



## The Urban Waters Federal Partnership: Connecting Communities to their Urban Waterways

**ABOVE:** Baltimore's vacant properties are being transformed through the use of green redevelopment strategies and tree plantings.

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) seeks to reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways to become stewards for clean urban waters. Through the Partnership, communities gain economic, environmental, and social benefits, and collaborate with Federal agencies, state and local agencies, and community-led efforts to achieve common goals.

The UWFP designated 19 locations between 2011 to 2014. The 19 geographically dispersed locations are working to revitalize urban waterways and the communities that surround them, transforming overlooked watersheds into community assets.

The UWFP is supported by 14 Federal agencies and more than 28 non-governmental organization (NGO) partners working in 19 designated locations. Examples of Partnership Accomplishments are highlighted below.

### ***UWFP Accomplishments***

#### **Toxics Cleanup in a New Jersey Watershed**

The Lower Passaic River was severely impacted by the early 1900s Industrial Revolution and still contains contaminants, such as mercury and dioxins. Due to the polluted conditions and industry along the riverfront, local underserved communities have been denied river access.

To address this, the U.S. EPA Superfund Program and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are leading toxic sediment cleanups, improving the health of the Passaic River, reducing human and wildlife exposure to toxic hazards, and creating opportunities for habitat restoration. Other locally driven improvements include Newark's rebuilt Riverfront Park, which is the site of new community-based recreational programs and events. In addition, the UWFP is supporting future plans that include parks and new habitats for fish and wildlife.

#### **Restoring Rapids in Michigan**

Efforts to restore and recreate the namesake rapids to downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan will improve habitats for fish, including the threatened lake sturgeon, which is spiritually important to Native American tribes. New recreational activities will increase revenue at local businesses in Grand Rapids. Expanded recreational use of the river is estimated to add \$15.9 - \$19.1 million per year and 1,520 new jobs to the local economy.



**ABOVE:** The Lower Passaic River has become the site of new community-based recreational programs and events, and has attracted local residents to kayak on the river.

## Redeveloping Vacant Lands in Maryland

Led by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, approximately 60 partners are working to redevelop Baltimore's vacant lands and clean the Patapsco watershed. The Patapsco watershed flows to the Baltimore City Harbor and into the Chesapeake Bay. Baltimore's 30,000 vacant properties pose economic, public health, and environmental problems. Location partners are adopting green redevelopment strategies to reduce polluted stormwater from those lots.

## Partnering with Tribes for an Urban Wildlife Refuge

The Middle Rio Grande watershed, in New Mexico, is situated between several tribes, including the Isleta Pueblo to the south of Albuquerque, and the Sandia Pueblo and other tribes to the north. There are a number of underserved communities where residents face high levels of unemployment and poverty. The Middle Rio Grande faces numerous challenges because long-term drought is affecting ecosystems and communities along the river.

Through the UWFP, partners are cleaning up and restoring the ecosystem, redeveloping the Bridge Boulevard corridor, and supporting education through citizen science projects. Partners created the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, the first urban wildlife refuge in the Southwest. Nine Federal agencies, which are led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. EPA, are working with state and tribal agencies to implement these projects.

## Guiding Principles of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

- **Promote clean urban waters** - The Partnership enhances the value of urban waters, recognizing their importance for the environment, public health, natural beauty, and economic and recreational potential. The Partnership seeks to also protect, manage, and restore the lands that surround those waters.
- **Reconnect people to their waterways** - Urban communities need access to their waterways to draw on commercial, recreational, and educational benefits. Reconnecting underserved communities to their waterways fosters economic growth and improvements in residents' well-being.
- **Encourage water conservation** - The Partnership strives to promote sustainability of water resources. New educational and conservation programs geared toward urban communities inspire such efforts to improve infrastructure and conserve local water resources.
- **Use urban water systems as a way to promote economic revitalization and prosperity** - Access to healthy urban waters enhances economic competitiveness by revitalizing local businesses and creating jobs. Efforts are especially focused on communities disproportionately impacted by pollution or economic burdens.
- **Encourage community improvements through active partnerships** - Strong partnerships at the Federal, state, and local levels, and with tribes, integrate services needed for community revitalization. Federal partners are removing barriers to collaboration and increasing the effectiveness of their actions.
- **Listen to communities in order to engage them** - The Partnership seeks to understand community values and to see environmental issues through their eyes. The Partnership works with underserved populations from the bottom up, rather than taking a top-down approach.
- **Focus on measuring results and evaluation to fuel future success** - Finding ways to measure success allows the Partnership to better invest resources at the local and Federal level. The Partnership is committed to monitoring progress to respond quickly when change is needed.