

## **Mystic River Watershed Initiative - Urban Waters Federal Partnership**

Federal Partners Conference Call

September 1, 2015

Call Summary

Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

### **Action Items**

- EPA to contact the NPS service about potential areas of collaboration.
- EPA to work with HUD to identify potential areas of overlap that could be discussed with the municipal subgroup.
- EPA to distribute USFS Landscape Scale Restoration Grant application information.
- EPA to poll federal partners to schedule the next call before the December 10 Steering Committee meeting.
- EPA to send the Steering Committee member outreach summary slides to the Steering Committee.

### **Decisions**

The group made the following decisions:

- The group will touch base quarterly via phone or webinar, with potentially one in-person meeting each year.
- An action agenda will be drafted to list projects the federal partners are actively working on together.

### **Introductions, Agenda Review and Objectives**

Stacie Smith, facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute, welcome call participants and led introductions. She reviewed the agenda and described the call objectives:

- Report on areas of potential collaborations suggested by Steering Committee members as consistent with the Mission and Priorities document.
- Identify collaborative goals and activities that federal partners will seek to implement with EPA and local partners over the next one to three years.
- Develop next steps for on-going communication and collaboration between EPA, Urban Waters Federal Partners, and the Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee.

### **Brief Review of the Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee and Urban Waters Federal Partnership**

Elizabeth Glivinski, ORISE Participant at EPA, briefly reviewed the background and history of the Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee and the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. Key points from her presentation included the following.

EPA initiated the Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee (the Initiative) about 8 years ago to facilitate collaboration between non-governmental organizations, and local, state, and federal agencies on issues in the watershed. The Steering Committee meets quarterly and operates based on the mission and priorities, which focuses on improving water quality and increasing access to open space in the watershed.

In 2013, EPA headquarters began the Urban Waters Federal Partnership in the Mystic River watershed. There are 19 urban waters partnerships across the US. The goal of the partnership is to improve coordination between federal agencies and collaboration with local community groups to complete projects that improve the water system and promote economic, environmental, and social benefits. In the Mystic River Watershed, this collaboration is focused on efforts to achieve the Initiative's mission and priorities.

### **Steering Committee Member Outreach Findings**

Eric Roberts, facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute, presented the findings of outreach to Steering Committee members that he and Stacie Smith completed prior to the meeting. Main points from his presentation are below.

During the June 2015 Steering Committee meeting, federal partners described many of the projects and goals they are working to achieve in the watershed. Building on that meeting since there was insufficient time to discuss areas of potential collaboration with the federal partners, the goal of the outreach was to collect feedback about areas of potential collaboration to achieve the Initiative's mission and priorities. Stacie and Eric reached five Steering Committee members and summarized their feedback by federal agency:

*United States Forest Service:* Areas of potential collaboration could include invasive species removal and native species plantings to maintain safe and secure public spaces (i.e., Mill Creek Pathway); native species reforestation in Draw Seven Park; and assistance to identify locations in the watershed that may be ripe for urban forestry grant programs.

*United States Geological Survey and the US. Army Corps of Engineers:* Areas of potential collaboration included in-kind contribution of field work or technical assistance for SWMM and HSPF modeling to help compensate for peer-review standards and matching fund requirements; analysis of public health risks associated with boating and swimming in the Mystic and Malden rivers; clean-up of contaminated sediments on the Malden side of the river, and improvements to embankments to support public access, and; assistance connecting with other parties about the CAD cells in Chelsea Creek.

*US Department of Transportation:* Steering committee members suggested potential collaboration could include the management of sediment from Route 1, which is causing sedimentation in the salt marsh at the headwaters of Mill Creek, and area that underwent restoration, and; assistance in the planning stages to identify access and green space mitigation projects or other improvements that would help connect people to the river since roadways frequently are the barriers to river access.

*National Park Service:* Areas of potential collaboration include the development of national parks along Chelsea Creek (e.g., historic sites of the revolutionary war) or dedications and commemorative installations at historic points, and; rivers, trails and conservation grant programs for open space initiatives.

*Environmental Protection Agency:* Steering committee members suggested the EPA could help to facilitate recognition among federal and state agencies of MyRWA, as opposed to the Boston

Harbor Association, as the representative of interests concerning the Mystic River Watershed and assist MyRWA to be involved in conversations that could impact the watershed; support community environmental justice efforts; more actively regulate to identify permit violations and increase the use of the Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEP) bank to achieve public health and water quality goals; assist in facilitated conversations between community groups and NPDES permit holders, and; encourage TMDLS for the Mystic River and Chelsea Creek.

### **Identify Potential Areas of Collaboration**

Group members discussed the findings of the Steering Committee member outreach and identified several potential areas of collaboration. Their conversations are summarized below.

The group discussed potential collaboration on Malden River public health risks study. Health concerns primarily may be due to sediment quality. Many studies on different sections of the Malden River exist and a first step may be to collect and analyze the studies to identify existing data, data gaps, and determine what the data indicates about water and sediment quality collectively. Once that is done, a risk assessment could be completed.

The group discussed potential collaboration on the SWMM model. It was noted that conversations several years ago between USGS and MyRWA led to a decision that SWMM was the best model to use due to urban nature of the watershed and ability to model stormwater. The USGS is interested to complete hydrologic modeling; however they require external funding. The USGS has a cooperative program to match funds, but even if matching funds are secured, the overall cost of working with the USGS is likely to be more than the cost of working with a contractor to develop a cheaper model. A possible option to reduce the cost of working with the USGS is to model only part of the basin instead of the full basin.

The group discussed clean up of contaminated sediments in the Malden River. Sediment clean up is costly and local partner interest seems to ebb and flow. A group member suggested the Initiative's water quality subgroup discuss this topic to determine whether or not it is a priority.

The group discussed potential collaboration with the US Department of Transportation (DOT). A participant said the Kirk Smith at the USGS had done some work on highway runoff and additional work had been completed with the MassDOT. USGS may be interested to complete more of this work.

The group discussed potential collaboration with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It was noted that the HUD funds are committed to the housing authorities and communities must work to influence how funding is spent. Communities would have to identify a problem and notify HUD and the local implementing partners before HUD could take any action. A participant suggested organizing between HUD and the municipal subgroup to talk about HUD grant cycles and how community based organizations could get involved in influencing the grant proposal.

The group discussed two potential opportunities to collaborate with the USFS. The first area is riparian zone forest restoration, or planting trees in the land/water interface, to improve or create natural filter strips. This work could be funded through landscape scale restoration grants. The second opportunity is with green infrastructure projects that use native vegetation

to treat stormwater runoff before it enters the waterway. These types of projects would need to be identified in the state action plan, which is updated every 5 years by the state forester, Peter Church.

The group briefly discussed some of the ideas for collaboration with the NPS service. Participants noted that NPS has a newly assigned Urban Fellow who will work in Boston and that she may be able to collaborate on projects.

The group discussed the potential areas of collaboration for the EPA. An EPA representative noted that EPA does many of the suggested activities and that encouraging TMDLs would represent a significant effort. However, if TMDLs were to move forward, it could provide an opportunity for collaboration with other agencies.

The group discussed Canoemobile, a program supported by the National Park Service but delivered by the non-governmental organization, Wilderness Inquiry, with support from NGOs, and state and local partners. The program takes urban students onto the rivers and streams in their watershed to teach them about environmental science and the history of the watershed.

Canoemobile will be launched on the Mystic and Neponset Rivers in September. Groundwork Somerville is hosting the event and the Appalachian Mountain Club, the National Park Service, and other organizations are helping to deliver the program with Wilderness Inquiry. The EPA may also partner to deliver the program. Canoemobile is expected to become an annual event, and may provide an opportunity for future collaboration.

### **On-going Communication and Collaboration**

The group discussed how they want to stay connected to the Initiative's work. The following points were made:

- USGS is glad to participate in a limited manner, but will keep abreast of what is happening and contribute in ways in addition to stream gauging, if possible.
- USFS plans to remain actively involved.
- EPA offered to host meetings, phone calls, or webinars as needed, and to send targeted emails to federal partners to provide key information being discussed or acted upon by the Initiative that may be of interest to the federal partners.
- The group decided to touch base quarterly via phone or webinar, with potentially one in-person meeting each year.

### **Federal Partner Action Agenda Development**

The participants briefly discussed the development of an action agenda for federal partners to work together on over the next year or two. The action agenda, which would ideally be a list of active projects rather than aspirational projects, could be included as an appendix to the Initiative's mission and priorities. The group decided to draft an action agenda listing projects that partners are actively working on together. Ideas surfaced at this meeting as well as other ongoing projects and potential projects will be placed on the list. Once the list is drafted, it will be distributed to federal partners and follow up calls with the federal partners will be completed to gather feedback. Additionally, the group suggested presenting the ideas from this meeting and from the Steering Committee outreach to the Steering Committee for additional input.