



URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities



Photo by Devonshire on Unsplash

2022

Accomplishments Report

Welcome

On behalf of the 15 federal agencies in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership program, it is an honor to share this Accomplishments Report highlighting the many milestones and successes of the program in 2022. Since 2011, the program has grown to include 21 Urban Waters Federal Partnership locations, 15 federal agencies and an active network of nearly 1,400 partners.

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership program is a successful model of sustained collaboration among federal, state, Tribal, local government, non-profit organizations, academia and private industry with communities with environmental justice concerns. By channeling local priorities and promoting holistic approaches to monitoring, restoration, education, training and outreach, the program improves water quality and increases access to urban waterways. In addition, projects are undertaken at the local level to address current and future climate impacts within underserved and overburdened communities and their watersheds — climate justice is a key pillar of the program.

The success of the program lies in the diversity of its many partners coming together across sectors to leverage and advance ideas, resources and projects in line with a common mission. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the various organizations across the country that host Urban Waters Ambassadors — a critical component of the program — including National Estuary Programs, universities, local government, non-profit organizations and other valued partners. I would also like to thank all the federal, Tribal, state, local government, academic and non-profit partners, and the community leaders in each location who worked to forward the Urban Waters mission in 2022 and continue their efforts today!



— **Benita Best-Wong**,
Deputy Assistant
Administrator of the U.S.
Environmental Protection
Agency's Office of Water



Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency launched the Urban Waters Federal Partnership program in 2011 in collaboration with 12 federal agencies to help urban and metropolitan communities, particularly those that are underserved or economically distressed, connect with local waterways and work to improve them while supporting the goals and objectives of the Clean Water Act. The program consists of 21 designated watersheds across the continental United States and Puerto Rico where partners develop a collaborative workplan to improve water quality and lift up local priorities for community revitalization and engagement with water resources. These partners include a mixture of organizations including Tribal, local and state governments; non-profits; universities; private sector entities and other local groups, each providing unique expertise and experience.

Federal agencies support local priorities through grants, technical assistance and other programs throughout the country. For example, the [Five Star Wetland and Urban Waters Restoration Program](#) is a joint collaboration between the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the EPA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture and provides financial assistance to grassroots partnerships for wetland, forest, riparian and coastal habitat restoration; stormwater management; outreach and stewardship with a particular focus on water quality; and watersheds and the habitats they support.

Each Urban Waters designated location is driven by local priorities and shaped by the culture, characteristics and challenges of the watershed. The efforts in each location are managed by an Urban Waters Ambassador who often wears multiple hats as the partnership coordinator,

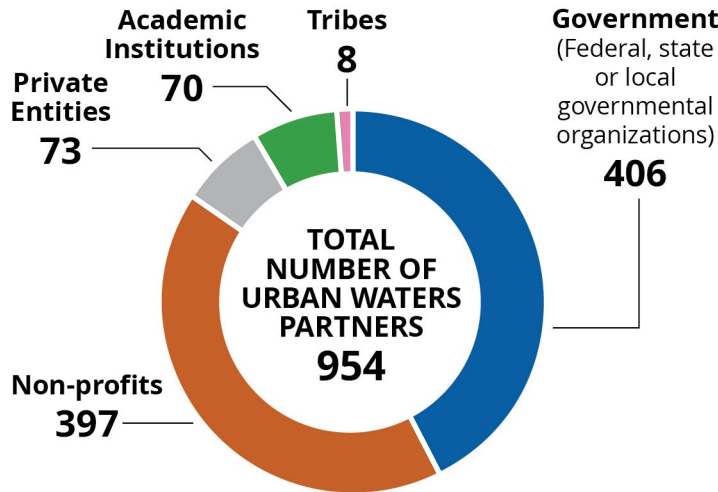
URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS

are located across the continental United States and in Puerto Rico. Partnerships work with all municipalities in their watershed. Local Urban Waters Federal Partnerships have an **average of more than 50 member organizations** from diverse sectors including federal, Tribal, state and local government, non-profit organizations, private entities and academia.



communicator and champion of collaborative approaches to watershed management. This role is crucial to the success of the program as they maintain the energy, focus and momentum of the group of partners working at the location. Over time, these partnerships are strengthened as relationships build and results are achieved.

In addition to support from federal agencies, Ambassadors and local partners have a platform



for peer-to-peer networking, sharing best practices and real time information exchange through the Urban Waters Learning Network. The Learning Network has grown 85% since 2011 and continues to see more visits and engagement with the website every year. The Learning Network is just one

aspect of this thriving partnership program. This report details many great examples of program successes from 2022.

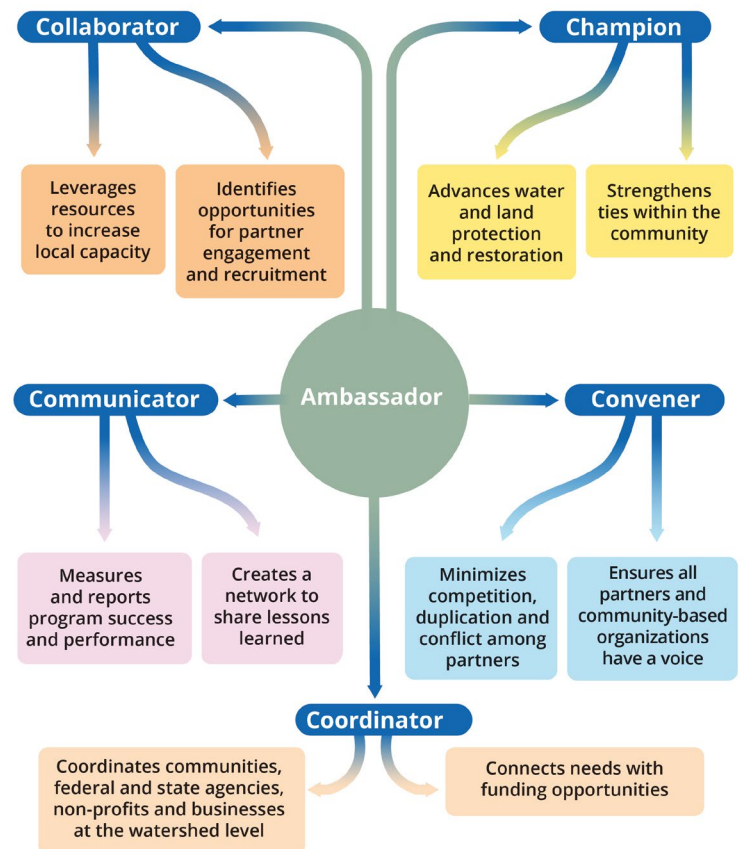
ROLE OF THE AMBASSADOR

All the accomplishments shared throughout this report are made possible by the Urban Waters Ambassadors who convene and lead collaboration among a myriad of partners and serve as **communicators** to identify community needs, **coordinators** to support on-the-ground projects that align with the community's plan or vision and **champions** to improve watersheds and benefit communities.

“Since our Urban Waters designation, communities have been incorporated into institutional and governmental efforts in the watershed like never before. This has taken the form of funding for communities, following community guidance and leadership in designing projects, and working together to accomplish mutual goals.”

— Green-Duwamish
Urban Waters Ambassador

ROLES OF THE URBAN WATERS AMBASSADOR



THE URBAN WATERS LEARNING NETWORK

With funding from EPA’s Urban Waters Federal Partnership Program — and in cooperation with the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program — Groundwork USA and River Network coordinate the [Urban Waters Learning Network](#). The Learning Network is a nationwide peer-to-peer network of people and organizations working to conserve, restore and revitalize America’s urban waterways. The Learning Network delivers tools, training, mentoring and financial assistance to support the work of members as they collaborate, develop solutions and elevate community priorities.

Together, the Learning Network fosters solutions that advance water equity and environmental justice, build healthy ecosystems and resilient communities and address the disparate impacts of environmental degradation and climate change.



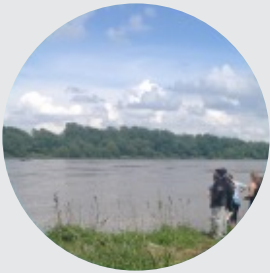
In 2022, the Urban Waters Learning Network facilitated information exchange among **649 individuals from 434 organizations** nationwide.



From 2016 to 2022, Network **membership grew by 85%**.



Website activity has more than tripled from 11,032 webpage-views in 2017 to **37,000+ webpage views** in 2022.



IMPACT STORIES

67 total stories

highlight successful Urban Waters restoration projects around the country.



STORY MAPS

11 story maps

tell engaging, interactive stories from the Learning Network.



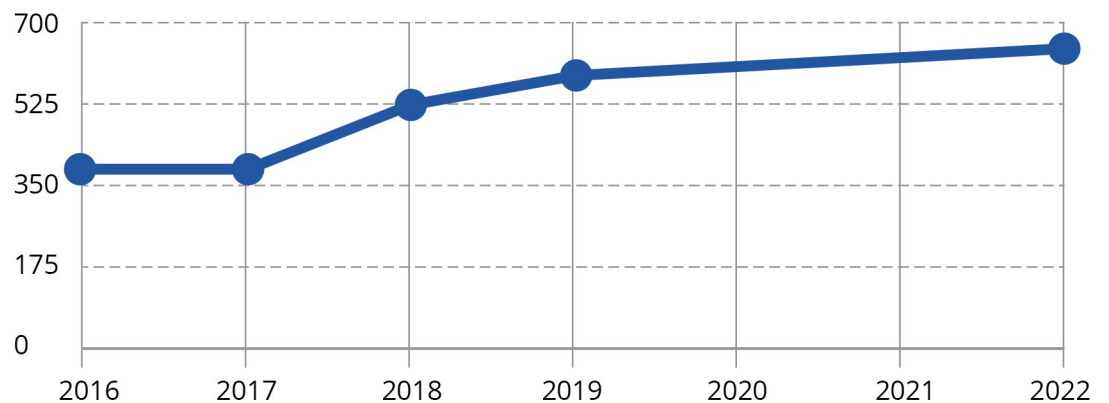
NETWORK BLOG

63 blog posts

highlight Network members, awards and Urban Waters topics of interest.

LEARNING NETWORK GROWTH

Number of individuals participating in Mobilize (formerly Basecamp), the Learning Network’s interactive communication platform.



2022 Impact Snapshot

This snapshot includes data from a subset of Urban Waters Federal Partnership locations (where the Urban Waters Ambassador served either a primary or supporting role in the activity), along with data from the [Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program](#) and federal partner contributions to the program. Agencies that contributed to these statistics include the EPA, the USDA-U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Department of the Interior-U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This information is not comprehensive of all activities or agency contributions that took place in 2022.

IN 2022, THESE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP LOCATIONS:



Reached **209,130** community members through education and outreach



Protected or restored **32,728** acres of habitat



Planted **27,675** native trees and plants, preventing stormwater runoff from entering waterbodies



Collected **27,482** pounds of trash from watersheds



Engaged **5,515** volunteers and participants in Urban Waters Federal Partnership activities



Collected **388** water quality samples



Created **183** job training opportunities in the environmental restoration sector by supporting Urban Waters Federal Partnership projects



Hosted **124** community events to connect people with local waterways and work to improve them

USGS COOPERATIVE MATCHING FUNDS PROGRAM

The USGS invested and leveraged \$4 million through the National Water Quality Program as [Cooperative Matching Funds](#) to support Urban Waters Federal Partnership projects. The funds will benefit 22 Urban Waters projects critical for citizen health and safety, recreation and economic development in 15 cities. The work leverages USGS water science through the Urban Waters Federal Partnership for a direct impact on urban waterways.



Completed **98** Urban Waters Federal Partnership projects, including 17 projects advancing environmental justice in underserved communities and 12 projects advancing climate resilience



Operated **43** continuous water monitoring sites



Secured and leveraged more than **\$7.7 million** in grants and through federal and non-federal funding to implement Urban Waters Federal Partnership projects

Urban Waters Federal Partnership: Project Accomplishments

The following pages highlight local accomplishments from 2022 across seven Urban Waters Federal Partnership locations organized by five focus areas: Environmental Justice Spotlight, Water Quality and Habitat Restoration, Climate Resilience, Workforce Development and Outreach and Education.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE SPOTLIGHT

Environmental justice is central to the mission of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. The program advances this mission through projects focusing on equity and communities with environmental justice concerns. The accomplishments listed here are examples of Urban Waters Federal Partnership environmental justice educational and grant making efforts that also integrate environmental justice through partnerships with communities to ensure community priorities are included in planning and project benefits are distributed equitably.

- The **GREATER PHILADELPHIA AREA/DELAWARE RIVER WATERSHED URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP** launched the second year of the Community Funds Mini-Grant Program awarded through the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary. The program works with residents and youth on environmental stewardship projects to support and build capacity for community groups with environmental justice concerns. The program will award up to **\$11,000 for eight projects including tree plantings, pollinator gardens, riparian habitat restoration, youth environmental stewardship and community environmental trainings**. Urban Waters federal partners helped to review and score proposals. The NFWF and the EPA are financially supporting this work through grants awarded to the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary

with funding from the Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund Grant Program and the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

- The **MYSTIC RIVER URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Boston)**, in collaboration with Groundwork USA and EPA Region 1, coordinated an **Environmental Justice Workshop series for 58 participants with community organizations**. Participants included Green Roots and Everett Community Growers focused on diversity, equity and justice in the Mystic River Watershed. The first workshop focused on building a common vocabulary around equity and structural and institutional racism with respect to water. The second workshop sought to share ongoing environmental justice projects, empower youth to participate in planning and improve communication and increase engagement between federal partners and community-based organizations.
- The **BRONX & HARLEM RIVERS URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (New York City)** co-hosted the **first annual Harlem River Environmental Justice Boat Tour** with Congressman Espaillat's office, Harlem River Working Group, Bronx Council for Environmental Quality, New York-New Jersey Harbor and Estuary Program, West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT), the USGS and the EPA. Building on the success and interest generated from the first annual Environmental Justice Boat Tour, the second annual tour received [local news coverage](#) from

CBS News. The idea for a Harlem River boat tour was initiated through environmental justice conversations around the Partnership's 10-year celebration. The tour featured 16 locations highlighting ongoing and completed projects and infrastructure needs including projects related to water quality, public waterfront access, pedestrian and wildlife safety, sewage control, flood management, storm resiliency, sanitation and more. The tour featured Partnership members and invited guests speaking on environmental justice issues and Urban Waters Federal Partnership project priorities.



Photo credit: CBS News

"The Urban Waters Federal Partnership has created the framework for sustained collaboration, communication and joint planning in the South Platte Watershed. Partners engage through partnership and committee meetings to learn about ongoing activities and projects. This engagement has led to increased partnership collaboration on projects and joint funding applications. The Partnership continues to serve as an incubator of ideas, bringing together water professionals and community members for the betterment of the watershed and impacted communities. Partners have stated that being a designated location has helped their fundraising."

— South Platte Urban Waters Ambassador

WATER QUALITY AND HABITAT RESTORATION

- The **MYSTIC RIVER URBAN WATERS AMBASSADOR (Boston)** presented at a meeting of the Mystic Valley Development Commission, a local tri-municipal partnership, to demonstrate the importance and success of the trash trap currently deployed in the Malden River (a tributary of the Mystic). **After learning more about the project, the Commission pledged to fund trash trap maintenance for four years.** In 2022, Mystic River Urban Waters partners held 32 clean up events with 792 volunteers and collected 3,694 lbs of trash from the Mystic River Watershed through the trash trap and cleanup events.



Photo credit: MyRWA

- The **SOUTH PLATTE RIVER URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Denver)** celebrated the **launch of the Denver Metro Water Quality Assessment Tool**. The tool provides water quality information on the South Platte for scientists, educators, anglers, boaters, water utilities and the public. The tool conveniently allows users to track water quality data of the river and its tributaries and read stories about what they can do to support restoration and protection in the watershed. The **South Platte River Urban Waters Ambassador coordinated collaboration between the EPA, USFS, USGS, Metro Water Recovery, Denver Water**

and other partners to pool funding and technical resources to allow for accessible and transparent data. The Water Quality Assessment Tool will continuously upload data from state and federal databases.



The South Platte Partnership worked with the EPA to create a [video](#) to celebrate more than 10 years of the Partnership.

- The **U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS** received a congressional appropriation of **\$350 million for ecosystem restoration of 6.5 miles of the South Platte River** running through the Denver Metro Area. Local partners, including the City and County of Denver, the Mile High Flood District, the Greenway Foundation and Capital Representatives, will contribute approximately **\$200 million in matching funding**. The project will **restore 150 acres of riparian habitat and 100 acres of wetland habitat and reconnect 190 acres** of existing habitat of the South Platte River, reducing the risk of flooding for communities with environmental justice concerns. The Partnership serves as a venue to share information on the projects with partners across the watershed, and Urban Waters partners submitted a letter of support to assist with the matching funds requirement for the project, reviewed the environmental impact statement and attended public meetings.

- The **NORTHWEST INDIANA URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP** celebrated the milestone achievement of **planting 10,000 trees** across Northwest Indiana through the U.S. Forest Service's CommuniTree program in October 2022. The event was attended by more than 40 federal government, municipal, non-profit and industry partners, including Indiana State Representative Pat Boy and representatives from the offices of Senator Todd Young, Senator Mike Braun and Representative Frank Mrvan. In 2022, the Partnership **removed invasive plant species and planted 2,000 wetland plugs and 28 native trees** with the help of an Indiana University Northwest restoration ecology class, the Student Conservation Association, the CommuniTree program, and more than 150 preschool aged students. Urban Waters partners also **performed maintenance on 3,000 trees and conducted marsh bird and vegetation monitoring at nearly 20 sites**, a crucial activity in determining the relative success of the Partnership's restoration efforts.



Photo credit: Victoria Wittig

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

- The **CAÑO MARTÍN PEÑA URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Puerto Rico)** collaborated in the **development and completion of the Comprehensive Infrastructure Master Plan (CIMP)**, which was spearheaded by ENLACE,

a major local community partner. The Plan identifies strategies to address flood mitigation, housing, water and electrical infrastructure, open spaces and urban design, ecology and environment, roads and mobility. The Plan incorporates green infrastructure that enhances water quality, ecology and community environment; projects that link infrastructure to economic opportunity; and interventions that reduce vulnerability and create models of resiliency. The **Urban Waters Ambassador served as a fundamental collaborator in the CIMP development**, assisting in coordinating multiple agency meetings in which progress was shared to collect input, incorporate comments and address concerns. During the initial planning stages of the project, the Ambassador provided documentation on green infrastructure models, guidance and descriptive language that was integrated into the proposal.

The Caño Martín Peña Comprehensive Infrastructure Master



American Society of Landscape Architects

Plan was recently **awarded** the inaugural Global Impact Award by the American Society of Landscape Architects and the International Federation of Landscape Architects.

- The **BALTIMORE URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP** flood science and policy team’s actionable flood science workgroup held a case study workshop in 2022 to further the investigation of policy and implementation issues defined in their 2020 **Science and Policy Workshop Action Report**. The 2022 workshop brought together experts in stormwater management and flooding within federal, state and local government and academia to explore interjurisdictional watershed management using the Maidens Choice watershed as a case study. The Maidens Choice watershed has

been heavily impacted by stormwater runoff, loss of riparian vegetation and flooding. The Partnership compiled and presented a summary report to the Baltimore County Commission on Environmental Quality and the report was shared through an **Urban Waters Learning Network Impact Story**.

The screenshot shows a webpage from the Urban Waters Learning Network. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links: About, Impact Stories, Resource Toolbox, Resource Collections, Upcoming Events, Blog, and Meet the Network. The main heading is "Science You Can Use: Baltimore's Urban Waters Actionable Science Flood Team" with a sub-date of "May 16, 2023 | Renee Mazurek | Impact Story". Below the heading is a paragraph of text describing the project's goals and achievements. To the right, there is a "Download PDF" button and a "Keywords" section listing "Federal Partnership, flooding, vacant lots, watershed planning". Below that, the "Organization Name" is listed as "URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP" and the "About the Organization" section mentions it is a partnership between Groundwork USA & River Network, funded by the US EPA Office of Water.

- The Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW), host organization of the Ambassador to the **GRAND RIVER/ GRAND RAPIDS URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP**, is developing the **Lower Grand River Watershed Resilience Plan**—a holistic, watershed-based approach to developing climate change resilience. In June 2022, **LGROW, EPA and the Urban Waters Federal Partnership collaborated to hold three workshops** in Indian Mill and Mill Creeks, Plaster Creek and the Buck Creek sub watersheds. The workshops applied activities from the **Equitable Resilience Builder**, an EPA support tool for equitable climate resilience planning. This tool includes resources and activities to help multistakeholder groups prioritize resilience indicators, community engagement techniques, equity assessment, root cause analysis and action planning. The workshops gathered feedback from community partners on how to build equity considerations

into LGROW's Watershed Resilience Plan. A [StoryMap on the effort](#) is linked on the Urban Waters Learning Network website.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- The **RIO REIMAGINED URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP'S (Phoenix)** Urban Youth Conservation Corps graduated its first cohort of high school student interns led by the Arizona Sustainability Alliance (AZSA). This one-year **paid conservation internship program for students from low-income communities** includes field trips, conservation lessons and education, networking and mentorship opportunities. The **concept for this program was developed by the Rio Reimagined Ambassador** and the Alliance, and the **Ambassador provided support in applying for grant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Five Star Urban Waters Restoration Program** to start the internship program. To maintain support for the program, **the Ambassador serves as a liaison between the AZSA and the Rio Reimagined partners and stakeholders to ensure the program is serving the needs of the cities and communities involved.**

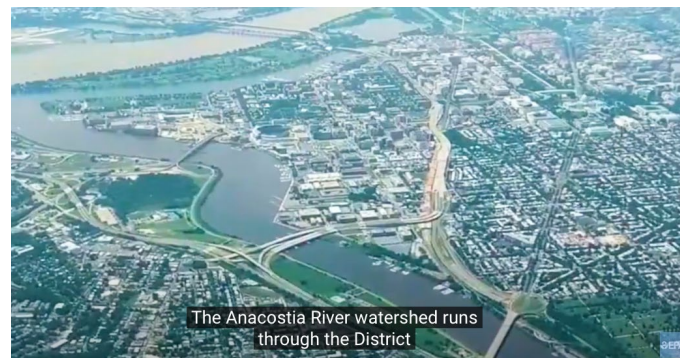


Photo credit: Arizona State University

"Since becoming an Urban Waters designated location, a sense of collective identity has emerged among partner organizations in the region. There has been increased activity around regional coalition building in applying for grants, and a growing awareness of other urban waterways and best practices in river revitalization. Since designation, our location has also seen engagement with new national non-profit partners and additional funding opportunities."

— Rio Reimagined Urban Waters Lead

- The **ANACOSTIA URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Washington, D.C.)** hosted the first cohort of the **University of the District of Columbia-DOI Justice40 summer internship**. This internship took Anacostia High School students on a 6-week journey allowing them to conduct community asset mapping and create a plan to improve their community. The students ended the internship by giving a presentation on the benefits of the program at the DOI.



The Anacostia Partnership worked with the EPA to create a [video](#) featuring the Justice 40 summer internship.

- The **GREEN-DUWAMISH URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Seattle)** launched an **effort to provide stipends for participation from communities in the watershed for restoration work**. This movement to **end**

unpaid volunteerism in communities with environmental justice concerns advances the Partnership's equity goal. Funding from the EPA, the Puget Sound Partnership and the USFS Region 6 Urban and Community Forestry Program supported this effort. The approach is being seen as a new best practice, and the **Urban Waters Ambassador has held conversations** with the City of Seattle, King County and the Washington State Department of Ecology **about implementing a similar approach** for their programs.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

- The **BLUE RIVER URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Kansas City, MO)** hosted a 4-week **Green Guard Stewardship Training Program** focused on **water quality education and engaging new stewards with ideas for behavioral change** across multiple generations. The training was hosted with Heartland Conservation Alliance partners across the Kansas City metro area with funding from the City of Kansas City Water Department.



Photo credit: Heartland Conservation Alliance

- The **BALTIMORE URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP'S** Greening Resources and Outreach for Watersheds (GROW) events were led by the Baltimore City Department of Public Works and brought together Urban Waters partners for **eight open house resource sharing events for community members** to

access information and resources to improve water quality and community greening. In 2022, **12 neighborhood pop-up events and eight community workshops** were held covering topics such as home composting, pollinator gardens, beekeeping, resources and funding. Nearly **1,000 people attended the GROW events, which included give aways of 152 trees, 12 truckloads of mulch and 48 compost bins**, as well as free resources and information from the many partners.



Photo credit: Baltimore City Department of Public Works

- The **RIO REIMAGINED URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Phoenix)** celebrated the signing of the **City of Phoenix Urban Bird Treaty** with 50 federal, county and non-profit partners. In 2011, the City of Phoenix became an Urban Bird Treaty City and a part of the USFWS' Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, which supports the city in bird and habitat conservation and provides opportunities for related community engagement and recreation. In 2021, the outreach and engagement efforts of this program expanded to align with Rio Reimagined — broadening the program's partnership and outreach opportunities along the river corridor. The **Urban Waters Ambassador identified, promoted and solidified the partnership opportunity** between the Urban Wildlife

Conservation Program and the Urban Waters Partnership and coordinated the signing ceremony.



Photo credit: Arizona State University

- The **SOUTH PLATTE RIVER URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Denver)** developed a local water quality advertising campaign focused on using phosphorous-free fertilizer to decrease the amount of phosphorus entering the waterways from runoff. With funding from the EPA, the campaign involved installing a billboard along a popular Denver highway and running radio ads on a popular radio station for a month. The billboard and radio ads were part of a larger ongoing campaign being implemented by partners across the Denver Metro Region to increase the use of phosphorus-free fertilizers.



Photo credit: Amy Conklin

- The **LOWER PASSAIC RIVER URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP (Newark, NJ)** celebrated its 10-year anniversary by hosting two days of education and canoeing for students and residents with Wilderness Inquiry’s Canoemobile. The Partnership hosted a celebratory press event with speeches from various nonprofits, elected officials, and federal, state and local government agencies — including the EPA Region 2’s Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor for Equity, Olivia Glenn; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Colonel Luzzatto; Congressman Payne’s office; New Jersey Department of



Photo credit: Lower Passaic River Urban Waters Partnership

Environmental Protection; City of Newark; Ironbound Community Corporation; New York-New Jersey Baykeeper; Trust for Public Land; and the New

York-New Jersey Harbor & Estuary Program. The event was a huge success highlighting the accomplishments of the Partnership over the last 10 years and recommitting to another decade of advocacy and progress. The Partnership also launched an impressive website that looks back at the [history of the Lower Passaic River](#) as well as major collaborations, projects and events.



Photo credit: Lower Passaic River Urban Waters Partnership

Conclusion

In 2022, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership program advanced a diverse range of projects focused on water quality protection, habitat restoration and resilience to climate change, and local Partnerships helped increase funding to community based and non-profit organizations working to improve their communities and watersheds. As the Urban Waters Federal Partnership program looks to the next 10 years, the EPA and federal partners will continue promoting holistic approaches that protect watersheds and communities. The program will work to further strengthen the Ambassador role

through training and professional development, deepen federal partner coordination to improve climate resilience, improve our communication and measurement of partnership impact and work to ensure the sustainability of our partnership locations.

We offer thanks to our Urban Waters partners across the country as they continue working diligently to advance ecosystem protection that is community driven to protect our nations waterways and vital cultural, economic and ecological resources.



Photo credit: iStock