



The Passaic River Partnership Pursues a Future that Brings People Back to the River

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are co-leads at this Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) location where the community is an active partner with a vested interest in restoring the river. The lower 17 miles of the Passaic River have experienced high levels of damaged natural habitat, including wetlands and wildlife refuges, and exposures to toxic chemicals threatening human and environmental health. The Lower Passaic River was severely impacted by the early 1900s Industrial Revolution and contains legacy contaminants, such as mercury, dioxin and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), making it one of the most polluted rivers in the country.

ABOVE: The Newark Riverfront Revival holds community festivals along the Passaic riverfront to bring residents back to the river.

Project Highlights

- Active history of site investigation and restoration planning by EPA, USACE, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP)
- The future vision is a healthy watershed with new wetlands, habitats, and riverfront parks, as well as removal of fish advisories
- Underserved communities and the UWFP are working to improve river access to bring residents back to the river and create recreational and economic opportunities

Introduction

The Lower Passaic River location stretches from Dundee Dam in Garfield, NJ to Newark Bay. Legacy pollutants in the sediments of the Lower Passaic River and Newark Bay have resulted in poor water quality, bans on fish and shellfish consumption, loss of wetlands, and damaged habitat for wildlife. For decades, diverse partners have been working together with parties responsible for the pollution to investigate and clean up the river, and create a future Passaic River that communities can safely use.

Underserved Communities Work to Improve River Access

There are many underserved communities within Newark, NJ, Harrison, NJ, and Kearny, NJ near the Lower Passaic River that have Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking populations. Historically, these communities have been denied river access by the dozens of industries and stacked shipping containers along the water. Communities once fished and crabbed the waters of the Passaic River, but now, there are fishing advisories prohibiting consumption of fish and shellfish. However, some residents continue to fish for recreation and subsistence, putting their health at risk.

Local urban waters partners include the *Ironbound Community Corporation* (ICC), and the City of Newark amongst others. ICC received an urban waters small grant to educate and empower communities on why the river is important, create outreach materials, and lead ecotours and river rallies.



ABOVE: Dredging technology removes pollution from the Passaic River to allow for the creation of new habitat and wetlands.

Cleanup Progress

To date, there have been two significant cleanups of the Passaic River. The first success was the removal of 40,000 cubic yards of the most concentrated inventory of dioxin-contaminated sediment in the riverbed adjacent to the Diamond Alkali facility, a former pesticides manufacturing facility and Superfund Site. The second success was the removal of 16,000 cubic yards of surface sediment (2 feet) over a five-acre area, followed by capping of the riverbed to prevent future exposure to the sediments at River Mile 10.9, adjacent to Riverside Park in Lyndhurst, NJ. These cleanups have helped improve the overall health of the Passaic River by removing contaminants and reducing human and ecological exposure to toxic hazards. Visit <http://www.ourpassaic.org/> for future project updates, and to view a 3-D computer simulated flyover of the river's existing conditions and specific restoration opportunities available for stakeholders to interact with and learn about the lower Passaic River.

EPA conducted a multi-year study focusing on the cleanup of the sediments of the lower 8 miles of the river. In April 2014, EPA proposed a cleanup plan for the lower 8 miles, which ultimately will lead to a cleanup remedy for the sediments of the lower 8 miles of the Passaic River. A comprehensive study of the Passaic River up to River Mile 17 is ongoing.

Revitalizing Newark's Waterfront

With the construction of Newark's Riverfront Park in the Ironbound community, many community activities and events have been held, including: Praise by the Passaic Gospel Festival, Riverfront House DJ Residency, Paddle on the Passaic Kayak Days, Walk to the Water & Orange Party, and Friends of Riverfront Park monthly meetings. The revival of Newark's

Waterfront has led to new community-based kayak and rowing clubs along the river with competitive and recreational programs. Communities now have a vision for a Passaic River shoreline that includes parks, bike trails, walkways, greenspace, and the creation of new habitats for fish and wildlife.

The restoration of lost habitat and the construction of new wetlands for fish and wildlife could also serve as a natural method for reducing flooding and stormwater pollution from heavy wet weather events.

The Future is Bright for Riverfront Communities

The final cleanup decision for the lower 8-miles of the river is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2015. The decision document will detail the cleanup plan for the sediments of the lower 8-mile stretch of the Passaic River. The USACE is also preparing a restoration plan to be released in 2016 that will outline the restoration opportunities within the Lower Passaic River watershed as well as the overall Hudson Raritan Estuary.

Through Hurricane Sandy Disaster Appropriations Act funding, the USACE is working with partners to identify solutions to flooding at the Lower 5.5 mile Tidal Passaic area. Approximately \$300 million in funding could be provided for construction of a floodwall and levee project subject to the completion and approval of a General Reevaluation Report and Environmental Impact Statement that is currently underway. Hurricane Sandy appropriations are also planned to complete the shoreline stabilization work at the Joseph G. Minish Passaic River Waterfront Park and Historic Area.

Location Goals

The Passaic River location measures success by evaluating ways to:

- Break down federal program silos to promote more efficient and effective use of federal resources.
- 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 and stimulate local economies to create local jobs.
- Learn from early and visible victories to fuel long-term action.