

URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

Lower Passaic River Watershed (Newark, New Jersey)



Ambassador

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Overall Assessment of the Partnership Since the Beginning

The Lower Passaic River Partnership has evolved from a group primarily working to improve communication and coordination around existing federal projects to one that proactively identifies and works to meet needs in the community through interagency coordination and leveraging of funds. In 2013, the pre-existing partnership was primarily focused on Superfund investigations and river cleanups, as well as the development of potential future restoration plans. To define and pursue expanded goals, partners convened a kick-off meeting to identify new potential project areas. In 2015, an expanded partnership convened non-governmental organization (NGO) and federal partners to identify community-based projects where interagency coordination could accelerate projects, or provide technical expertise to build capacity. To implement these interagency projects, the partnership has also required improved coordination and community engagement.

Since hiring an Ambassador in January 2016, the core leadership of the partnership has created a formal mission statement and defined objectives; advanced three pilot projects through varying stages of implementation; and engaged NGO and municipal partners from previously uninvolved

areas of the watershed. As of September 2016, the partnership's core leadership agreed upon revisions to the workplan, organizing the Ambassador's activities around priority pilot projects and outlining a strategy to engage new partners, and laying the groundwork for a full partnership meeting.

Nature of the Partnership and Members

The partnership has evolved over time. Its core leadership team currently includes an Ambassador; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) federal representatives (who serve as the federal co-leads); and NGO representatives from the Trust for Public Land, NY/NJ Baykeeper, Ironbound Community Corporation, and the publicly-funded NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program.

In addition to those formally involved in the core leadership, the partnership works with many other individuals and organizations through pilot projects overseen by the Ambassador. Partners, organized by project, are included below:

Lower Passaic River Cleanup and Restoration

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Diamond Alkali/Passaic River Community Advisory Group
- Ironbound Community Corporation
- NY/NJ Baykeeper
- City of Newark
- Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Essex County Parks Department
- Newark Department of Engineering
- Newark Office of Planning and Sustainability
- Newark Community Economic Development Corporation
- Friends of Riverfront Park
- Ironbound Community Corporation
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- The Trust for Public Land
- NY/NJ Baykeeper
- Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission

Newark Riverfront Park Mapping Pilot

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Federal Emergency Management Agency

Creating a Community Involvement Guide for Federal Projects on the Lower Passaic River

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

- NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program
- The Trust for Public Land
- NY/NJ Baykeeper
- Ironbound Community Corporation

- Great Swamp Watershed Association
- NY/NJ Baykeeper

Advancing Stewardship of the Upper Reaches of the Lower Passaic River

- City of Passaic Urban Enterprise Zone
- Passaic River Coalition

Addressing Riverfront Homelessness

- Newark Health Department
- Bridges Outreach
- Project Live
- Newark’s War Against Poverty Coalition

Organizations for Planning and Action

In September 2016, the Ambassador convened the core leadership team to discuss key pilot projects and a strategy to develop infrastructure for the partnership. Based on a series of stakeholder interviews with partners, the Ambassador presented a Newark-based project and a river-wide project to the core leadership team, and facilitated a discussion on governance and communication structures necessary to sustain work. The partnership plans to convene a full meeting of groups involved in the different pilots in winter 2017.

Major Actions Taken Since the Beginning of the Partnership

Major actions taken since the beginning of the Lower Passaic River Urban Waters Federal Partnership include:

- Studies, cleanups, and restoration planning continued.
- A second sediment cleanup in the Lyndhurst section of the Lower Passaic River was completed in 2014.
- The final cleanup decision for the entire lower 8 miles was announced in March 2016.
- Version 1.0 of the USACE’s Hudson Raritan Estuary (HRE) Comprehensive Restoration Plan, which outlines potential future restoration opportunities in the Passaic River and overall HRE region, was completed in June 2016.
- Engaged partners to develop the HRE Feasibility Report/Environmental Assessment, which will recommend construction to restore up to five sites within the Lower Passaic River.
- USACE completed the integrated Final Hurricane Sandy Limited Reevaluation Report/Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact in 2017 to

complete construction of the bulkhead at the Joseph G. Minish Passaic River Waterfront Park and Historic Area.

- Compiled a table of ongoing federal agency projects, their key milestones, and times when the partnership could play a key coordination role.
- Coordination with Ironbound Community Corporation and the City of Newark (Urban Waters grant recipients) to:
 - bring residents back to the river's edge to celebrate, learn about, and improve the river.
 - convene a kick-off meeting to identify potential future actions beyond those already being worked on by the partnership.
 - engage additional federal, state, municipal, and NGO partners to expand the partnership.
- Convened a full partnership meeting to identify community needs and agency resources.
- The partnership's Ambassador conducted a series of stakeholder interviews with partners with ongoing work at Newark's riverfront and mapped the projects and their timelines using GIS.
- Held a Newark riverfront mapping pilot meeting where each organization with projects ongoing along the riverfront shared their progress, coordination needs, and leveraging opportunities between projects.
- Ongoing circulation of a bi-weekly bulletin with grants, as well as personalized emails to 150 partners, including over 40 unique community-based organizations, with local updates and events, and grant opportunities and resources.
- Updated the partnership mission statement and language for the Urban Waters website.
- Co-hosted a workshop with the Diamond Alkali/Passaic River Superfund Community Advisory Group (CAG) and the NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program (HEP) to share the CAG's priorities for HEP's five-year Action Agenda.
- Convened a core leadership and Ambassador workplan meeting and identified priority projects for the following year, including identifying organizational needs for the partnership and an implementation plan.
- Convened community groups involved with riverfront park stewardship, local homelessness service providers, and regional housing authorities to identify points of collaboration on improving outreach and targeting resources to chronically homeless individuals who live along the riverfront.

Major Impacts of the Partnership

- The mapping pilot meeting streamlined communication between USACE and municipal and NGO stakeholders regarding the alignment of a planned flood mitigation project that intersected a soon-to-be expanded park.
- The partnership assisted a conservation NGO in the midst of a leadership transition with applying for a Technical Assistance grant from the National Park Service to create a plan for converting some of their riverfront properties into a park.
- The partnership has served as a critical warehouse of information on agency decision timelines and public input opportunities. The partnership worked with one of USACE's contractors to identify organizations and data sources during an assessment of environmental conditions for one of its flood risk management projects.
- The partnership garnered letters of support from local stewardship and recreational groups for USACE restoration activities.
- The partnership has laid the groundwork for park stewards to play a formal role in helping homelessness agencies reach chronically homeless individuals.
- The partnership assisted a local academic cooperative extension in identifying federal grants related to Green Infrastructure for the following year's application cycle.

Major Actions Planned in the Future

The partnership is pursuing the following projects and activities:

Meeting the long-term needs of a homeless population that lives in the footprint of a future park. The partnership has worked with local NGOs to survey the homeless population and better understand their relationship to the river. Several individuals are known to bathe and fish regularly in the Lower Passaic River, and two homeless men have drowned in the past year. The partnership convened a series of meetings with homelessness service providers in Newark to identify how local park stewards can assist with outreach, as well as with advocacy, to align local housing and homeless assessment policies with Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-identified best practices. The partnership is planning to continue building relationships between park stewards, housing advocates, and service providers in order to assist with the county's planned Coordinated Assessment pilots in August and September 2017.

Developing a Community Involvement Guide for the Lower Passaic River. A major community-based organization in the partnership raised the need for a generic outreach plan for the Lower Passaic River that aligns with USACE feasibility study milestones. In addition to compiling a list of key stakeholders and accessible venues, the Community Involvement Guide will guide federal

and state agencies on effective means of public outreach on flood risk mitigation and ecological restoration in the watershed, and assist the public in identifying the appropriate decision-makers at each phase of the USACE feasibility process. The guide will also include an easily editable, open source online map of civic organizations in the watershed, so that local organizations can identify groups with similar program areas, and guide all partners in understanding where stewardship and sustainable community development activities are taking place.

Identifying leveraging opportunities for restoration sites in USACE's Comprehensive Restoration Plan. USACE's Comprehensive Restoration Plan feasibility study recommended several sites on the Lower Passaic River for near-term construction. The partnership is planning to convene local partners in those areas and identify additional leveraging opportunities to advance restoration and public access.

Developing a report on post-Sandy climate resiliency funding. The partnership will compile information on how federal funds authorized after Hurricane Sandy from agencies involved in the partnership were spent in the counties most impacted by the storm. This research may lead to the identification of ongoing leveraging opportunities, enable an equity analysis, and lay the foundation for watershed-wide resiliency planning.

Full partnership visioning meeting. Currently scheduled for winter 2018 and strategically planned to take place after the Community Involvement Guide workshops are held, the meeting will celebrate the new relationships built through sustainable, equitable development activities on the Lower Passaic River, and identify new projects that could benefit from additional interagency coordination and Urban Waters resources.

Major Challenges in the Future

While the partnership newsletter and webpage have been redesigned, there is much more work to be done to upload the results of the civic survey and Community Involvement Guide, and track how the information on the map is being used by the partners. A major goal for the future also involves building off the relationships developed through the Community Involvement Guide process to advance concrete habitat restoration opportunities identified in the Comprehensive Restoration Plan.