) to reflect on what they have learned and how they will use new skills and attitudes to achieve their personal goals.

~ Philadelphia Urban Expedition: Young people explore the rich cultural, historical, and natural environment of Philadelphia. They plan and provide community service, climb our high ropes course, canoe the Schuylkill River, and hike the trails of the Wissahickon Valley.

~ Wilderness Expedition: Backpacking and canoeing courses through the Pennsylvania wilderness – state parks and forests and/or the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Youth learn and practice leadership skills, Leave No Trace™ camping, map and compass navigation while reflecting on their life goals and how they will achieve them.

- Youth Leadership Corps & Get Out And Lead Programs: Fourteen- and ten-day wilderness expeditions launched from the Center that bring together a diverse group of urban and suburban youth from the Philadelphia metropolitan region. Young people must demonstrate leadership in their academic, athletic and social lives to qualify for these merit-based awards. On course, they assume leadership positions as their crews traverse challenging terrain and, upon their return to Philadelphia, they work collaboratively to plan and carry out community service projects.

- Workshops and Training Programs (examples): POBS offers educational workshops and training programs for schools, youth-serving organizations, non-profit organizations, corporate teams, community groups and others. These may be half-day, full-day or multi-day workshops offered at the Center, including (but not limited to):
  - “Leave No Trace™” Workshops – Outward Bound is a national LNT training organization. LNT is the most widely accepted outdoor ethics program used on public lands.
  - Conflict Resolution Workshops – Outward Bound’s acclaimed experiential education model is framed to teach peaceful communication and problem-solving techniques as a way of educating participants how to effectively resolve conflict.
  - Teambuilding Workshops – Outward Bound’s time-tested programs have proven to provide powerful experiences that bond individuals into high-performing teams