

2026 WORK PLAN

Urban Waters Federal Partnership Delaware River Location

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Location: Delaware Estuary

Point of Contact: Eve Quinones, Urban Waters Ambassador, Partnership for the Delaware Estuary,
Equinones@delawareestuary.org



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I. Background

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) is an effort seeking to “revitalize urban waters and the communities that surround them, transforming overlooked assets into treasured centerpieces and drivers of urban revival.” The partnership exists to restore and reconnect urban communities with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and partners. It is based out of the U.S. EPA in agreement with 15 other federal agencies to align federal programs and investments in urban communities, expand partnerships, build local capacity, and improve the environmental and economic potential of safe and clean urban waters.

The Delaware River Location is one of twenty-one UWFP Locations throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. The Delaware River is the longest un-dammed river in the United States east of the Mississippi and is a drinking water source for over 15 million people (roughly 5% of the nation’s population). The Delaware River Location is unique because it includes a highly urbanized and industrialized river that spans several cities and three states in the Delaware Estuary—the tidal portion of the Delaware River Basin—spanning from Trenton, NJ to the Delaware Bay.



IMAGE 1: THE DELAWARE ESTUARY, SPANNING ACROSS NEW JERSEY, PENNSYLVANIA, AND DELAWARE

The four cities that comprise the focus area of this location are:

- Camden, New Jersey, population 71,749
- Chester, Pennsylvania, population 34,052
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, population 1.574 million
- Wilmington, Delaware, population 73,176



IMAGE 2: THE DELAWARE RIVERFRONT IN CAMDEN, NJ. TAKEN AT RCA PIER AFTER THE 2025 DELAWARE RIVERFEST (CREDIT: EVE QUINONES)

Historically, the Delaware River has been a key social, ecological, and economic resource for the Mid-Atlantic region. The Delaware River or “Lenape Wihittuck” is the ancestral home of the Lenape Native American tribes for at least 10,000 years and provided shad and shellfish as major food sources. Post colonization, Greater Philadelphia became a major industrial area, using the river and land to create commercial wealth. Today, the Lower Delaware River remains one of the largest port areas in the world, although much of the industry has been abandoned, leaving communities disconnected from this important waterway and with legacy pollutants and infrastructure challenges. Due to the large geographic extent and complicated set of environmental and social issues at hand, restoration requires a large-scale focus while advancing small-scale on-the-ground project and programming implementation.

The UWFP Delaware River Location also aligns with the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan of the Delaware Estuary Program, one of 28 congressionally designated

National Estuary Programs. Both the Delaware Estuary Program and the Delaware River UWFP location are hosted by the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary.

This work plan has been developed by partners working in tandem for the Delaware River Location as part of the UWFP. It is intended to detail key partners, define goals, summarize priority projects, and specify milestones.

II. Workgroup Partners

The following list consists of agencies and organizations that are active members of the UWFP Delaware River Location's monthly workgroup. This list is subject to change, and the workgroup hopes to involve more of the federal agencies that are represented in the UWFP but not yet active in this Location.

Federal Agency Partners

- Department of Agriculture
 - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
 - Department of Defense
 - United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- Department of Homeland Security
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Department of Interior
 - Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
 - National Park Service (NPS)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Inter-State Agency Partners

- Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC)

State Agency Partners

- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP)

Non-governmental Organizations

- The Nature Conservancy
- Partnership for the Delaware Estuary (PDE)
- Green Building United

Academia Partners

- Delaware Sea Grant at the University of Delaware
- Pennsylvania Sea Grant at Penn State University
- Environmental Finance Center at University of Maryland

III. Community Partners

The following list consists of local community organizations that are at the forefront of leading environmental community improvement projects in their respective cities. The list is currently comprised of organizations that have received past funding or letters of support, as well as organizations that the workgroup hopes to involve as part of a community cohort. This list is subject to fluctuation and may also overlap with the workgroup partners.

<p>Camden, NJ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center for Aquatic Sciences • Center for Environmental Transformation • Neighborhood Collaborative Community Gardens • Delaware Riverkeeper Network • Camden Lutheran Housing, Inc. 	<p>Chester, PA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chester Ridley Crum Watershed Association • City of Chester and Shade Tree Commission • 9th Street Youth & Community Center • Delaware County Riverfront Alliance • DELCORA • Chester Economic Development Authority
<p>Philadelphia, PA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awbury Arboretum • Bartram’s Gardens • Nicetown-Tioga Improvement Team • Philly Thrive • Riverfront North Partnership 	<p>Wilmington, DE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delaware Nature Society • West Side Grows • Cornerstone West CDC • Healthy Communities Delaware • Green Building United



IMAGE 3: MICHELLE JACKSON (RIGHT), DELCORA’S COMMUNITY AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR, ASSISTING DURING A HOMEGROWN HABITAT WORKSHOP AT RUTH BENNETT COMMUNITY FARM IN CHESTER, PA. (CREDIT: KATE LAYTON)

IV. Overall Goals

The Delaware River Location, which covers the Delaware Estuary watershed (~6,800 square miles) and includes 4 major cities, through collaborative efforts with residents and organizations, is dedicated to revitalizing urban waters and the surrounding neighborhoods by fostering a renewed connection between urban communities and their waterways.

The following collaborative priorities for the urban Delaware River Location will be addressed through environmental, socioeconomic and resiliency lenses.

1. ***Clean Waters and Healthy Habitats***
 - a. Reduce flooding through stormwater management and resiliency to recurring extreme weather events
 - b. Conserve natural areas and restore lost habitat
 - c. Improve water quality in the tributaries and main stem of the Delaware River
 - d. Revitalize brownfield sites into vibrant community spaces
2. ***Healthy, Resilient, and Accessible Communities***
 - a. Build local capacity by training, providing financial support, and empowering communities to become leaders of environmental stewardship
 - b. Enhance and create public green space and waterfront access
 - c. Increase outdoor recreation
 - d. Engage communities
 - e. Equip communities to be resilient to recurring extreme weather events
 - f. Promote sustainable development
 - g. Support sustainable urban agriculture



IMAGE 4: SENIORS PARTICIPATING IN A NATIVE PLANT WORKSHOP HOSTED BY THE PARTNERSHIP FOR THE DELAWARE ESTUARY AND NEW JERSEY AMERICAN WATER AT THE SALVATION ARMY CAMDEN KROC CENTER IN CAMDEN, NJ. (CREDIT: ZACH MOORE)

V. Delaware River Location 2026 Initiatives

Initiative 1: Fund and Support Restoration and Revitalization Projects

There are many local organizations and community leaders throughout the Delaware River Location doing on-the-ground restoration projects. We aim to support these projects both financially and technically, specifically those that restore habitat and improve quality of life in communities vulnerable to recurring extreme weather events and socioeconomic challenges.

Activities

1. Continue and refine the Collaborative Community Project program to distribute collaborative funds to local community groups doing restoration, stewardship, and engagement work that aligns with our overall goals and objectives.
 - a. Continue to support at least 18 local, community restoration projects across all 4 location cities.
 - b. Continue to work to secure additional funding to support more projects.
2. Connect community members with technical assistance and resources from UWFP workgroup partners.
 - a. Share webinars and funding opportunities from federal partners.
 - b. Plan and hold an Urban Waters Community Forum.
3. Write letters of support for community groups' projects that support UWFP goals.
 - a. Write at least 3 letters of support.



IMAGE 5: VOLUNTEERS FROM FAIRMOUNT PARK CONSERVANCY'S LOVE YOUR PARK NETWORK, FATHER JUDGE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL, AND HDR CAME TOGETHER TO PLANT POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY PERENNIALS IN THE SOUTHERN FOREST AT PENNYPACK ON THE DELAWARE IN PHILADELPHIA, PA. THIS COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY EFFORT ALSO INTRODUCED A NEW KIOSK THAT WILL SHARE SEASONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE DELAWARE WATERSHED AND HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE PLANTS IN SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY. (CREDIT: RIVERFRONT NORTH PARTNERSHIP)

Expected Outcomes

1. More accessible funding to community members to do on-the-ground projects in their communities.
2. Improved urban habitat, water quality, and community stewardship of green spaces.
3. Community members have greater capacity to successfully write and manage grants.

Initiative 2: Build Relationships & Access to Resources

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership at its core is about working collaboratively across federal agencies to improve our Nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits. In the Delaware River Location, it is important to maintain and increase partnerships that will ultimately reduce barriers between federal agencies and local communities as well as connect local community leaders for a more cohesive urban corridor that works synergistically across city and state boundaries.

Activities

1. Identify and invite additional relevant governmental (federal, state and local) agencies to the Location's workgroup.
 - a. Engage one representative from each of the four cities, two additional federal partners into the workgroup, and one representative from the department of environmental protection of each of the three states.
2. Host a regional Urban Waters Community Forum, in collaboration with both community members and government partners.
3. Continue forming a cohort of local community leaders that meet regularly.
 - a. Recruit a cohort of 15-25 inter-city community leaders.
 - b. Support up to 3 events for community cohort members including networking opportunities, field trips, stewardship events, and workshops.
4. Promote UWFP activities to the public and community leaders.
 - a. Share stories through news and social media.
 - b. Maintain and grow distribution list of stakeholders to share relevant funding, events, news, and tools.
5. Identify potential new collaborative projects with UWFP partners.
6. Create an end-of-year report showing workgroup member accomplishments that relate to the overall goals and objectives of the UWFP Delaware River Location.
7. Conduct an Artist in Residence (AiR) Program as a tool for community engagement, environmental storytelling, and connection to urban waterways.

Expected Outcomes

1. Federal partners are engaged and create cross-agency synergies.
2. Community leaders are empowered and more easily able to do local community improvement work in their own communities.
3. Community members and government partners have improved relationships and connectivity.

4. Community members gain improved access to essential resources, including educational programs, green infrastructure, revitalized recreational spaces, and economic opportunities.
5. Increased public awareness and connection to urban waterways through art.
6. Enhanced visibility of local environmental issues and community-led solutions.



IMAGE 6: YOUNG VOLUNTEERS, UNITED BY GREEN BUILDING UNITED FOR A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY PROJECT IN WILMINGTON, DE, PROUDLY DISPLAY SIGNS MARKING THE NATIVE PLANTS THEY HELPED INSTALL AT CONSCIOUS CONNECTIONS IN THE NORTHEAST NEIGHBORHOOD. AN INCREDIBLE TURNOUT OF 40 VOLUNTEERS MADE THIS EFFORT POSSIBLE! (CREDIT: GREEN BUILDING UNITED)