

URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP
Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain Urban Waters Location Strategic Transition Plan - 2016



Source: Gabrielle Bodin, USGS

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New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain Urban Waters Federal Partnership Strategic Transition Plan

I. Overview

A. Program History

With a goal of helping urban communities – and especially underserved and economically distressed communities – connect with and improve their waterways, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) was announced by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 13 other federal agencies, and the White House Domestic Policy Council in early 2011. The New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain area applied for UWFP pilot program designation and was named the first of the current 19 UWFP sites nationwide. A meeting of federal stakeholders was held in New Orleans in March 2011 to begin identifying suitable local projects and to determine each federal agency’s commitment to the project and potential available resources. This was followed in September 2011 by UWFP meetings of federal, state and local government, and community and non-governmental organization (NGO) stakeholders. At those kick-off meetings the new Partnership reached consensus on listing five local projects:

- 1. UNO Coastal Education and Research Facility (CERF)**
- 2. West End Pier and New Canal Lighthouse**
- 3. Pontchartrain Beach**
- 4. Lafitte Greenway**
- 5. East End Area/Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge**

In addition to the commitment of a dedicated group of local stakeholders, much of the success of the New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain UWFP projects can be attributed to the ongoing support and guidance of the EPA Region 6 project coordinators and to the appointment in 2012 of a local UWFP Ambassador. On loan to the UWFP by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through December 2015, Ambassador Danny Wiegand helped accelerate progress on the projects through his on-site support in strategic planning, stakeholder coordination and project implementation. Continuation of this role and duties through 2016 and beyond is factored into this Strategic Transition Plan.

A. NOLA UWFP Project Status

Since 2011, the NOLA Urban Waters Partners successfully achieved many of the goals laid out by the UWFP initiative in two of the projects – the New Canal Lighthouse and the Lafitte Greenway. Progress continues to be made on Pontchartrain Beach, the East End/Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge projects, and CERF. Following are highlights of project successes as of December 2015:

New Canal Lighthouse: Led by the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF), issues surrounding the rehabilitation of the historic lighthouse that had been destroyed by Hurricane Katrina were worked out with the U.S. Coast Guard, and the reconstructed lighthouse now serves as a Lake Pontchartrain tourist attraction and education center, hosting more than a thousand visitors a month.

West End Pier: The pier represents an important access point to the lake and with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding and City of New Orleans support, the project is advancing well with FEMA recently approving an amendment to the project worksheet for \$24 million in funding.

Pontchartrain Beach Pier: Another FEMA-funded lake access project, the pier at Pontchartrain Beach, is being spearheaded by LPBF, which secured a lease with the levee district for a year. The LPBF also received an Urban Waters small grant.

Lafitte Greenway. With support from the Friends of the Lafitte Greenway, the Trust for Public Land, and others, the City of New Orleans took the lead in successfully developing this 2.6 mile right-of-way along a former shipping canal and railway connecting the historic French Quarter to Bayou St. John into a publicly accessible linear park. Among the goals have been to create recreation areas and other amenities, including bringing healthy food options to neighborhoods that have become food deserts. Among projects under discussion are restoring the area's community gardens.

Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife (NWR) Refuge: The City of New Orleans is partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on ways to enhance access to the NWR and Lake Pontchartrain. Among these are proposed improvements to public access to the wildlife refuge and the "crabbing" bridge.

The New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain Urban Waters Location Work Plan provides a detailed description of these and other projects.

<http://www.epa.gov/urbanwaterspartners/2013-work-plan-lake-pontchartrain-areanew-orleans-louisiana>

II. Transition Plan Process & Methodology

Just as the New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain area was the first of the UWFP sites to launch, so will this Strategic Transition Plan be the first to establish a roadmap for the Partnership to continue to evolve into a locally-driven, cross-sector collaborative with on the ground support from the UWFP Federal Partners.

The Strategic Transition Plan factors in an UWFP-mandated deadline of August 2017 for local Partners to take the lead in advancing the Urban Waters Partnership projects. More immediately, the plan addresses ways that local stakeholders can undertake the tasks and duties that had been the responsibility of the federally funded local Ambassador through December 2015.

The Partnership sought facilitator support in mapping out the transition and developing a Strategic Plan to accompany the existing New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain Area UWFP Work Plan. Three sets of facilitated stakeholder meetings were conducted in 2015 – in May, July and November – with the goals of:

- Developing an approach that would encompass all of the designated UWFP projects and those that might be added in the future.
- Creating a process for transition of coordination duties from a temporary federal lead to a local organization or group of organizations.
- Identifying local organizations to serve as Urban Waters “Champion(s)” and/or project Co-Leads, with federal agency support, after August 2017.

Among significant strategic planning outcomes, Partnership stakeholders agreed to transition from the project-centric focus areas identified in 2011 to a theme-based model. The Partnership stakeholders also agreed to officially rename the UWFP the **Urban Waters Partnership** going forward.

[See Appendix A for a full listing of NOLA Urban Waters Transition Strategy participants.](#)

III. Project Transition Approach

Early in the planning process, the Partnership stakeholders agreed that a thematic, rather than a project-by-project, approach would be the best option to leverage local stakeholder resources once the federal partners were no longer taking the lead. Discussions focused on **Commonality** and **Connectivity** – what, besides water, was the common thread that connected each of the existing New Orleans Urban Waters projects and that would continue to connect future Urban Waters projects.

[Charts showing the connection between current UWFP projects and project leaders to each thematic approach are on pages 7 and 8.]

Stakeholders agreed upon the following themes:

A) Overriding Themes – Those that connect *all* projects:

- **Community Resiliency.** New Orleans is the epitome of resiliency when it comes to a capacity for rebuilding infrastructure and maintaining the area’s world-renown unique culture and attractions despite catastrophic events, such as Hurricane Katrina. Every current project speaks to resiliency.
- **Environmental Justice/Economic Development.** The UWFP was designed to “help communities – especially underserved communities – as they work to access, improve and benefit from their urban waters and the surrounding land” and to “promote economic revitalization and prosperity through existing networks of urban water resources.” Each project listed will advance these goals.

B) Project-Centric to Theme-Centric

In addition to the overriding themes of Resiliency and Environmental Justice/Economic Development, the core project themes that met the connectivity and commonality criteria were:

1) Environmental Education. Identified opportunities to include:

- Outreach to youth through water-related educational programs through schools and summer camps, and possible creation of an Urban Waters Youth Advisory Council.
- Developing interactive programs and educational displays for all age groups and physical abilities.
- Water education that leads to water-related and green jobs, and possible creation of an Environmental Education/Employment Committee.
- Recruiting and training professionals to replace the water profession’s aging employee population.

- 2) Water Quality.** Identified opportunities to include:
- Educating adults and youth about the critical need for water quality.
 - Promoting awareness of the impact of chemicals and other materials in stormwater on the bayous' and Lake Pontchartrain's water quality.
 - Enhancing water quality data collection and monitoring, including groundwater and coastal waterways data.
 - Engaging citizens in the water data monitoring process through the distribution of water testing kits.
 - Developing and placing in appropriate Urban Waters projects exhibits that illustrate the water cycle.
 - As needed, mount a public health, water quality education campaign to alert subsistence fishermen to the risks of eating fish caught in waterways with high levels of mercury and other toxins.
- 3) Restoration and Habitat.** Identified opportunities to include:
- An emphasis on citizen-driven, small, local restoration and habitat projects that the Urban Waters Partnership can facilitate and maintain.
 - Urban Waters becoming a restoration and habitat projects clearinghouse.
 - Urban Waters Becoming a local vehicle to connect with systemic, regional restoration and habitat projects.
 - Urban Waters facilitating grants and other funding for local, citizen-driven projects.
- 4) Public Access (to Water)/Utilization.** Identified opportunities to include:
- Making it easier for residents to access their waterways, including Lake Pontchartrain, to make use of the recreational amenities and environmental resources these urban waterways can afford.
 - Raising awareness of opportunities to utilize water resources, through education and signage.
 - Augmenting the Lafitte Greenway with other urban access projects.
 - Developing Bayou Sauvage and other such waterways and wetlands into accessible urban environmental resources.

Project-Centric to Theme-Centric Approach Matrix

| THEMES | CURRENT NOLA UWFP PROJECTS * | | | | |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | PROJECT #1 | PROJECT #2 | PROJECT #3 | PROJECT #4 | PROJECT #5 |
| Environmental Education | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Water Quality Management | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Citizen-Driven Small Scale Restoration | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Public Access/ Utilization | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

***PROJECT LEDGER:**

#1: University of New Orleans Coastal Education and Research Facility (CERF)

#2: West End Pier and New Canal Lighthouse

#3: Pontchartrain Beach

#4: Lafitte Greenway

#5: East End Area/Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

C) Theme-Centric Local/Federal Leadership

To be or remain viable, the projects included in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership thematic approach require local Lead Partners and, through the transition, Federal Agency Leads. The following chart indicates the organizations that stepped forward to take project leads and others that could support the four thematic areas.

Theme-Centric Approach Local/Federal Leadership

| THEME | LOCAL CO-LEADS | FEDERAL CO-LEADS |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Environmental Education | Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) Lower 9 th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development (L9CSED) Groundwork NOLA Resilient New Orleans (RNO) | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) EPA Gulf of Mexico Program (EPA GOMP) National Park Service (NPS) |
| Water Quality Management | LPBF (all inclusive) Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans (SWB) RNO Groundwork NOLA Living with Water – Greater NO (Possible) | U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) EPA EPA GOMP |
| Citizen-Driven Small Scale Restoration | Regional Planning Commission (RPC) City of New Orleans L9CSED LPBF SWB RNO Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority (CPRA) Common Ground Relief (Possible) NOLA Parish (Possible) Jefferson Parish (Possible) | EPA GOMP USDA National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) USFWS |
| Public Access/ Utilization | L9CSED LPBF Port of New Orleans (PONO) Trust for Public Land (Possible) Levee Districts (Possible) Railroads (Possible) | Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) FWS NPS |

IV. Urban Waters Partnership Leads & Project Co-Leads

The City of New Orleans's Resiliency Office and the Sewerage & Water Board (SWB) of New Orleans have taken on the role of overall Urban Waters Partnership Co-Leads. They are supported by Project Co-leads, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development, which will identify and enlist other local organizations as needed.

The benefits of this leadership arrangement is that the City of New Orleans can provide staff resources and access to governmental funding sources not available to the nonprofit Partners. The nonprofit Partners, in turn, can promote inclusion of all sectors of the community, thereby fostering a grassroots buy-in to Urban Waters Partnership decisions and help ensure that the project's environmental justice goals are met.

V. Ambassador Roles and Duties Moving Forward

Federal funding for the New Orleans UWFP Ambassador ended in December 2015. While Ambassador Danny Wiegand will be available on a limited basis, the Local Urban Waters Co-Leads and Project Co-Leads have agreed to take on the following Ambassador responsibilities through August 2017:

- Assist in planning and tracking progress toward completion of the New Orleans UWFP projects.
- Engage stakeholders, convene meetings, and use information sharing tools to improve communication to further the Partnership's work plan.
- Network regularly with other UWFP locations to provide and gain information to benefit relevant projects. This will include attendance at River Rally in Mobile, Ala., May 20-23, 2016, <https://www.rivernet.org/events-learning/river-rally/about/>, and the UWFP National Workshop in summer of 2016. Scholarship funding is available for attendance at both.
- Communicate the direction and accomplishments of the Local Partnership through outreach materials, reports, and verbal presentations to a wide range of audiences.

VI. Transition Period Action Items

Resources, including funding and staffing, will dictate what can and cannot be accomplished during the transition period.

A) Short-Term Transition – Through Fall 2016

The City of New Orleans’ Resiliency office, established in late 2015, will be fully operational in the fall of 2016. In the meantime—and throughout the transition—so as to maximize resources:

- The Urban Waters Partnership team will tackle one theme at a time, starting with Education.
- The Urban Waters Partnership Co-Leads will conduct a survey of all members and potential members that will assist in creating a “gap analysis” of projects and organizations that are qualified for inclusion in the Partnership.
- Meetings of the entire Partnership will be held quarterly, with committee meetings scheduled more frequently.
- The NOLA Urban Waters website will continue to be available, with co-leads submitting information to the EPA lead to post.
- Urban Waters Partnership team will tap resources, including EPA, to fund meeting space, etc. [Funding for meeting and facilitation services may be available through the UWFP Federal Partners and other sources.]
- The Urban Waters team will post annual reports on project developments and successes.
- As funding permits, Urban Waters representatives will attend River Rally in Mobile, Ala., May 20-23, 2016, and the UWFP National Workshop.
- The Urban Waters Partnership will communicate project opportunities and successes by publicizing Urban Waters reports to the public through the local news media and other channels, as well as to local, regional, and federal leadership constituents.

B) Longer-Term Transition Recommendations

Throughout the UWFP, the role of Ambassador has taken many forms, from federally funded to community appointed. While Project Leads have agreed to be responsible for Ambassador duties through the August 2017 transition, if funding can be procured, the New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain Urban Waters Partnership would do well to appoint a dedicated Ambassador to ensure that initiatives are carried out after the initial short-term transition. Grants and other funding may be available to support the Ambassador position. [A White Paper on the Role of UWFP Ambassador is available.](#)

VII. Conclusion

As with the New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain UWFP as a whole, the projects within the Urban Waters Partnership have been, and will continue to be, works in progress. This Strategic Transition Plan is designed to evolve with the changing needs of the Urban Waters Partnership and its projects as it serves as a guide for future Urban Waters Partnership projects in New Orleans and in Urban Waters sites throughout the nation.

APPENDIX A – NOLA Urban Waters Strategic Transition Plan Participants

The following State/Local and Federal Urban Waters Partner representatives attended the Strategic Transition meetings held in New Orleans in May, July and November 2015.

State/Local Stakeholders

Government/Municipal

City of New Orleans - Prisca Weems

Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans – Bob Miller, Ann Wilson, Scott Finney, Travis Martin, Jen Roberts, Brad Klamer

New Orleans Redevelopment Authority – Jerry Graves, Louise Colson

Port of New Orleans – Emily Federer

Regional Planning Commission – Meredith Soniat

University of New Orleans– Dinah Maygarden

Non-Government Organizations

Friends of Lafitte Greenway – Sophie Harris, Nellie Catzen, Kellie Band

Greater New Orleans Urban Waters Collaborative – Aron Chang, Nathan Lott, Dane Eness, Ella Delio

Groundwork NOLA – Alicia Neal, Maria Brodine

Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation – Andrea Calvin

Louisiana Water Network - Steve Picou

Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development – Charles Allen, Rachel Pickens

NOLA Vibe – Grasshopper Mendoza

Propeller – Jenny Heiseck

Public Lab – Steve Lewis

Trust for Public Land – Sarah Olivier, Afuah Frimpong

Other: Brook Morris (No affiliation indicated)

Federal Agency Stakeholders

UWFP Ambassador – Danny Wiegand, USACE/EPA

Environmental Protection Agency – Adele Cardenas Mallott, Project Lead; William Honker

EPA Gulf of Mexico Office – Jerry Boos, Kealia Hughes

National Park Service – Stacey Palmer

Small Business Administration – Michael Ritz

US Fish & Wildlife Service – Shelley Stiaes

US Department of Agriculture/National Resource & Conservation Service – Alton James, Jr.

US Geological Survey – Tom Doyle, Janelda Biagas