



NEW JERSEY DEP, COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE IN CAMDEN, NJ AND LINKS TO THE URBAN WATERS PARTNERSHIP

Location: Urban Waters and the Greater Philadelphia Area/Delaware River Watershed (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware)


Project Date: 2013 - Present

Overview

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), along with the city of Camden, Cooper's Ferry Partnership, Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA), and USEPA, formed the Camden Collaborative Initiative (CCI) in 2013. [NOTE: The Camden Collaborative Initiative is nationally recognized for its innovative partnership and was the winner of the USEPA Environmental Champion Award for effective public-private partnership in 2016]. With similar objectives including the health of the Delaware River and its urban communities, the CCI partners linked up with the Delaware River Urban Waters Partnership efforts in 2014 and this collaboration has continued to the present. Because the Camden Collaborative effort and the Urban Waters Partnership have similar goals and philosophy, the linkage was seamless, and great synergies between the groups were formed. While the State agency was a driving force to work alongside many local stakeholders, the Urban Waters Partnership added additional support from public and private entities outside New Jersey such as from the City of Philadelphia, the federal National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, US Department of Agriculture and USEPA Region 3.

Background: Urban Waters and the Greater Philadelphia Area/Delaware River Watershed (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware)

The Greater Philadelphia Area/Delaware River Watershed Urban Waters Federal Partnership encompasses several major urban areas, including Philadelphia, PA, Wilmington, DE, Camden, NJ and Chester, PA, as well as the surrounding suburban and rural landscape. The area along the Delaware River has historically experienced a significant loss of economic benefits and environmental services provided by the river. The Partnership is working to address these challenges, and includes more than 400 federal, state, and municipal agencies, community



organizations, non-profits, regional academic institutions, and private and business entities. The Partnership established Communities of Practice around each of its five focus areas (Water Quality and Quantity, River Protection and Restoration, Climate Resilience, Brownfields Revitalization, and Trails, Parks, and Open Spaces) so that partner members can collaborate effectively around common areas of work, concern, and impact. Through monthly federal team meetings, annual all-partners meetings and Communities of Practice, the Partnership has had great success, including a Canoemobile project in 4 cities, the reclamation of several Delaware River waterfront brownfields sites (e.g., Phoenix Park, Harrison Ave Landfill), green infrastructure projects, riparian waterway improvements, and many other local projects funded through grant awards. Looking to the future, the Partnership plans to focus efforts on source water protection plans, a self-generated Canoemobile, urban and community gardens, increasing access to the waterfront, restoration of the urban riverfronts, supporting the revitalization efforts of the urban communities along the river, and expanding the reach of the Philadelphia Zoo's ecological and educational programming.


The NJDEP and the Camden Collaborative Initiative

As noted above, the NJDEP and its other core partners like USEPA Region 2, established the CCI in 2013. As the CCI developed and the Urban Waters Partnership was established, the NJDEP was essential in connecting the two collaboratives initiatives together. Through various meetings among the key stakeholders in each collaborative effort, new linkages were created, new project partners were established and best management practices between the four UWFP cities were shared.

The Camden Collaborative Initiative (CCI) was forged in 2013 to strengthen the efforts of partners addressing environmental quality and improving strategies for the residents of the city of Camden. A large portion of their work concerns the access to and health of the Delaware River, and its ability to act as a critical resource for both the urban communities and vulnerable habitats that rely on it. Importantly, this partnership has pooled the networks, know-how, and cooperation of some of Camden's leading stewards: Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority, the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, and the Cooper's Ferry Partnership. In concert with the City, EPA Region 2 and EPA Region 3, this collaboration among municipal, state, federal, and not-for-profit stakeholders has been pivotal to the progress of urban water quality, repair, and access along the Delaware.

Symbiosis with the Urban Waters Partnership

With Brownfields as one of the primary focus areas for CCI efforts, they have also been an ideal (and very gracious!) host to the related communities of practice within the UWFP. This has allowed us to spotlight the immense progress being made in Camden thanks to the work of this anchoring partnership. The cities of Wilmington, DE and Chester, PA especially benefited from the relationship with Camden's stakeholders in better understanding the challenges and opportunities presented by brownfield sites in their communities. Wilmington and Chester learned invaluable lessons from the Camden projects, including how to revision their brownfield sites, obtain funding and technical support and establish effective partnerships.





Collaboration between the CCI and the Urban Waters Partnership took shape through various projects:

- Remediation and redevelopment of a brownfield site into Phoenix Park along the waterfront and design of a living resilient shoreline at the park and the adjacent Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority plant,
- Remediation and restoration of the former the Harrison Avenue Landfill to establish the Kroc Community Center. The balance 61-acres of the landfill is being remediated to form the Cramer Hill Waterfront Park along the Delaware River, and will include a Living Shoreline Project, waterfront access and waterfront recreation.
- Helping to direct collaboration with local schools and environmental specialists to help hundreds of kids explore the Delaware River during the annual Canoemobile event.

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