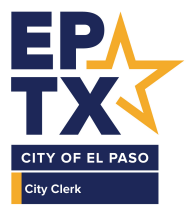


**CITY OF EL PASO, TEXAS
AGENDA ITEM
AGENDA SUMMARY FORM**



DEPARTMENT:

AGENDA DATE:

CONTACT PERSON NAME

PHONE NUMBER:

2nd CONTACT PERSON

PHONE NUMBER:

3rd CONTACT PERSON

PHONE NUMBER:

DISTRICT(S) AFFECTED:

STRATEGIC GOAL:

SUBGOAL:

SUBJECT:

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH:

REPORTING OF CONTRIBUTION OR DONATION TO CITY COUNCIL:

NAME	AMOUNT (\$)	DATE

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION:

PRIOR COUNCIL ACTION:

AMOUNT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

*****REQUIRED AUTHORIZATION*****



ABOVE: Baltimore's vacant properties are being transformed through the use of green redevelopment strategies and tree plantings.

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) seeks to reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways to become stewards for clean urban waters. Through the Partnership, communities gain economic, environmental, and social benefits, and collaborate with Federal agencies, state and local agencies, and community-led efforts to achieve common goals.

The UWFP designated 19 locations between 2011 to 2014. The 19 geographically dispersed locations are working to revitalize urban waterways and the communities that surround them, transforming overlooked watersheds into community assets.

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership: Connecting Communities to their Urban Waterways

The UWFP is supported by 14 Federal agencies and more than 28 non-governmental organization (NGO) partners working in 19 designated locations. Examples of Partnership Accomplishments are highlighted below.

UWFP Accomplishments

Toxics Cleanup in a New Jersey Watershed

The Lower Passaic River was severely impacted by the early 1900s Industrial Revolution and still contains contaminants, such as mercury and dioxins. Due to the polluted conditions and industry along the riverfront, local underserved communities have been denied river access.

To address this, the U.S. EPA Superfund Program and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are leading toxic sediment cleanups, improving the health of the Passaic River, reducing human and wildlife exposure to toxic hazards, and creating opportunities for habitat restoration. Other locally driven improvements include Newark's rebuilt Riverfront Park, which is the site of new community-based recreational programs and events. In addition, the UWFP is supporting future plans that include parks and new habitats for fish and wildlife.

Restoring Rapids in Michigan

Efforts to restore and recreate the namesake rapids to downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan will improve habitats for fish, including the threatened lake sturgeon, which is spiritually important to Native American tribes. New recreational activities will increase revenue at local businesses in Grand Rapids. Expanded recreational use of the river is estimated to add \$15.9 - \$19.1 million per year and 1,520 new jobs to the local economy.



ABOVE: The Lower Passaic River has become the site of new community-based recreational programs and events, and has attracted local residents to kayak on the river.

Redeveloping Vacant Lands in Maryland

Led by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, approximately 60 partners are working to redevelop Baltimore's vacant lands and clean the Patapsco watershed. The Patapsco watershed flows to the Baltimore City Harbor and into the Chesapeake Bay. Baltimore's 30,000 vacant properties pose economic, public health, and environmental problems. Location partners are adopting green redevelopment strategies to reduce polluted stormwater from those lots.

Partnering with Tribes for an Urban Wildlife Refuge

The Middle Rio Grande watershed, in New Mexico, is situated between several tribes, including the Isleta Pueblo to the south of Albuquerque, and the Sandia Pueblo and other tribes to the north. There are a number of underserved communities where residents face high levels of unemployment and poverty. The Middle Rio Grande faces numerous challenges because long-term drought is affecting ecosystems and communities along the river.

Through the UWFP, partners are cleaning up and restoring the ecosystem, redeveloping the Bridge Boulevard corridor, and supporting education through citizen science projects. Partners created the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, the first urban wildlife refuge in the Southwest. Nine Federal agencies, which are led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. EPA, are working with state and tribal agencies to implement these projects.

Guiding Principles of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

- **Promote clean urban waters** - The Partnership enhances the value of urban waters, recognizing their importance for the environment, public health, natural beauty, and economic and recreational potential. The Partnership seeks to also protect, manage, and restore the lands that surround those waters.
- **Reconnect people to their waterways** - Urban communities need access to their waterways to draw on commercial, recreational, and educational benefits. Reconnecting underserved communities to their waterways fosters economic growth and improvements in residents' well-being.
- **Encourage water conservation** - The Partnership strives to promote sustainability of water resources. New educational and conservation programs geared toward urban communities inspire such efforts to improve infrastructure and conserve local water resources.
- **Use urban water systems as a way to promote economic revitalization and prosperity** - Access to healthy urban waters enhances economic competitiveness by revitalizing local businesses and creating jobs. Efforts are especially focused on communities disproportionately impacted by pollution or economic burdens.
- **Encourage community improvements through active partnerships** - Strong partnerships at the Federal, state, and local levels, and with tribes, integrate services needed for community revitalization. Federal partners are removing barriers to collaboration and increasing the effectiveness of their actions.
- **Listen to communities in order to engage them** - The Partnership seeks to understand community values and to see environmental issues through their eyes. The Partnership works with underserved populations from the bottom up, rather than taking a top-down approach.
- **Focus on measuring results and evaluation to fuel future success** - Finding ways to measure success allows the Partnership to better invest resources at the local and Federal level. The Partnership is committed to monitoring progress to respond quickly when change is needed.

Middle Rio Grande/Albuquerque Urban Waters Partnership Quarterly Project Report

Project Reporting Period: October-December 2024

February 15th 2025

For additional information or questions about this report, please contact:

Annie Montes

Urban Waters Ambassador, Middle Rio Grande/Albuquerque

Ciudad Soil & Water Conservation District

annie@ciudadswcd.org

Laurel Ladwig

Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge

laurel@friendsofvalledeoro.org

Urban Waters Workplan Overview

During the project reporting period, the Middle Rio Grande/Albuquerque (MRG) Urban Waters (UW) Federal Partnership made significant progress toward the goals outlined in the [2024-2029 Work Plan](#). The national Urban Waters Partnership program is guided by the vision of restoring urban water quality, revitalizing communities, and reconnecting people to their urban waterways, with a particular focus on overburdened or economically distressed areas.

The MRG UW Partnership operates under four primary goals: (1) investing in healthy watersheds, (2) engaging in education and outreach, (3) facilitating economic revitalization and prosperity, and (4) fostering active collaboration and true partnership. For the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the Partnership is prioritizing efforts to enhance its sustainability, expand Steering Committee participation, and continue advancing its core goals. Additional objectives include refining the format of quarterly partnership meetings, exploring methods for tracking collective outcomes, and implementing the Artist in Residence Program.

A summary of progress toward these goals is provided below.

Urban Waters Projects

Middle Rio Grande Urban Waters Success Story

A major success for the MRG UW Program was securing a local home for long-term sustainability. One of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership's initiatives is to ensure that the program remains locally invested and community-driven. Previously, the Urban Waters Ambassador role was structured as an internship, limiting the ability to advance projects and build lasting partnerships. Now, with Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District stepping in to host the program, MRG Urban Waters has a permanent, full-time presence. This transition has already led to increased partnerships and expanded project opportunities, strengthening local engagement and ensuring that Urban Waters efforts continue to thrive in the watershed.

Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge Backyard Refuge Program

During the project reporting period, the Backyard Refuge Program (ByRP) established a Steering Committee, which held its inaugural meeting. Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District (Ciudad SWCD) joined as a core committee member, further strengthening the

program's leadership and support. Additionally, Urban Waters Ambassador Annie Montes joined both the Project and Fundraising subcommittees, contributing to the program's strategic growth. By the end of December, the ByRP had certified 454 backyard refuges, covering a total of 151.96 acres. To maintain program momentum, Ms. Montes drafted, finalized, and signed a Professional Services Agreement between Laurel Ladwig and Ciudad SWCD, ensuring continued progress.

During the reporting period, the program also conducted five outreach events, engaging a total of 65 participants in habitat restoration, environmental education, and conservation efforts.

Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge Development Committee

Between October and December 2024, the Friends Development Committee was reestablished to support development initiatives at Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The committee's goals include raising funds for habitat restoration, advocating for a bus line extension to improve access to the refuge, and supporting the Backyard Refuge Program (ByRP).

In December, the committee began preparing an application for the [2025 Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program](#). Additionally, a strategic plan was drafted to guide the committee's efforts, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was drafted between Ciudad SWCD and Friends of Valle de Oro to formalize their partnership.

Committee representation and outreach efforts included participation in the Valle de Oro NWR Quarterly Community Update Night on November 21st and active involvement in the Friends Fundraiser on December 12th, where partner organizations were engaged to support fundraising and awareness efforts.

Artist in Residence Program

Significant progress was made on the Artist in Residence (AiR) program during the reporting period. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was drafted and officially launched on December 2nd, with the application period closing on December 31st. To ensure broad outreach, the program's informational flyer was updated—including a Spanish version—and distributed through the partnership's network and the biweekly Urban Waters Newsletter.

The MRG UW Partnership also continued efforts to amend the agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ciudad SWCD to support the program. With guidance from the Advisory Committee, a rubric was developed to evaluate artist submissions, ensuring a structured and equitable selection process. Additionally, a pre-proposal conference was held on December 17th, providing potential applicants with an opportunity to learn more about the program and ask questions.

Tijeras Creek Watershed Restoration Project

The Tijeras Creek Watershed Restoration Project (TCWRP) is a key initiative supporting the MRG UW Partnership's goal of investing in healthy watersheds. Construction is scheduled to resume in January 2025, with completion anticipated by May 2025. Following construction, revegetation and native plant seeding will take place in January 2026, led by Rio Grande Return, to enhance habitat quality and ecosystem resilience.

Progress during the reporting period included securing Kimo Constructors as the construction contractor in December. Additionally, Ciudad SWCD and project partners requested an

extension for the River Stewards Grant from the New Mexico Environment Department, as revegetation efforts will extend beyond the current funding deadline of June 2025.

Efforts also continued to source root wads and footer logs for streambank stabilization and erosion prevention along Tijeras Creek, ensuring long-term watershed health and sustainability.

Tijeras Creek BioZone Education Center

Further downstream from the TCWRP, the Tijeras Creek BioZone Education Center continues to develop as a hub for community engagement and environmental education. During the reporting period, Ciudad SWCD staff began drafting a monitoring plan to support community-led data collection at the BioZone. The plan includes tracking the phenology of keystone species such as cottonwoods, conducting macroinvertebrate and arthropod surveys, and monitoring precipitation to assess watershed health.

On October 17th, Ciudad SWCD staff participated in a work session with City of Albuquerque Open Space (COAOS) staff to remove kochia, a non-native plant, from the creek bed to improve habitat quality. A major milestone was also achieved in December with the completion of an ADA-certified trail, enhancing accessibility for visitors.



Progress continued on the refurbishment of the Education Building, with meetings held between the project architect, Ciudad SWCD, and COAOS to review renovation plans. Additionally, efforts are underway to secure funding for green stormwater infrastructure (GSI), including a bioswale. Potential funding sources being explored include an application with the [Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance](#) and a [Water Quality and Conservation grant](#).

EMNRD Urban Waters Small Grant Program

The EMNRD Urban Waters Small Grant Program supports local communities, watershed health, and environmental education, aligning with the four primary goals of the MRG UW Partnership. In early October, the evaluation panel reviewed and scored five applications for community forestry projects within the MRG Watershed. As a result, \$42,317.65 was awarded to [Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps](#) (ALCC) to support wildfire risk mitigation in the Pueblo of Sandia bosque.



Throughout the reporting period, purchases and reimbursements for the ALCC project were managed, with final invoices submitted at the end of December. The project was successfully completed in December, contributing to the health of the bosque ecosystem while providing valuable professional development opportunities for youth engaged in conservation work.

Additionally, in late December, the Request for Applications (RFA) for the 2025 grants program was drafted and finalized, with plans to post it in January 2025, ensuring continued investment in community-led watershed initiatives.

Land and Water Summit

The Land and Water Summit remains a valuable platform for fostering collaboration among organizations within the MRG UW Partnership and facilitating knowledge exchange among land managers. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, the summit continues to invest in future partnerships and collective action.

During the reporting period, significant progress was made in planning and logistics. A call-for-posters flyer was created, along with content for a dedicated landing page to streamline poster submissions. Inquiries from potential poster presenters were managed to ensure broad participation. Efforts were also made to enhance accessibility of flyers and related materials to ensure a reach to a wider audience.

In December, Urban Waters and its partners, alongside Ciudad SWCD Board Chair Steve Glass, applied for a \$60,000 EMNRD Community Forestry Assistance Grant. If awarded, these funds will help increase accessibility for the summit by supporting ASL and Spanish interpretation services, student scholarships, and poster printing for student participants. Ongoing work includes finalizing key logistics such as ticketing and organizing the poster session and associated workshop.

Candelaria Nature Preserve

During the reporting period, progress continued at the Candelaria Nature Preserve (CNP). On October 15th, a walkthrough meeting was held to map out the route for a planned tour of the Tree Nursery Tract and the broader CNP site. Additionally, feedback was provided on interpretive signage to enhance visitor engagement and education about the preserve's ecological significance.

Youth Engagement

Advancing the MRG UW Partnership's goal of engaging in education and outreach, several youth-focused activities were conducted during the reporting period. Participation in the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Mentor Mixer provided career guidance to 22 young participants, fostering their interest in conservation and environmental careers.



At the Rio Rancho Children's Water Festival, approximately 200 students learned about the MRG Watershed through hands-on activities using the Rolling River model. Additionally, through the RiverXchange program, stormwater pollution curriculum was delivered using the EPA Enviroscape Model at multiple schools, including North Valley Academy (~20 students), Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary (~80 students), and Puesta del Sol (~50 students). These efforts continue to build

environmental literacy and stewardship among youth in the region.

Urban Waters Partnership Meetings and Steering Committee

Urban Waters Partnership Meetings

On December 10, 2024, the MRG UW Partnership hosted a Walk and Talk event in collaboration with Pueblo of Sandia and Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps. This gathering provided an opportunity for partners to engage directly with the Pueblo's landscape, learn about

ongoing conservation efforts, and discuss ways to strengthen collaboration in watershed restoration and stewardship. The event was a big success, with 34 attendees representing 16 partner organizations.

This Walk and Talk served as a valuable platform for knowledge exchange, relationship-building, and fostering deeper connections between partners and the Pueblo of Sandia community.

Urban Waters Steering Committee

The Urban Waters Steering Committee continued to play a vital role in guiding the MRG UW Partnership. During the reporting period, UW quarterly partnership meetings for 2025 were scheduled, ensuring a structured approach to collaboration and decision-making. In addition to these, the committee maintained regular monthly meetings to discuss ongoing initiatives and strategic priorities.

Efforts to expand committee membership remain a focus, with continued outreach to potential new members. Notably, Raven Zellers, Urban and Community Forestry Specialist with the U.S. Forest Service has expressed interest in joining, further strengthening the committee's expertise and connections.





8/11/2025
El Paso City Council
1 Civic Center Plaza
El Paso, TX 79901

Re: Letter of Support for the Establishment of an Urban Waters Location in El Paso, Texas

Dear Members of the El Paso City Council,

On behalf of Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District (Ciudad SWCD), I am writing in strong support of efforts by U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) staff and local advocates to establish an Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) location in El Paso, Texas.

As the host of the Middle Rio Grande Urban Waters Ambassador in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Ciudad SWCD has seen firsthand the benefits of being part of this national partnership. The Urban Waters Federal Partnership brings together federal agencies, local governments, tribes, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders to revitalize urban waterways and the communities that surround them. Through this collaboration, we work to improve water quality, restore habitat, enhance public access, and invest in communities—particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed.

Becoming an Urban Waters location would position El Paso to access targeted federal support and funding through the EPA's Urban Waters program. Just as importantly, it would create a platform for sustained, cross-sector collaboration to address local water issues and connect residents more deeply with the Rio Grande and other vital water resources in the region.

Ciudad SWCD believes that the Urban Waters model is not just about environmental restoration—it's about building equitable and resilient communities through healthy watersheds, community engagement, economic revitalization, and meaningful partnerships. We are confident that El Paso would be an excellent addition to the national network of Urban Waters locations, and we enthusiastically support this initiative.

Please do not hesitate to reach out at joshua@ciudadswcd.org if we can provide additional information or speak further in support of this effort.

Sincerely,
Joshua O'Halloran,

District Manager
Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District

Sergio Coronado
Precinct 4



El Paso County Commissioner

September 15, 2025

Urban Waters Program

Office of City Representative Josh Acevedo, District 2

RE: Letter of Support for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

Dear City Council:

This letter is in support of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership initiative, that will improve water quality, revitalize communities, and connect residents to their local waterways.

The work proposed aligns closely with the priorities of El Paso County Precinct 4. Since taking office, I have advocated for stormwater and wastewater improvements, park expansion, and quality of life initiatives that strengthen our communities. Efforts that restore and protect waterways directly support these priorities by reducing flooding risks, creating healthier environments, and expanding recreational opportunities for families across the region.

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership is a natural fit for the work already underway in El Paso County, and I strongly support this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sergio Coronado".

El Paso County Commissioner, Precinct 4

915-237-3596

Commissioner4@epcounty.com



**COUNTY OF EL PASO
DAVID C. STOUT
COUNTY COMMISSIONER, PRECINCT TWO**

Sept. 15, 2025

Honorable Mayor and City Council
City of El Paso
300 N. Campbell
El Paso, TX 79902

Re: EPA Urban Waters Federal Partnership / Item 23

Dear Members of the El Paso City Council:

I write in support of developing a regional partnership as contemplated in Item 23, a presentation on the Urban Waters Partnership. This program aims to reconnect urban communities with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies. The Partnership also collaborates with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits.

El Paso is blessed with a river valley and a mountain that together define our community. These natural systems can provide great benefits if we learn to work with them. This program offers another resource through which to do just that.

El Paso County heard a similar presentation in June, and directed staff to work with potential partners, including the city, as we develop the regional Urban Waters concept to share knowledge and implement improved waterways management. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

David C. Stout
County Commissioner
El Paso County, Precinct 2