

Federal Agencies Partner to Revitalize Urban Waterways

BY BARBARA BILLITZER

A new federal partnership aims to stimulate regional and local economies, create local jobs, improve quality of life, and protect Americans' health by revitalizing urban waterways in under-served communities across the country. The Urban Waters Federal Partnership, an innovative federal union comprised of 11 agencies, will focus its initial efforts on seven pilot locations. Each pilot location already has a strong restoration effort underway, spearheaded by local governments and community organizations. Lessons learned from these pilot locations will be transferred to other cities in the country.



Led by the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and coordinated by the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership closely aligns with and advances the efforts of other White House place-based efforts. One example is the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, which is focused on revitalizing communities, creating jobs and improving the quality of life in cities and towns across the nation.

“There is a range of health and environmental challenges facing our urban waters today, but each challenge is matched by an incredible opportunity to transform distressed urban waterfronts into centerpieces for community revitalization,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. “Urban waters have the potential to support healthy environments, growing business and educational and recreational activities. By bringing together the experience and expertise of multiple federal partners, we have a chance to reconnect local residents, young people and community groups with the environmental resources all around them.”

Cleaning up and restoring these water resources is essential to protecting Americans' health and improving their overall quality of life. Revitalizing these urban waterways will also reconnect citizens to open spaces, and will have a positive economic impact on local businesses, tourism and property values. It will also spur private investment and job creation in these communities. The seven pilot locations include the Patapsco Watershed in Maryland, Anacostia Watershed in Washington DC/Maryland, Bronx and Harlem River Watersheds in New York, South Platte River in Colorado, Los Angeles River Watershed in California, Lake Pontchartrain Area in Louisiana, and the Northwest Indiana Area.

“Conserving our natural heritage is an objective shared by all Americans,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “The Urban Waters partnership will not only give thousands of urban Americans access to the great outdoors in a way they haven't had before, it also creates partnerships between the federal government and American communities on conservation issues. At USDA, the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working in thousands of communities across the country to conserve and revitalize forests and watersheds, many impacting urban areas. At the same time, we're connecting people with our land and resources by promoting outdoor activities and healthier lifestyles.”

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership marks a significant step towards revitalizing an often overlooked resource in our urban communities. The partnership offers an opportunity to realize urban waterway and watershed revitalization goals that are larger than, and beyond the resources of any individual community, agency, or mission. Domestic Policy Council Director Melody Barnes noted, “At a time when every dollar the federal government invests in jumpstarting the economy is critical, we are finding ways to create unprecedented collaboration among the federal agencies, invest American's tax dollars more wisely and efficiently, and act as better partners with local communities.”

“We can deliver solutions to help urban communities enjoy and prosper from healthy waters through collaboration with other agencies and the communities we collectively serve,” said Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, one of the initiative's 11 federal partners. “The Department of the Army for Civil Works is committed to the vision, mission, and principles of this partnership. We are ready to assist in securing more vibrant and sustainable urban waters.”