

URBAN WATERS

Strategic Framework

This strategic framework outlines the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's approach on how it will achieve EPA's vision to protect and restore America's urban waters and reconnect communities, especially underserved or economically distressed communities, to their urban water environments. This will require new and renewed efforts on the part of the Agency, in concert with our federal partners, to help communities grow in ways that protect public health and the environment, expand economic opportunity, and create and enhance the places where people live. Our efforts to protect our urban water resources, the lifeblood of our communities, are part of EPA's overall efforts to expand the conversation on environmentalism by engaging and empowering communities and partners to advance environmental protection to all Americans. We will work for environmental justice as we move forward to achieve the vision and goal for urban waters and support community efforts to build healthy, sustainable green neighborhoods.

This document outlines an organizing framework for strategically aligning current and future actions taken by: EPA; the many partners already active on urban waters; and new partners who can join in these efforts. This document is not a list of actions but rather outlines an overall philosophy and approach to achieving a vision. As EPA's efforts proceed, this framework -- enhanced in dialogue with partners and stakeholders -- will guide the development of actions and commitments.

Urban Waters Vision

Our combined efforts will restore urban water quality, revitalize our communities and reconnect communities to their urban waterways. This vision advances key elements of President Obama's vision for American's Great Outdoors (AGO), outlined in the AGO Report:

- Connecting Americans to the Great Outdoors
- Conserving and Restoring America's Great Outdoors
- Working Together for America's Great Outdoors

We envision community members having access and opportunity to experience and enjoy their waterways and viewing their urban waters and adjacent lands as intrinsically valuable. Community members will be motivated, informed and engaged with federal, state and local governments, centers of learning, community institutions, businesses and non-profits in order to revitalize their waterways, waterfronts, and adjacent communities. As water issues and other urban priorities become linked, we envision new and previously unlikely partnerships being created to transform previously degraded urban waters and adjacent lands into community assets. Urban waters will no longer be undervalued but will be treasured as centerpieces of urban revival.

Our Goal

Working with a diversity of partners, we seek to help communities restore and protect urban water quality and revitalize adjacent neighborhoods by engaging communities in activities that increase their connection to, understanding of, and stewardship of local urban waterways.

Our Intended Outcomes

Connection to urban waters: Greater access to urban waterfront and greater public participation in waterfront activities, such as recreation, volunteer monitoring, clean-ups, education and leisure.

Understanding of urban waters and their potential: Greater public involvement and awareness of urban waters and their potential for improving public health, economic development, and the quality of life.

Sense of public ownership of urban waters: Greater public benefit from improvement efforts, especially in underserved communities, and consequent increased priority given to the improvement of urban waters.

Protection and restoration of urban waters: Acceleration of the measurable improvements to urban water quality.

Community revitalization: Promote equitable community improvements that capitalize on the social and economic benefits derived from improved urban waters and adjacent lands.

We will achieve these outcomes by:

1. Aligning EPA and federal government programs and investments in these communities,
2. Expanding partnerships,
3. Building local capacity, and
4. Finding innovative ways to communicate the environmental and economic development potential of safe and clean urban waters.

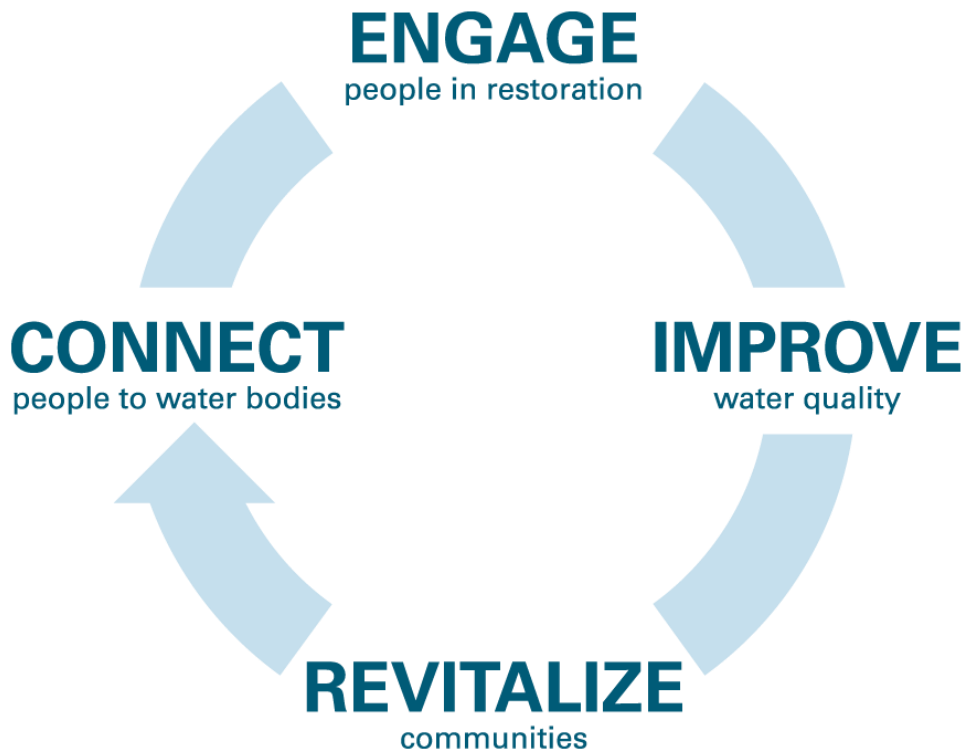
Expanding the Conversation on Urban Waters

We will engage diverse sectors, people, and communities that impact or are impacted by our work. This fullness of engagement is essential for communities to drive and own their local urban water efforts. We recognize that our regulatory efforts, technical assistance and partnerships are most effective when they are informed by community experience and expertise. Accordingly, we will work with communities and not act for them. We will seek out those who are particularly vulnerable to adverse impacts; those who have historically been underserved and under-represented in decision-making; and those we have not engaged in the past. These efforts will foster an enhanced stewardship which is grounded in community priorities and allow a broader range of people to enjoy the benefits of urban waters.

To accomplish this goal, we understand that we must more effectively allocate resources for engagement. Stakeholder engagement must occur at multiple stages of our efforts. We must use new and traditional methods, two-way conversations and appreciative listening to create ongoing, open dialogue that is appropriate to a community's unique history and context. By being transparent and accessible, we will build stronger working relationships with communities, thereby strengthening the foundation of our collaborations, now and in the future.

Making an Impact: A Positive Cycle

We will strive to create a “virtuous cycle”, as illustrated below, which connects people to their urban waters, and generates new energy to restoration efforts to improve urban water quality, the integrity of the adjacent land, and the health of urban habitats. Together this will revitalize urban neighborhoods, local businesses, generate jobs, improve public health and public safety, and expand the area’s educational, recreational and social opportunities. This will result in more people reconnecting to these waters, and the cycle begins anew.



The Urban Waters effort is anchored in a simple theory: if we better engage communities in efforts to improve and protect water quality, those efforts will be more powerful. The diagram above illustrates the theory. The explanation begins at the left with the recognition that we must connect people to the potential of their water bodies to get them engaged. It then moves clockwise, noting that if people are better engaged that will help us improve local water quality and if water quality improves that can help revitalize communities. That revitalization will, in turn, help connect people to their water bodies, completing what could become a positive cycle for improving the environment and people’s lives.

Our Approach

EPA's existing efforts to protect and improve urban waters can be significantly enhanced by:

1. Better alignment of EPA programs and resources to assist a broader set of communities; and
2. Engaging communities more actively in protecting these urban waters, especially those communities not engaged today.

Communities will be more engaged if:

1. They view urban waterways and adjacent lands as intrinsically valuable;
2. Efforts to improve these waterways and lands are made more relevant to their everyday lives and priorities; and
3. They have greater resources and capacity (both skills and efficacy) to make an impact.

The federal government can assist communities in building capacity to protect and restore urban waters and adjacent lands by:

1. Partnering with community-based organizations, the private sector, state and local government agencies and collaborating across departments to:
 - A. Deepen government understanding of urban priorities by learning from communities and valuing their expertise
 - B. Align existing programs and goals and so that they advance these community priorities
 - C. Coordinate existing programs for maximum efficiency and impact, and
 - D. Communicate efforts openly and invite ongoing, appreciative dialogue
 - E. Design genuinely mutual partnerships that foster equitable local benefits
2. Offering expertise, technical assistance, resources and innovative ideas and best practices that recognize communities' values and cultural and linguistic needs, and that are informed by communities' expressions of their experiences and priorities
3. Aligning and targeting federal government investments and regulations in ways that respond to community priorities

Our Objectives

To achieve our goal and intended outcomes using the above approach for our urban waters, the following objectives will be achieved. In so doing we will accelerate the Agency's goals for protecting America's waters, cleaning up our communities, expanding the conversation on environmentalism, and working for environmental justice.

Connection to Urban Waters

Objective: Encourage and, when possible, create better and more equitable access to urban waters.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

1. Partner with communities to participate or sponsor national and local events that bring people back to their urban waters.
2. Link EPA and other agencies' land revitalization efforts near urban waters with community plans for improved environmental health, smart growth, and economic development.
3. Facilitate and support local governments to create safe and inviting urban waters environments for the public's benefit.
4. Assist neighborhood schools in activities that promote the utilization of urban waters as an outdoor classroom.

Objective: Partner with community-based organizations, as well as states and tribes, to link existing environmental programs and goals with other urban priorities.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

1. Identify opportunities for communities to benefit from existing federal programs by partnering with community-based organizations.
2. Assist community organizations to develop comprehensive, integrated approaches to address urban waters problems and link them to area-wide watershed restoration and planning efforts.
3. Provide funding opportunities, within existing budgets and possibly new budget initiatives, to leverage local funds.
4. Engage tribal, state, and local governments in active dialogue to advance the initiative's goals.
5. Sponsor or convene national and regional Urban Waters Partnership events to promote the initiative, provide assistance, and/or demonstrate how existing regulatory and non-regulatory programs and approaches can help communities achieve their goals for urban waters and adjacent lands.
6. Working with our federal partners, provide easy public access to information, such as case studies of on-the-ground projects, example code/ordinances, green city planning, economic benefits, and job opportunities associated with community revitalization with urban waters as their centerpiece.

Understanding of Urban Waters

Objective: Create better awareness of the potential of urban waters to enhance the quality of urban life, drive economic growth, and improve public health.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

1. Develop a “learning-to-earning path” related to water that includes service learning in schools, job training, and creating green jobs.
2. Connect with and support watershed and greenway groups to identify and create new opportunities for communities to learn about current urban waters conditions and what other communities are doing to restore and revitalize them.
3. Partner with trade organizations to promote Urban Waters initiative outreach and encourage training and careers in environmental sciences and engineering, water and wastewater sectors, landscape architecture, hazardous waste clean up and other related occupations.
4. Promote the use of existing federally-funded urban waters-related educational materials in our schools.

Sense of Ownership of Urban Waters

Objective: Provide expertise, technical assistance, resources and innovative ideas, and best practices to help communities build the capacity they need to protect and restore urban waters.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

1. Educate and assist communities on methods and practices to protect sources of drinking water and to practice water conservation.
2. Develop and provide tools to help guide urban and upstream community participation in projects.
3. Improve information exchange and access to environmental information for our communities, especially underserved communities and neighborhood schools.
4. Educate communities about available tools and resources that can be used to improve the condition of urban waters and their surroundings, e.g., wetlands restoration, Brownfields redevelopment, and trash collection campaigns.
5. Use EPA Internet-based tools and published materials, such as the Watershed Academy, to offer training opportunities to communities on topics related to the goals of the initiative, such as monitoring, data assessment, watershed planning, pollution control and prevention, and collaborative decision-making.

Restoration and Protection of Urban Waters

Objective: Align and target EPA, federal, state, and tribal government investments and regulatory programs to help communities better protect and restore urban waters.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

1. Assist communities to identify existing state and federal funding sources that would help them characterize urban water conditions and fund projects to protect and restore these waters and clean up adjacent lands
2. Focus Clean Water Act compliance outreach, enforcement attention and resources on urban areas, particularly underserved areas, including Supplemental Environmental Agreements, and target enforcement to the most serious contributors to water quality problems in urban areas.
3. Identify barriers and solutions to federal coordination and develop a comprehensive and integrated federal strategy to align and target resources and programs to protect and restore urban waters and adjacent lands, reconnect populations with them, and promote uses consistent with and supportive of urban waters objectives.
4. Ensure that those responsible for maintaining municipal infrastructure are in, or on a path to compliance with Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act requirements, including pretreatment programs.
5. Improve stormwater permits and guidance and target enforcement actions to address stormwater runoff issues in urban areas more effectively, such as promoting green infrastructure practices like infiltration and water reuse in urban environments.

Community Revitalization

Objective: Promote equitable community improvements that capitalize on the social and economic benefits derived from improved urban waters and adjacent lands.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

1. Work within EPA and with federal partners to increase utilization of existing programs, or develop new funding incentives, to help communities better protect urban waters, cleanup hazardous waste sites, and plan and carry out projects and revitalize communities.
2. Encourage and enable the implementation of green infrastructure, low impact development and Smart Growth approaches near urban waters, through permits, enforcement and revitalization projects such as Superfund & Brownfields redevelopment
3. Co-sponsor multi-agency grants workshops in underserved communities to sustain or assist in achieving the goal of the Initiative, especially community revitalization, water quality restoration and protection efforts.

4. Identify programmatic changes needed to support federal funding of activities related to the goals of the initiative.
5. Develop partnerships with the private sector, e.g., developers, home builders, architecture and engineering firms, general contractors, to advance the goals of the initiative.
6. Promote the inclusion of the restoration of urban waters and water conveyances to their natural hydrology into community planning efforts.

Implementation and Evaluation

The objectives in the Framework will be achieved through the implementation of the Headquarters and Regional actions to be captured in an Urban Waters Action Plan. Progress in implementing these actions will be tracked on a periodic basis in order to assess what is working and not working. This will help identify opportunities for spreading effective practices and opportunities to make course corrections based on learning. Many of the actions in the Plan contribute to the strategic and programmatic commitments of the National Water Program. These actions will also accelerate the Agency's goals for cleaning up our communities, expanding the conversation on environmentalism, and working for environmental justice.

Although it is difficult to demonstrate a clear connection between the actions in the Plan and the outcomes associated with the water program's national commitments, the successful implementation of the Headquarters and Regional actions will assist the program in meeting its national water quality goals. The National Water Program commitments or measures most directly associated actions in the Urban Waters Action Plan include the following:

SP-10 Number of waterbodies identified in 2002 as not attaining water quality standards where standards are now fully attained. (cumulative)

SP-11 Remove the specific causes of waterbody impairment identified by states in 2002. (cumulative)

SP-12 Improve water quality conditions in impaired watersheds nationwide using the watershed approach. (cumulative)

WQ-8a Number, and national percent, of TMDLs that are established or approved by EPA [Total TMDLs] on a schedule consistent with national policy.

WQ-10 Number of waterbodies identified by States (in 1998/2000 or subsequent years) as being primarily nonpoint source (NPS)-impaired that are partially or fully restored. (cumulative)

WQ-13a Number, and national percent, of facilities covered under either an individual or general MS-4 permit.

WQ-21 Number of water segments identified as impaired in 2002 for which States and EPA agree that initial restoration planning is complete (i.e., EPA has approved all needed TMDLs for pollutants causing impairments to the waterbody or has approved a 303(d) list that recognizes that the waterbody is covered by a Watershed Plan i.e., Category 4b or Category 5m). (cumulative)

URBAN WATERS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: AT-A-GLANCE

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	VISION
<p>1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have events to bring populations to urban waters 2. Link land revitalization efforts with community plans 3. Facilitate creation of safe, inviting urban water environments 4. Help schools use urban waters as outdoor classrooms 	<p>Encourage and, when possible, create better and more equitable access to urban waters.</p>		
<p>2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify opportunities for communities to partner 2. Help community organizations address urban water issues 3. Provide funding opportunities 4. Engage tribal, state, and local governments 5. Sponsor Urban Water Partnership events 6. Provide access to information 	<p>Partner with community-based organizations, as well as states and tribes, to link existing environmental programs and goals with other urban priorities.</p>	<p><i>Connection to Urban Waters</i></p>	
<p>3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a water-related "learning-to-earning path" 2. Help groups create opportunities to learn about urban waters 3. Partner with trade organizations 4. Promote use of urban waters-related educational materials 	<p>Create better awareness of the potential of urban waters to enhance the quality of urban life, drive economic growth, and improve public health.</p>	<p><i>Understanding of Urban Waters</i></p>	
<p>4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educate communities on how to protect drinking water 2. Help guide community participation in projects 3. Improve exchange and access to environmental information 4. Educate about tools to improve water conditions 5. Use EPA tools to develop training opportunities 	<p>Provide expertise, technical assistance, resources and innovative ideas, and best practices to help communities build the capacity they need to protect and restore urban waters.</p>	<p><i>Sense of Ownership of Urban Waters</i></p>	
<p>5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify funding sources and fund projects 2. Focus CWA compliance on urban areas 3. Develop a federal strategy 4. Ensure compliance with regulatory requirements 5. Address stormwater permits, guidance, and enforcement 	<p>Align and target EPA, federal, state, and tribal government investments and regulatory programs to help communities better protect and restore urban waters.</p>	<p><i>Restoration and Protection of Urban Waters</i></p>	
<p>6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support use of existing programs or new funding incentives 2. Enable green infrastructure and Smart Growth 3. Co-sponsor multi-agency grants workshops 4. Identify programmatic changes needed for federal funding 5. Develop partnerships with the private sector 6. Promote urban waters in community planning efforts 	<p>Promote equitable community improvements that capitalize on the social and economic benefits derived from improved urban waters and adjacent lands.</p>	<p><i>Community Revitalization</i></p>	<p>Communities have equitable access and opportunity to experience and enjoy their waterways. Communities view their urban waters and adjacent lands as intrinsically valuable. Community members are motivated, informed and engaging with a broad range of government, non-profit and private sector partners to transform previously degraded urban waters and adjacent lands into community assets. Urban waters are no longer undervalued, but treasured as centerpieces of urban revival</p>