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NGOs Support Federal Agencies in Efforts to Revitalize Urban Waterways, Boost Metropolitan Communities

Public-Private Partnership Helps Connect Urban Youth with Outdoors

WASHINGTON, DC—More than two dozen NGOs including conservation and outdoor recreation organizations announced their endorsement today for the Urban Water Federal Partnership, a collaboration of 14 federal agencies that aims to boost local economies and create jobs by restoring waterways and their surrounding communities.

The announcement came as agency leaders, mayors, non-profits and others working with the Partnership convened in the nation's capital to share best practices from 18 current Urban Waters project locations across the country.

The collective NGO and association partners have pledged to align resources, funding and expertise to restore urban waters, parks and greenspaces; increase outdoor recreation; engage youth and residents at pilot sites; and create new initiatives or projects nationally or at the state or local levels that achieve complementary results. They will also be assisting federal agency partners with outreach and communications encouraging urban waters restoration, parks and greenspace conservation and outdoor recreation.

“This broad public and private Partnership is vital for ensuring the quality and quantity of our nation’s urban water resources,” said The Conservation Fund’s CEO, Larry Selzer. “In addition, as the vast majority of Americans now live in cities, these restored watersheds are critical gateways for reconnecting young people with the outdoors. Looking forward, we will need all hands-on-deck to restore our nation’s urban waters so these precious resources can help present and future generations thrive.”

In addition to The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, City Parks Alliance, Sierra Club and American Planning Association, 21 other NGOs have signed the pledge.

“We are very grateful for the support and partnership that these important organizations will be bringing to our efforts to restore urban waterways,” said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy. “Community led revitalization is central to the success of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and these organizations have deep roots in cities across the country, which will enhance and accelerate our collective work.”

In addition to EPA, the Urban Water Federal Partnership also includes the White House Council on Environmental Quality, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and nine other federal partners.

Launched in 2011, the Partnership provides grants, resources and expertise to local governments looking to restore urban rivers and jumpstart local economies, particularly in underserved communities. This support rejuvenates local communities by restoring habitat, providing outdoor education for youth and improving access to waterfront areas for both business and recreational uses. These enhancements improve public health while bolstering property values and local businesses.

“Today, 80% of Americans live in urban areas, so it is a great idea to focus on how rivers and streams flowing through cities can be improved and used by the millions of people who live near them. As an organization whose mission to protect land for people and provide parks, we support the Administration's effort in this long-neglected area and are pleased to be working with federal, state, local and private partners in cities that are part of the Urban Waters Partnership,” said Will Rogers, President of The Trust for Public Land.

The Bronx and Harlem River watersheds in New York, for example, pose the challenge of reconnecting communities to their waterways and enabling them to improve health conditions and benefit recreationally and economically. Eight federal agencies, four city and state agencies, community board representatives, and members of the Harlem River Working Group are involved.

The Interior Department, EPA and New York State Parks kicked off urban waters improvement efforts on the banks of the Harlem River in Roberto Clemente State Park, pledging to work together to revitalize the Bronx and Harlem River corridors. Interior's National Park Service and EPA also are working closely with New York City and community groups to create a new waterfront greenway along the Bronx side of the Harlem River, connecting the river to neighborhoods.

“Restoring our urban waters, preserving open spaces and providing outdoor recreation opportunities are critical to our cities' growth, health and sustainability, said Catherine Nagel, Executive Director of City Parks Alliance. “City Parks Alliance is excited about this new partnership that brings together federal agencies, local nonprofits, and local governments to restore our nation's urban waters.”

“Restoring urban waterways helps re-connect metropolitan residents—youth in particular—to open spaces and a relationship with nature,” said Mike Connor, Deputy Secretary of the

Interior. "The Urban Water Federal Partnership is an important part of Interior's programs to help youth and veterans by creating opportunities for them to restore their waters, parks and greenspaces, and providing them with jobs and, in many cases, a career path for those in distressed areas."

"We can no longer view nature as something separate and outside of cities," said Meera Bhat, Director of Urban Strategies for The Nature Conservancy. "Urban areas are home to diverse species, wildlife habitat and important waterways. We must work together to keep cities' lands and waters healthy so they can provide clean drinking water, outdoor recreation opportunities, jobs and other essential services."

The Urban Waters and Five-Star Grant program, which currently supports 18 communities in cities of all sizes across the nation, has awarded more than \$1.8 million since its inception, with grantees leveraging an additional \$6.7 million in local project support. The RFP was issued in November and closes February 5, 2015.

The grant recipients are tackling some of their communities' foremost challenges, from improving drinking water quality to promoting economic revitalization. This cross-sector engagement with local groups ensures community-based solutions best tailored to the local environment.

"We're proud to be a part of this community-driven partnership to restore and protect urban waterways. Together we will help open the door for more families to explore and enjoy the outdoors," said Michael Brune, Sierra Club Executive Director.

"Most cities in America, from large urban areas to small rural communities, have these important waterway resources. Many places were originally settled because of them," said William Anderson, FAICP, President of the American Planning Association. "To restore waterways for habitat, water quality, and storm protection, while planning their use for recreation, contribution to public health, connections to culture, and value to economic development is a tremendous opportunity."

- A list of NGOs signing the pledge follows.
- More information: <http://www.urbanwaters.gov>
- Progress in the original 7 urban waters locations is detailed in the [Partnership in Action Report \(PDF\)](#)

The participating NGOs include:

- Alliance for Community Trees
- American Forests
- American Planning Association
- American Rivers
- American Society of Landscape Architects
- Amigos de los Rios
- Arbor Day Foundation

- Arkansas Urban Forestry Council
- City Parks Alliance
- EarthForce
- Groundwork USA
- Izaak Walton League
- National Association of Clean Water Agencies
- National Recreation and Park Association
- National Wildlife Federation
- River Network
- SavATree
- Society of Municipal Arborists
- The Chesapeake Conservancy
- The Conservation Fund
- The Intertwine Alliance
- The Nature Conservancy
- Sierra Club
- The Trust for Public Land
- Tree Care Industry Association
- US Water Alliance
- Wilderness Inquiry

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