

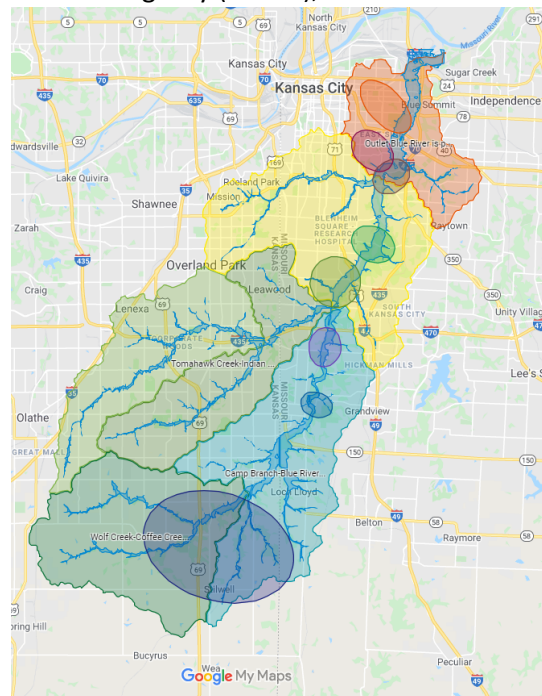
## Blue River Urban Waters Federal Partnership

### 2023-2025 Work Plan

#### Executive Summary

Since 2013, the Blue River Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) has been working to restore land, reconnect people and revitalize communities in the Blue River watershed in the Kansas City Metro, both in Kansas and Missouri. Co-led by the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Heartland Conservation Alliance (HCA) and Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) the Partnership includes more than 30 federal, state, and local partners. Developed with input from Blue River UWFP partners, this Work Plan highlights key projects that advance UWFP goals in Kansas City, including those directly initiated by UWFP, as well as those driven by local partners with the UWFP playing a supporting role. It also identifies tasks for moving existing and new initiatives forward in 2023-2025. Highlights in the Work Plan include accomplishments in key strategies developed by the Blue River UWFP Steering Committee (Steering Committee) in 2022:

- Urban Restoration Areas
- Community Engagement
- Partnerships



#### Partnership

##### History

HCA originally served as the Blue River UWFP Ambassador (Ambassador) in partnership with MARC. HCA and MARC successfully served as co-leads starting in 2012 until HCA took over as the Ambassador in 2020. HCA and MARC have been instrumental in convening and building the structure of the Blue River UWFP Steering Committee, which meets every other month to work together to plan

strategically and catalyze key projects that are connected through the geography of the Blue River Watershed.

The Steering Committee has successfully accelerated and catalyzed work with on-the-ground projects prioritized as critical to improving water quality, restoring outdoor spaces, and fostering community stewardship in urban watersheds.

As an Ambassador, HCA is part of “Renew the Blue,” a co-branded messaging campaign that arose from the need to coordinate efforts and messages for a healthy watershed. The Blue River UWFP Steering Council created and adopted a Strategic Communication Plan (Strategic Plan) in 2016. HCA has been leading the implementation of the Strategic Plan with support of stakeholders on an Outreach & Education Work Group.

Since 2017 UWFP and “Renew the Blue” Partners have:

- Restored over 43,000 acres of green space, clearing invasive bush honeysuckle, and planting trees and native plants
- Hosted 315 events
- Welcomed over 22,000 visitors to the Blue River Watershed
- Cleaned up over 114 tons of trash

HCA will continue to serve as the Ambassador by assisting in planning and tracking local project progress toward completion; engaging stakeholders, convening meetings, and using information sharing tools to improve communication; furthering the national partnership’s work; and networking regularly with other UWFP locations.

In 2022, the U.S. Forest Service entered into an interagency agreement with the USEPA to fund the Blue River UWFP at an amount of \$75,000 for the one year. With this funding, the Ambassador and Steering Committee will continue to implement plans and projects to reconnect people to the Blue River, revitalize communities impacted by environmental justice challenges and restore the river, the riparian forests, and its surrounding land, including neighborhood tree canopy. HCA will lead and serve as Ambassador for the Blue River UWFP. This funding includes establishing a new, full-time, permanent position at HCA to serve as the Ambassador.

## 2022 Accomplishments

The Ambassador worked throughout the year to strengthen and build partnerships with federal partners that will lay a foundation for the continuity of the UWFP projects. Highlights included:

- Issued the [2021 Blue River Report Card](#)
- Published the [2022 Blue River Action Plan](#)
- Trained new Ambassador after HCA Executive Director transition
- Hosted community stakeholder meeting and neared completion of a Water Equity Roadmap for the Blue River.



- Palestine East: Nine community members served on a Community Advisory Board to design a “preferred concept” reuse plan for ~20 acres of vacant and forested land. The preferred concept includes preservation of forested areas, walking trails, farmers market, wetland, community garden spaces, bee boxes, public gathering spaces, and playground areas. HCA will share the plan with the City of Kansas City, MO and strive to collaborate on its implementation. Partners included USEPA; Center for Neighborhoods (CFN), University of Missouri - Kansas City (UMKC); Vireo; Kansas City Neighborhoods and Housing Services; Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC); The Open Table; and The River Network.
- A four-week version of Green Guard was hosted with HCA's Alliance partners across the Kansas City metro area with funding from City of Kansas City Water Department (KC Water). The Green Guard Stewardship Training Program increases community understanding and awareness of issues facing the Blue River and offers hands-on training to empower people to take action by serving as stewards. The training focuses on water quality education and engages new stewards with ideas for behavioral change across multiple generations.
- In 2021 HCA received a grant from MDC to establish a "Green Career Corps in Kansas City" pilot program. The Green Career Corps sought to fill a need for trained landscapers that can work with native plants in the Kansas City Metro Area, provide diverse opportunities for careers in conservation for underrepresented Kansas City residents, work on mutually-beneficial habitat projects in the Blue River Watershed and enhance the connection of underrepresented populations in nature. Today the Green Career Corps is now the Nature Action Crew (NAC), a full-time, paid position with HCA. The NAC supports conservation work throughout Kansas City and the Blue River Watershed, particularly ongoing projects at HCA's eight action areas and projects led by our Alliance partners. NAC members are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities to further their conservation careers.
- In 2022 HCA received the USEPA Environmental Workforce and Job Training Brownfields grant. We received this grant in partnership with Cornerstones of Care and solidified the Conservation and Landscaping apprentice program with their Build Trybe cohorts. This grant funds the Build Trybe 10-week training program, which provides environmental restoration training to at-risk youth in foster care, ages 18-24, with a goal of placing students in environmental careers in the Kansas City areas impacted by brownfields. Each training cohort consists of 36 classroom training sessions and 12 hands-on learning in the field for a total of 180 hours of intermediate training, including 54 students receiving OSHA 29 CFR 1910.120 40-hour HAZWOPER and OSHA 10 training. Graduates from Build Trybe have the opportunity to join HCA's NAC.
  - In April 2022, EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister presented a \$198,195 novelty big check to Brownfields Job Training grant selectee HCA. McCollister and HCA were joined by Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, U.S. Representative Sharice Davids (Kansas), and leaders from Build Trybe, a program of the Kansas City organization Cornerstones of Care.
- Jackson County Parks + Rec's Blue River Parkway Master Plan was approved by the County Legislature in 2022. Among the priorities identified are:
  - Establish protections guaranteeing all park property will be preserved for green space and recreation in perpetuity.
  - Extend the Blue River Greenway Trail System, from Swope Park to Kenneth Road.
  - Consider developing a program to encourage more visitation and connection with the Parkway.



- HCA, The Conservation Fund, MARC, and the Kansas and Missouri chapters of The Nature Conservancy funded initial research and data collection efforts to support the Blue River Greenway project. The greenway is proposed to extend from Overland Park Arboretum in Johnson County, Kansas to Corrinton Park in Kansas City, Missouri. This initial effort will provide necessary information to support future funding application opportunities anticipated from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. HCA contracted with Vireo and Hoxie Collective to tie in existing plans, research land ownership, and evaluate what funding sources may be suitable for the Blue River Greenway project.
- The City of Kansas City and HCA are working together to finish the contract language for the conservation easement for the Municipal Farm Property. A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization that allows a landowner to limit the type or amount of development on their property while retaining private ownership and many uses of the land. Both the City of Kansas City and HCA had had staff change which has slowed down the process. Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) collaborates on a restoration Project at Municipal Farm.
- The Conservation Fund moderated and HCA participated in a panel discussion at the Johnson County Museum called *Redlining and the Blue River Watershed* discussing how redlining and systemic racism have played a role in inequity and environmental justice problems throughout the Blue River Watershed.
- With help from partners such as MARC, Bridging the Gap (BTG), HCA, and the Conservation Fund, KCMO Parks was awarded a \$5 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) stormwater grant from the state of Missouri. This project seeks to restore 200-270 acres of diverse riparian habitat along the Blue River with native plants and trees, restore green infrastructure in three nodes along the Blue River corridor (Blue River Park, Blue Valley Park, and the Municipal Farm, as well as the restoration of a 9-acre wetland in Alex George Wetland Park), and plant 2,000-2,500 trees in neighborhoods and business districts adjacent to the corridor. Work will be led by the Kansas City, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department, in collaboration with diverse community and nonprofit partners.
- Participated in a state-wide annual Missouri Conservation Partners Roundtable September 28 – 29 in Springfield, MO.
- Provide leadership for Missouri Land Trust Coalition and Blue River Conservation Collaborative in Kansas.
- Participated in national trainings and conferences including River Rally.
- Expanded the Steering Committee partnership.
- Hosted the annual HCA Partnership Summit in December.





## Next Steps

A key goal of the Ambassador will be ensuring continuity of planning and continuation of past efforts. Specifically, the Action Plan was developed to outline restoration and conservation opportunities in the watershed.

The Action Plan summarizes and prioritizes decades of work to restore the health of the watershed, including the goals of four regional plans: MARC's MetroGreen Plan, KC Water's Combined Sewer Overflow Plan, the Upper Blue River Watershed Plan, and Kansas City WildLands' Conservation Opportunity Action Plan.

We will continue to develop and catalyze the Action Plan and other tools created by the Steering Committee.

Further development of the Action Plan will catalyze successful on-the-ground, short- and medium-term projects in the middle Blue River area. Catalyst actions will include:

- Approach key area landowners and land managers, including city and county governments, about endorsing the Action Plan;
- Catalyze key projects identified through partner and community engagement; and
- Leverage the projects to build capacity for future years. We will facilitate endorsement, adoption, and refinement of the Action Plan through community engagement and workshops.

The Ambassador will also research and explore the feasibility of forming a watershed district. Watershed district boundaries generally follow a natural watershed basin. This district could be funded by landowners in the watershed with future built development practically and financially supporting the protection of the Blue River, or other sustainable funding mechanisms.

The Ambassador will Finalize and Implement the Partnership Work Plan. Target completion: September 30, 2023 for 2024-2026 Work Plan

The Ambassador will plan and execute HCA's annual fall Partnership Summit. This summit honors the many Alliance members working to protect, conserve, and restore rivers and land in the Kansas City area.

Ambassador will provide assistance to UWFP partners: Target completion: Ongoing

- Advance capacity building, leadership development, and connectedness by coordinating subawards to emerging grassroots conservation and environmental justice leaders and organizations that undertake, or seek to undertake, urban forestry, urban waters revitalization, or environmental justice activities as well as assist them with their grant applications and strategic planning.
  - Deliverable: Minimum five subawards delivered; minimum five grant applications.
  - The activities performed with these awards will vary, to allow community leaders and grassroots organizations the flexibility they require while building capacity and skills to fulfill their goals, and meet the requirements of the state and federal grant funds.
  - HCA will develop a simple subaward award process that balances equitable accessibility and flexibility with accountability. USFS will review and approve that process before its implementation.
- Enhance community-initiated conservation engagement, particularly related to coordination of HCA's existing Restoring Vacant Lots programming.
  - Deliverable: Demonstrate engagement with or participation of at least 100 Blue River watershed community members in conservation related activities such as community meetings, surveys, or events. At least 50 community members will be from

neighborhoods that have been highly impacted by environmental justice challenges within target zip codes.

- Advance participation in democracy by helping underinvested neighborhoods advocate for and secure resources to improve their environment, health, and access to natural recreation.
  - Deliverable: Coordinate at least two meetings with a total of at least 20 community members from target zip codes and their relevant government official(s) for a conservation-related initiative.

## FUNDING

**Local UWFP partners have secured grants totaling over \$8 million.** Federal partners provided direct assistance in preparing proposals that secured over \$400,000. (These estimates are conservative and do not include the substantial in-kind and cash match leveraged by partners.) Funds benefited several communities throughout the Blue River Watershed. This increase in grant funding from previous years reflects years of UWFP effort to communicate opportunities and priorities, increase organizational capacities, and encourage higher quality grant applications. Examples include:

- With help from partners such as MARC, BTG, HCA, and the Conservation Fund, KCMO Parks was awarded a \$5 million ARPA stormwater grant from the state of Missouri. This project seeks to restore 200-270 acres of riparian habitat along the Blue River, restore green infrastructure in three nodes along the Blue River corridor (Blue River Park, Blue Valley Park, and the Municipal Farm, as well as the restoration of a 9-acre wetland in Alex George Wetland Park), and plant 2,000-2,500 trees in neighborhoods and business districts adjacent to the corridor.
- \$110,000 – Health Forward Foundation in partnership with Heart of the City Neighborhood, MY REGION WINS! and Foxtown East Neighborhood to restore unused vacant land in the Blue River Watershed and provide community outreach and education about urban conservation.
- \$200,000 – USEPA Brownfields Job Training Grant in partnership with Cornerstones of Care, City of Kansas City, MDC and Full Employment Council to fund training and employment for natural resource management.
- \$120,000 – USEPA Environmental Justice Grant in partnership with OpenTable, Center for Neighborhoods, KC Land Bank, and MDC to engage neighborhoods in designing a reuse plan for nearly 40 acres of vacant and forested land in the Blue River Watershed.
- \$600,000+ – MDC in partnership with Deep Roots, MO Hives KC, KC Full Employment Council and Cornerstones of Care to pilot a youth employment program to develop a trained crew to manage and maintain projects in the Action Plan. This grant was awarded in three consecutive years at an amount at or above \$200,000 beginning in 2020.
- \$152,500 – Health Forward Foundation in partnership with Cornerstones of Care to support the conservation crew pilot project.
- \$50,000 – National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Grant in partnership with MDC, US Fish & Wildlife, Cornerstones of Care and KC Full Employment Council to support the conservation crew pilot project.

## OUTREACH

Our Blue River UWFP team continues to share information about funding opportunities and help partners develop strong projects and successful proposals. At the end of 2022, HCA Executive Director Logan Heley served part-time as the Ambassador. In 2023, HCA will hire an Environmental Justice Program Manager who will serve as the full-time Ambassador. The Ambassador's mission is to accelerate and coordinate on-the-ground projects, promote community engagement, and advance water and land protection and restoration. The Ambassador convenes various working groups and addresses funding opportunities that require cross-organization collaboration. The Renew the Blue campaign continues to gain momentum with 15 partners sharing outcomes and co-branding efforts. In 2018, the partnership launched a new website: [www.JoinRenewtheBlue.org](http://www.JoinRenewtheBlue.org). In 2022, our e-newsletter reach was an average per month of 2,251 readers, 6.6% click rate, 33% open rate.

## Accomplishments

- The Ambassador compiled and distributed monthly meeting notes and announcements (plus special alerts as needed).
- Steering Committee meetings were held monthly, and the Ambassador participated in monthly calls with 19 federal locations and partners.
- Partners made several public presentations about the work.
- In April 2022 USEPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister presented a \$198,195 novelty big check to Brownfields Job Training grant selectee HCA. McCollister and HCA were joined by Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, U.S. Representative Sharice Davids (Kansas), and leaders from Build Trybe, a program of the Kansas City organization Cornerstones of Care.



## Next Steps

- Blue River UWFP will continue to facilitate communication among partners through monthly e-blasts and regular partnership meetings;
- Partners will continue working to increase engagement with new federal partners; and
- The Partnership will continue to participate in UWFP national calls and assist with specific tasks as needed.



# Urban Restoration Areas

## PARKS WITH PURPOSE

### Project Background

In 2011, the Marlborough Coalition of Neighborhoods became home to one of our country’s largest, most comprehensive, neighborhood-based green infrastructure installations, the Middle Blue River Basin Green Solutions Pilot Project, which includes more than 100 bio-swales and rain gardens, porous concrete sidewalks, and native trees on parkways. The project was the first green infrastructure project to be completed as part of Kansas City’s 25-year Overflow Control Program, which is designed to improve water quality by reducing the frequency and volume of sewer overflows and represents the largest infrastructure investment in Kansas City’s history. The projects were designed and installed by the City of Kansas City Water Services to keep rain water from overwhelming sewers as part of a consent decree with USEPA, but the Marlborough Coalition was fully engaged in the process of identifying and including in the projects solutions to their most important priorities which included reducing litter, calming traffic issues, restoring urban trees and fixing sidewalks.



The Marlborough Community Coalition developed The Catalyst Plan in 2013 to discover and develop the rich assets of the five neighborhoods of the Marlborough community (Battleflood Heights, Walnut Grove, Marlborough East, Marlborough Renaissance, and Marlborough Pride), and craft an action plan to create a thriving place to grow up, live and work.

In 2014, HCA and the Blue River UWFP partnered with the Marlborough Community Coalition and KC Water to develop a Parks with Purpose project with funding of \$250,000 from The Conservation Fund and UHaul at 81st Street and Troost Avenue. At this site, 38 vacant privately owned lots were chosen by Kansas City Water Services for Phase 2 of its green infrastructure improvements. The City purchased the lots with an initial project investment of \$175,000 and constructed a large vegetated detention basin to reduce combined sewer overflows and

downstream flooding at a cost estimated to be more than \$10 million. Marlborough Community Coalition and KC Parks invested \$450,000 to design and construct a Nature + Play area to add value and community benefits to the site. The Nature + Play site design was led by Down to Earth Services, a design, build, and maintenance company specializing in native plants and sustainable solutions. Down to Earth Services developed the concept for a park that is home to spaces developed to reflect the values and community. “Nature Nodes” were built and filled with vegetation meant to support the Monarch butterfly on its yearly migration through our area. In line with green infrastructure developments these nodes use native plants to attract the monarch as well as other beneficial pollinators. Their deep root systems contribute to stormwater runoff reduction. The city commissioned an artist, Jacob Balcom to design and install public sculptures, called Blomes.

## Accomplishments

- With funding from The Conservation Fund, one of 42 national Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) UWFP partners, four Nature Nodes were designed and installed by local contractor, Down To Earth Services
- The project was managed by Blue River UWFP Ambassador, HCA.

## Next Steps

- Organize and host annual Green Guard Stewardship programs;
- Sustain maintenance of project sites (ongoing);
- Increase use and programming on-site (ongoing); and
- Work with partner neighborhoods to implement workforce development plans.

## MUNICIPAL FARM

### History

Located upstream of the former Anadarko Petroleum site, the 422-acre Municipal Farm has been in ownership of the City of Kansas City, Missouri since 1911. The site benefits from close proximity to major regional natural resources and amenities (like the Blue River, Brush Creek, Truman Sports Complex, regional greenway trails, and the Rock Island Corridor.) The farm has been home to the city’s tuberculosis hospital, women’s reformatory, municipal correctional institution and an inmate-run farm.



After the jail was demolished in 2009, City staff embarked on a planning initiative with an EPA Area Wide Brownfields Planning Grant (2010) to outline the community’s vision for the farm’s future. The resulting Municipal Farm Sustainable Reuse Plan (SRP) provides an integrated development strategy that embraces small-scale urban agriculture coupled with ecosystem restoration and outdoor recreation and education.



In conjunction with this effort, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) developed an ecosystem restoration plan for the western portion of the Municipal Farm, which was integrated with the SRP. The Kansas City, Missouri City Council formally adopted the SRP as the City's official plan for the site on December 20, 2012 in Resolution No. 120959. Partners working to implement the community's vision include Kansas City Community Gardens, Boys Grow, HCA MDC, USEPA, the City of Kansas City and others.

In 2017, HCA received \$500,000 in compensatory groundwater restoration funds to advance the USACE ecosystem restoration plan. The restoration project began in 2019 and implements significant portions of the USACE and NFWF restoration plans in and around existing water bodies and wetlands from the Boys Grow farm site to the east.

## Recent Major Project Accomplishments

- Habitat Architects developed and submitted for approval the first draft of plans as specified in the contract in June 2019. The plan received final review in May 2020 and approved on July 22, 2020. The plans reflect adaptive maintenance and will be revised and updated as needed. HCA will use the plans to establish the future monitoring and ongoing maintenance of the restoration area protected by the easement.
  - All tree planting was accomplished, and tree survivorship appears to achieve the initial goal of 90 trees per acre.
- A "hand off" tour of the conservation easement site occurred in December 2022 with the City of Kansas City (MO), HCA, Habitat Architects, and MDNR.

## Next Steps

- Adopt conservation easement with assistance from The Conservation Fund;
- Work with City to Continue site maintenance;
- Sustain volunteer stewardship restoration;
- Connect site to Rock Island Corridor Trail;
- Build workforce opportunities at the site;
- Deepen relationships with surrounding neighborhood; and
- Build relationships with user groups to increase on-site trail use

## BLUE VALLEY PARK

### History

Blue Valley Park has a long history with its community. Established in 1945, this 238.5 acres sits alongside the Blue River. It has a small lake, historic Santa Fe trails, rolling woods and traditional amenities like Frisbee golf and ball fields added over the years due to efforts by the community. Following the decline of the neighborhood in the 1960's when nearby steel businesses closed and families left, crime, trash



and overgrowth moved in. Since the 1980's, the Blue Valley Neighborhood Association has organized volunteer clean ups, raised funds and brought needs to the attention of the Parks Board. Two years ago, they began to restore an oxbow near the ball fields, improving the natural riverside beauty of their park. The oxbow trail was created in 2020 through a partnership between Blue Valley Neighborhood Association, KC Parks and Recreation, and Heartland Conservation Alliance. The 1/2 mile single track trail provides views of the woods and an oxbow of the Blue River. Funding for the trail was provided by the National Parks and Recreation Association. We will build on these efforts with this green infrastructure project and will restore 50 acres of riparian corridor, increasing community access and visibility, reducing flooding, managing stormwater and enhancing habitat.



The Blue Valley Neighborhood is located in Kansas City, Mo, with a population of 7,762 residents who on average are 42 years old and 62% are renters. This is a working class neighborhood that 2010 census data notes is 78% minority (Hispanic 22%, Black 51%, White 32%), 34% not in the labor force and 69%

earning less than \$25,000 annually.



When comparing this data using the EPA's Environmental Justice Screen we found that our community ranks at a much higher risk than the state's average for reasons mentioned above as well as residents are lower-income (74% vs. 35% citywide) and less than a high school education (23% vs.12% citywide) The community is flanked on the east side by Interstate 435 and a heavy industrial corridor, now abandoned. The community has experienced severe flooding from the Blue River over the years and is located in a combined sewer overflow area.

With support from EPA, the Blue River UWFP worked to deepen understanding and relationships with the community of Blue Valley. Surveys, public events and community outreach resulted in developing a restoration plan for Blue Valley Park with \$240,000 in funding support from the National Recreation and Parks Association.

## Recent Accomplishments

- Hosted five Renew the Blue community volunteer restoration workdays in 2022.

## Next Steps

- Work with KC Parks to adopt Natural Resource Management plan for park;
- Build more trails;
- Sustain maintenance of restoration areas;
- Increase use of park;
- Host Green Guard Stewardship Training for nearby public schools and families; and
- Work with neighborhood to implement workforce development plans.

# Community Engagement

## RESTORING VACANT LOTS

### History

In 2013, the Blue River UFWP team began building upon current work developing a Blue River watershed restoration strategy to study 3,000 vacant lands in the Middle Blue River Watershed with a goal to identify properties to redevelop with green infrastructure or Low-Impact Development to improve watershed health and community vitality. Working with MARC Natural Resource Inventory; KC Water stormwater studies; and City Planning and Development plans among other criteria. Findings will be shared widely to integrate water quality protection into land use planning and to support Kansas City's community improvement goals.



In 2015, MARC and HCA teamed up with the Urban Neighborhood Initiative to co-lead a Vacant to Vibrant initiative and created a Working with Vacant Lots Field Guide and assisted neighborhoods with revitalizing communities by greening vacant lots. The long-range goal is to protect open spaces, increase access to nature, improve stormwater management and increase neighborhood vitality. Vacant lot restorations demonstrate solutions to issues impacting the health of the Blue River and surrounding community.

### Recent Accomplishments: Palestine East Corridor

- Project funded by EPA Environmental Justice grant. Project partners included HCA;UMKC CFN; Kansas City Neighborhoods and Housing Services; MDC; The Open Table; and The River Network



- 2019: Conducted an inventory of the trees in the corridor and learned about the health and diversity of the community forest. 587 trees were inventoried and trees considered invasive to Missouri are not dominant, and overall the corridor is fairly healthy.
- 2021-2022: Nine community members served on a Community Advisory Board to design a reuse plan for ~20 acres of vacant and forested land. The “preferred concept” for the reuse plan includes preservation of forested areas, walking trails, farmers market, wetland, community garden spaces, bee boxes, public gathering spaces, and playground areas. This concept provides economic opportunities that focus on community investment and entrepreneurship where community members can grow and sell fresh produce. The concept also includes ecological services by preserving the existing forest that will help with pollution removal, carbon storage, oxygen production, and avoiding runoff. HCA will share the plan with the City and strive to collaborate on its implementation. Hosted a community meeting on Thursday, August 25, 2022 and also distributed surveys to the neighborhood via mail and canvassing.

### Next steps

- Assist partners to enhance urban forestry practices and management, provide forestry educational programs to schools and the public, and work with communities to increase tree canopy.
- Execute the role outlined for HCA in the EPA Environmental Justice (EJ) grant award, potential memorandum of understanding (MOU) with KC Water, and potential cooperative agreement between MDC and UMKC CFN.
- Advance capacity building, leadership development, and connectedness by coordinating subawards to emerging grassroots conservation and environmental justice leaders and organizations and assisting them with their own grant applications and strategic planning.
- Enhance community-initiated conservation engagement, particularly related to coordination of HCA's existing Restoring Vacant Lots programming including the Palestine East Corridor project.
- Advance participation in democracy by helping underinvested neighborhoods advocate for and secure resources to improve their environment, health, and access to natural recreation.



## GREEN GUARD STEWARDSHIP TRAINING

### History

HCA’s Green Guard Stewardship Program connects community members to nature in their neighborhood and teaches them how to take care of it. In turn, preserving their natural areas helps them preserve their local identity. An appreciation for nature is a social value that can be learned from the stewards we train as they work in their community. As one’s sense of place evolves so does the pride they take in their community. In February 2016, HCA launched its first class of stewards partnering with East High School.



The Green Guard Stewardship Program has been in Ivanhoe, Blue Valley, Marlborough and Seven Oaks Neighborhoods, and in East High School in 2016. The class convened once a week for 12 weeks each spring and fall. The program provided a stipend, water bottle and resources each week. Our partners help teach each class, exposing community members to a wide array of expertise and opportunities. The Green Guard Stewardship Program enables Kansas City's urban communities to take ownership of their surroundings while creating environmental literacy in watershed health, plant identification, biodiversity, community engagement, green infrastructure, how to safely interact with wildlife in the city and land use. In addition, it increases community engagement within civic organizations who work to alleviate poverty by building capacity in order to protect natural areas for the enjoyment of all.

## Accomplishments

The program graduated 20 participants in 2018. Through partnership with the MDC's Tree Resource Improvement and Maintenance (TRIM) grant program, HCA contracted Molly Gosnell, Midwest GeoInfo, to produce a tree inventory of the East High School forest. Included in the TRIM grant, HCA partnered with KC WildLands, Bridging the Gap, as well as Midwest GeoInfo to Recruit 10 stewards to participate in the "Honeysuckle Academy" at East High School and work with Heartland Tree Alliance to develop the "Trees are Terrific" Program for 4, 5, and 6 graders at Trailwoods Elementary and JA Rogers Elementary. Lisa Pena provided Spanish-language interpretive services for the participants.

There were 31 students who completed the spring Green Guard Stewardship Program at East High School in May of 2019. Over the course of three months, stewards participated in a total of 12 classes and two workdays in the 13-acre forest patch at East High School, Alex George Lake, Municipal Farm, KC Water, Blue Valley Park, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Discovery Center, and other local sites. Stewards represented East High School, East High School's English Language Learners Program, Northeast High School, Blue Valley neighborhood, Brookside neighborhood, Rockhurst University, and the University of Oregon. Nearly 30 Alliance partners contributed their time to teach and mentor throughout the program.

The Green Guard Stewardship Training Program was planned to continue at East High School in the fall 2019 with 26 students, but was canceled for spring 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Program emphasized empowerment of the individual and asked each class, "How can **one** person have an impact?" and "How can that impact grow when we work together as a community?"

Over the course of three months, stewards participated in a total of 10 classes and two workdays at Municipal Farm and Blue Valley Park. 15 Alliance partners contributed their time to teach and mentor during fall 2019.

Planning for the 2020 JA Rogers and Trailwoods Schools Green Guard Stewardship Programs began in the fall 2019. 25 participants registered for the program, which was planned for



four classes over 2 months. Program teachers represented organizations such as Urban Trail Co, Green Works, Heartland Tree Alliance, Lakeside Nature Center, and the Missouri Department of Conservation. In partnership with Green Works in Kansas City, National Recreation and Park Association, and the Local Investment Commission, we developed and provided “Blue Valley Outdoors,” a nature and garden exploration curriculum designed for Trailwoods’ families to use in their backyards, Blue Valley Neighborhood, and Blue Valley Park.

## Next Steps

- Continue hosting the Green Guard Stewardship Training Program annually to target Environmental Justice populations and/or locations.

## RENEW THE BLUE

### History

Over the years, partners laid the groundwork for a strategic communications plan by identifying key audiences and core messages, developing the “Renew the Blue” brand and logo, and sharing information about each organization’s activities. The co-branded messaging campaign rose from the need to coordinate efforts and messages for a healthy watershed. The Blue River UWFP Steering Council created and adopted a Strategic Communication Plan (Strategic Plan) in 2016. HCA has been leading the implementation of the Strategic Plan with support of stakeholders on an Outreach & Education Work Group. The Strategic Plan envisions a vibrant, resilient Blue River ecosystem that boasts healthy riparian corridors, diverse plant communities, urban forests and prairie grasslands, with abundant habitat for wildlife. The Blue River will offer recreational opportunities that promote healthy activities, including a network of hiking and biking trails; places to boat, float, fish or swim; it will link to a larger regional system of trails and greenways; and access to cultural and activity centers. The river is a centerpiece of revitalized neighborhoods and a community asset that is valued and maintained by residents and visitors alike. It is an important part of our region’s history and our future.

The Renew the Blue unified messaging campaign is helping people understand how amazing the river is to our community and ways they can connect to their urban waters. The campaign helps partners and the public understand who is working on and in the river. The campaign unites our efforts into a larger story and increases our success. Partners participating in Renew the Blue co-brand their existing work and share key metrics with each other.

The overall goals of our Renew the Blue initiative are to:

- Restore riparian forests, upland habitats and wetlands in the Blue River Watershed.



- Revitalize brownfields and urban neighborhoods with connections to the Blue River.
- Engage the community to connect people — especially neighbors — to the Blue River.
- Support partners already working to restore the Blue River.

## Accomplishments

- Hosted and supported 315 Renew the Blue events, including updating outreach materials for public tabling to support Renew the Blue maps and other collateral material
- Conducted bi-monthly meetings with the HCA Education & Outreach Work Group to collect Renew the Blue outcomes and maintain relationships
- Maintained the website: [www.JoinRenewtheBlue.org](http://www.JoinRenewtheBlue.org)
- Estimated total promotional reach for 2022 was 136,304
- Estimated total attendance for 2022 events was 3,464 people
- Estimated total views of The Blue River Documentary is 1,765
- Distributed Renew the Blue materials for 2022. A comprehensive Blue River map is available on [www.JoinRenewtheBlue.org](http://www.JoinRenewtheBlue.org) for others to view and download. Other versions of the map, brochures, and stickers are available by contacting the HCA Program Manager or attending an event at which the Renew the Blue team is tabling:
  - Brochures = 135
  - Maps = 225
  - Stickers = 183

## Next Steps

- Continue restoration at The Heartland Overlook Preserve
- Continue working with neighborhood leaders and deepening area connections
- Enhance the Renew the Blue website to include digital and printable resources available for partners, teachers, organizations, and others interested in engaging and protecting the Blue River
- Create a project map for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership Work Plan that details municipalities, access points that are currently available, and future project plans.

***For more information on Heartland Conservation Alliance and information in this Work Plan contact Logan Heley at [Logan@heartlandconservationalliance.org](mailto:Logan@heartlandconservationalliance.org) or (816) 316-6071***