

URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

Lake Pontchartrain Area Watershed/New Orleans (Louisiana)



Co-Leads

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Overall Assessment of the Partnership Since Inception

The New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain area was named the first of the current 19 Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) sites nationwide. The partnership has evolved over the last five years from a network of federally-led stakeholders working together to promote discrete projects into a locally-led partnership striving to collaborate and leverage resources around thematic initiatives. Thematic priorities include: Environmental Education, Water Quality, Restoration and Habitat, and Public Access & Recreation.

Nature of the Partnership

The New Orleans Urban Waters Partnership meets quarterly to identify priorities, plan outreach events, identify grants and funding opportunities, and share lessons learned. From its conception in 2011 through 2015, the partnership was led by a federal Ambassador, Mr. Danny Wiegand, who was on loan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from the U.S. Army Corp of

Engineers. In 2016, a 43-member steering committee participated in a series of transition planning meetings. The goal of these meetings was to identify the form and strategy that would be employed to sustain the partnership under local leadership. It was determined during this transition period that the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans (SWBNO) and the City of New Orleans Office of Resilience would co-lead the partnership, with support provided by the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development. The city and SWBNO committed to provide staff resources and access to governmental funding not available to non-profit partners; the non-profit partners can promote inclusion of all sectors of the community. The methods of engagement for the partnership include: quarterly partnership meetings and email routing lists.

Organizations for Planning and Action

Under federal leadership, the partnership organized and acted on a project-to-project basis, with five priority projects identified in year one. Those projects included:

- University of New Orleans Coastal Education and Research Facility (CERF)
- West End Pier and New Canal Lighthouse
- Pontchartrain Beach
- Lafitte Greenway
- East End Area/Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

Three sets of facilitated stakeholder meetings were conducted in May, July, and November 2015 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 “champions” and/or project co-leads, with federal agency support, after August 2017

During this transition planning it was determined that all projects and initiatives addressed two overarching themes of community resiliency and environmental justice/economic development. Within these overarching themes the transition steering committee identified the following four thematic priorities around which the membership will organize resources and efforts:

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 exhibits that illustrate the water cycle and placing them in appropriate Urban Waters projects
- As needed, mounting 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:

- Emphasizing 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

Major Actions Taken Since the Beginning of the Partnership

Project successes as of December 2015:

New Canal Lighthouse The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) led efforts to work with the U.S. Coast Guard to resolve issues surrounding the rehabilitation of the historic lighthouse that had been destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. 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. With Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding and City of New Orleans support, the project is advancing well. FEMA recently approved an amendment to the project worksheet for a total of \$24 million in funding.

Pontchartrain Beach Pier LPBF is spearheading this FEMA-funded lake access project. The foundation secured a lease with the levee district for a year. 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. Goals included creating recreation areas and other amenities, including bringing healthy food options to neighborhoods that have become food deserts. Projects under discussion include 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-area-new-orleans-louisiana>.

Project successes as of November 2016:

- Transition planning identified local leadership and local strategic priorities
- Environmental Education funds were obtained by multiple partners (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-Bay Watershed Education and Training, EPA Urban Waters Small Grants) to improve water literacy and gather water quality data to inform local policy

Major Impacts of the Partnership

The local partnership has compiled a comprehensive database of all organizations and stakeholders who align with the four thematic priorities described above. The impact of the partnership will be far-reaching, as our work will include all appropriate stakeholders for each theme and partners will be able to easily join teams for grant applications, etc.

Major Actions Planned in the Future

- The Urban Waters Partnership team will tackle one theme at a time, starting with Environmental Education. An education-themed planning meeting occurred on July 13, 2016. Local education leadership will continue to engage membership and strengthen community partnerships to the best of their abilities by leveraging existing funding sources and identifying potential grant funding
- 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
- The Urban Waters Partnership team will tap resources, including the EPA, to fund meeting space, etc. [Funding for meeting and facilitation services may be available through UWFP federal partners and other sources]
- The Urban Waters Partnership team will post annual reports on project developments and successes
- The Urban Waters Partnership team 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

The following chart indicates leads and co-leads by partnership themes:

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) FWS
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

Major Challenges in the Future

Throughout the UWFP, the role of Ambassador has taken many forms, from federally-funded to community-appointed. Project leads have agreed to be responsible for Ambassador duties through the August 2017 transition; however, if funding can be procured, the New Orleans/Lake Pontchartrain Urban Waters Partnership would benefit from appointing 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. Keeping stakeholders engaged without dedicated funding will remain a major challenge for the Urban Waters Partnership moving forward.

"Groundwork New Orleans has benefitted from the Urban Waters Partnership in numerous ways. The Partnership has provided us an opportunity to collaborate with peers, work with various organizations and introduce new programs to our green team, a job training program for high school youth. Through several Urban Waters Small grants, GWNO has been able to lead our students in the creation of an anti-dumping campaign called Don't Dump Dat; complete 3 years of water testing and community education at Bayou Bienvenue in the Lower 9th Ward as well as, engage and empower youth around the importance of stormwater management."

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