

NEW LIFE FOR THE MARTIN PEÑA CHANNEL

THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

ABOUT THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

The Martin Peña Channel is one of **NUMBER** locations selected for help from the nation's new Urban Waters Federal Partnership. This partnership will reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our Nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits. Specifically, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership will:

- Break down federal program silos to promote more efficient and effective use of federal resources through better coordination and targeting of federal investments.
- Recognize and build on local efforts and leadership, by engaging and serving community partners.
- Work with local officials and effective community-based organizations to leverage area resources and stimulate local economies to create local jobs.
- Learn from early and visible victories to fuel long-term action.

Led by these federal agencies and coordinated by the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership closely aligns with and advances the work of the White House's place-based efforts, including the **Partnership for Sustainable Communities**, to revitalize communities, create jobs and improve the quality of life in cities and towns across the nation. The Urban Waters Federal Partnership also advances the work of the **America's Great Outdoors Initiative** (<http://americasgreatoutdoors.gov/>).

For more information, visit www.urbanwaters.gov

ABOUT THE MARTIN PEÑA PARTNERSHIP

The Martin Peña Channel Urban Waters Federal Partnership seeks to make significant contributions to the health and welfare of the approximately 27,000 residents of the area.



ABOUT THE COMMUNITY AND THE MARTIN PEÑA CHANNEL

The Martin Peña Channel is a 3.75 miles long tidal channel located within the San Juan Bay National Estuary in Puerto Rico. During the early 20th century, substandard dwellings were built within the mangrove wetlands bordering the channel, using refuse and debris as fill material. Over 3,000 structures now discharge raw sewage into the remains of the channel. Incompetent and poorly maintained sewer systems result in flooding, regularly exposing 27,000 residents to sewage polluted waters and sediments.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW

In an effort to improve water quality, make public access safe, and restore the watershed's ecosystem, here are some federal and/or local projects the Partnership is currently engaged in:

Martin Peña Ecosystem Restoration Project –The Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federal partners are currently evaluating a feasibility report and preliminary draft environmental impact statement prepared by our local partner: “Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martin Peña” (Enlace). These documents are the result of extensive efforts led by Enlace, a public corporation of the Government of Puerto Rico. This is the first step towards achieving a major dredging project to restore water flow within the channel, which should result in significant improvements in water quality within the San Juan Bay Estuary.

Martin Peña Health Study– The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) facilitated a cooperative agreement between Enlace and local academia partners (The Ponce School of Medicine and the University of Puerto Rico), leading to the conduction of the first ever environmental health studies at the Martin Peña communities. The studies are determining the possible effects of repeated exposure to contaminated waters and sediments by area residents.

Public Education and Outreach– A major undertaking at the site is the education of residents on the risks associated with the contact of contaminated flood waters. Of particular importance is education of school age children, who sometimes need to wade through floodwaters to return home after rainfall events, and are often seen playing in the flooded streets. Preliminary results from the environmental health studies show that the incidence rates for asthma and dermatitis in the pediatric population of the area exceed those for the rest of the nation by far. With assistance from an Urban Waters Program grant, our local partner is implementing innovative outreach methods to reach this population, such as plays and urban music.

WHAT'S NEXT

Additional partnerships – While the need to dredge Martin Peña channel remains at the core of the issues surrounding the project area, significant obstacles must be overcome before the dredging project can start. The designation of Martin Peña as an Urban Waters Federal Partnership Site should result in an escalation of federal activities in the area. Among the activities planned, the partnership will convene a series of meetings with stakeholders to discuss the issues, exchange information and examine potential solutions to the complex socioeconomic issues surrounding the environmental situation of the area. These discussions will allow us to identify potential partnerships that can be convened amongst the federal and local governments, as well as with stakeholders from the private enterprise.

THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

The partnership includes: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of the Army (Army Corps of Engineers), U.S. Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Corporation for National and Community Service, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Transportation

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