

Future of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

Call with Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organizations

Meeting Summary
Tuesday, June 21, 2016
2:00 PM-4:00 PM EDT

Conference Call Participants

Speakers:

- Gary Belan, American Rivers & Sustainable Urban Forest Coalition Policy Working Group
- Gwen Griffith, Cumberland River Compact
- Rachel Hansgen, Groundwork Colorado
- Anne-Marie Mitroff, Groundwork USA & Groundwork Hudson Valley
- Brad Buschur, Groundwork Lawrence
- Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
- Greg Lais, Wilderness Inquiry
- Juan Lopez, First Choice Community Health
- Michelle Melendez, First Choice Community Health
- Erik J. Meyers, The Conservation Fund
- Brandon Winn, Sierra Club
- Paulina Lopez, Duwamish River cleanup
- James Rasmussen, Duwamish River cleanup
- Donny Roush, Earth Force
- Diana Toledo, River Network
- Julie Waterman, City Parks Alliance
- Erica Holloman, Southeast CARE Coalition
- Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.

Listeners:

- Robin Parker, EPA Headquarters
- Roy Simon, EPA Headquarters
- Abu Moulta-Ali, EPA Headquarters
- Emily Simonson, EPA Headquarters
- Bradley T. Klamer, New Orleans UWFP
- Charles Allen, New Orleans UWFP
- Jennifer Ousley, EPA Region 7
- Julie Mawhorter, Forest Service
- Mike Galvin, Patapsco River UWFP
- Michael Leff, Delaware River UWFP
- Lisa Pelstring, Department of Interior
- Linda Garczynski, MDB, Inc.
- Betsy Galluzzo, MDB, Inc.

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Agenda Overview/Background for Conference Call

Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.: Mr. Fields explained the purpose for this call. He said it would focus on the future of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) and possible expansion beyond the current [19 designated](#) locations. He explained that the call would be an opportunity to discuss practical ideas for identifying new locations to affiliate with the Partnership. This effort is driven by a need to find a new model to develop and sustain future partnerships and how they will form and function based on current local collaborations. Similar calls have been held with local and state government organizations. He emphasized that it is important to decide where the Partnership will be in the future because resources are increasingly limited. The UWFP is currently unable to provide the same level of financial or staff support to establish new partnerships. New locations will not have the same level of Federal technical assistance or financial support, as compared to the current 19 locations. Therefore, this call is an opportunity to gain input from community based and non-governmental organizations on the best approach to move forward. Several communities and metropolitan areas have expressed an interest in joining the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. The conference call explored questions in the Discussion Guide provided to the participants. Mr. Fields thanked the participants for devoting their time to this call, and reviewed the need to respond to the three questions outlined in this document.

Ground Rules: Mr. Fields explained that after everyone had a chance to respond to the three questions, the call would be opened up for continued dialogue.

Discussion Question 1: Why might a community/metropolitan area choose to “self-affiliate” with the Partnership? What are the benefits of being an affiliate of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership?

Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.: Mr. Fields stated that there are certain benefits already laid out in the Discussion Guide. What other benefits would be helpful to create new partnerships within states?

Diana Toledo, River Network: Ms. Toledo noted that NGOs in locations with partnerships have seen investment from other federal agencies beyond EPA and for an NGO that is an attraction that helps ‘bring others to the table’. Without a formal structure like the partnership, the ‘table’ to explore areas of interest with other agencies, is challenging. She noted that the ‘table’ is a huge benefit and should be maintained, even if under a different structure. She noted that EPA had created a forum, and that without official federal agencies it is difficult to maintain momentum. She concluded noting that NGOs often struggle to initiate that type of dialogue, but having EPA behind them is helpful.

Greg Lais, Wilderness Inquiry: Mr. Lais echoed the first speaker and noted that having EPA support helps bring other federal partners to the table and helps build the legitimacy of the effort and the forum. It is a huge value that should not be overlooked.

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Gary Belan, American Rivers: Mr. Belan noted that the ability to leverage other partnerships with other coalitions, in particular, could be a solution to the resource issue. There are a growing number of efforts that look at integrated water management and urban waters. These other groups can bring the leverage and legitimacy. The UWFP playing some role is important; it can be changed, but they can look for other conveners and to facilitate connection to other partnerships.

Anne-Marie Mitroff, Groundwork USA: Ms. Mitroff noted that the convening power of the UWFP and the ambassador role have been particular strengths of the UWFP. The convening power is important as she has seen it help structure plans among NGOs working on community problems. The benefit of the UWFP as a 'convener' is in not having five different NGOs working on five different efforts. She noted that a coordinated effort like UWFP can help reduce competition locally among NGOs.

Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance: Ms. Jelks noted that the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance has seen the benefits of the UWFP as a local coordinator and sees a role for the UWFP to support community engagement as well. She noted working together increases collaboration; without it, there would be a void.

Erica Holloman, Southeast CARE Coalition: Ms. Holloman stated having the federal agencies at the table allow the voices of the community to be taken more seriously, particularly at the state level. Many activities take place at the state and local level, but the top down support of the 'bottom up' community makes a world of difference.

Gary Belan, American Rivers: Mr. Belan noted that federal involvement provides consistency across locations. He shared a concern that state support and willingness to participate may be inconsistent.

Paulina Lopez and James Rasmussen, Duwamish River cleanup: The Duwamish river team noted that sharing of best practices remains an important element of the UWFP. They shared a story of how federal agencies involved in their project also themselves benefit from involvement. They reminded participants on the call that the UWFP benefits both federal agencies and communities.

Diana Toledo, River Network: Ms. Toledo noted that UWFP has helped her organization push forward initiatives, help replicate good work being done in other parts of the country and allowed them to better share ideas across geography. She noted that it helped bring diversity to her organization (e.g., the River Rally).

Discussion Question 2: What could be the expected commitments of new "self-affiliated" locations?

Julie Waterman, City Parks Alliance: Ms. Waterman noted that locations should be required to designate an organization or individual tasked with establishing collaboration and clearly leading the group. There is a need for one person or organization to oversee and coordinate the activities of others.

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Gary Belan, American Rivers: Mr. Belan noted that new locations should focus of the UW principles. He suggested that new partners be asked to develop their own goals and explain how they will address the principles.

Roy Simon, EPA: Mr. Simon clarified that new locations may receive less individual assistance from Federal Agency staff. Some services, such as the Learning Network, will remain available along with the final Partnership Handbook. There will be an effort to have individual agencies work with communities during the startup process to help answer questions.

Eric Meyers, The Conservation Fund: Mr. Meyers suggested four core elements to a new location: An effective partnership structure that outlines organizers, leaders (from local, state and federal agencies and organizations); a focus on actions that improve water quality, health and communities; an emphasis on underserved communities; and an emphasis on building community and regional stewardship. This could lead to regional or philanthropic organizations developing core criteria and quantifying benefits (e.g., the LEED program).

James Rasmussen, Duwamish River cleanup: Mr. Rasmussen noted that EJ communities need an additional focus and should be an important part of the commitment of future urban waters partnerships. He suggested that all new locations focus on those watersheds that EJ communities are confronting. He also noted the importance of involving a variety of community and EJ organizations in all location actions.

Anne-Marie Mitroff, Groundwork USA: Ms. Mitroff noted that the main commitment made by an affiliate needs to be a clear vision and that is supported by a clear structure for inclusion of EJ communities and measurement of progress. She noted that affiliates may benefit from Federal support initially to convene new projects and bring credibility to a project. After the initial support, they could be on their own after a certain amount of time.

Gwen Griffith, Cumberland River Compact: Ms. Griffith noted that any time there is a partnership, there should be mutual benefit. The benefits for all partners should be included in the goals. This might include a startup phase.

Roy Simon, EPA: Mr. Simon clarified that the 14 agencies are announcing a national work plan for 2016-2018 outlining the future of the UWFP. He noted that in doing so, the agencies are acknowledging the benefits they have seen from current UWFP locations.

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Discussion Question 3: How could new communities/metropolitan areas “self-affiliate” with the Urban Waters Federal Partnership?

Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.: Mr. Fields noted that past conversations have included suggestions for applications to become a UWFP location with a review, self-affiliation, or a hybrid-approach with individuals signing up to be an UWFP and then undergoing review. All locations will have to meet minimum commitments.

Roy Simon, EPA: Roy clarified that in the past, UW locations completed extensive application processes, reviewed by all 14 Federal Agencies.

Michelle Melendez & Juan Lopez, First Choice Community Health: First Choice representatives shared that their participation in the Middle Rio UWFP location was ‘organic’ and the local UWFP was aware of their non-medical activities; it was a natural fit. She noted that her organization did not need to apply to be part of their local Location. She felt that the ‘organic’ process in which her organization joined the local partnership was sufficient.

Donny Roush, Earth Force: Mr. Roush noted that partnerships require coalition building and commitment; therefore, he does not think individual locations should be able to ‘sign up’ without meeting specific requirements.

Diana Toledo, River Network: Ms. Toledo suggested that new partnerships be assessed and controlled so they don’t become just like any other partnership that already exists. She recommended a limited number of new locations be selected to operate under a new framework before expansion. She felt that there could be a five-year review, and a need to designate a number for three years in two rounds.

Erica Holloman, Southeast CARE Coalition: Ms. Holloman suggested a ‘tiered’ system of acceptance that could ‘phase in’ groups in a transparent way. She noted that the first step could be to recognize partnerships, even if not fully developed, who are doing work in Urban Waters. Later ‘tiers’ could include those who meet all UWFP criteria. She encouraged recognition of smaller partnerships as a way to encourage further work in communities.

Erik J. Meyers, The Conservation Fund: Mr. Meyers noted that if resources are coming to locations from non-federal partners, then ‘self-declaration’ of intent was acceptable. He supported the previous suggestions of transparency and requirements to meet the UWFP goals. Building on Ms. Holloman’s suggestion, he noted that if Federal agencies wanted to provide ‘certification’ to groups that are transparent and meet them, they could provide that as well. Groups could declare their intent and then have a ‘two track’ system that allows interested and certified groups to work in their communities.

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Open Dialogue on Future of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

Roy Simon, EPA: Mr. Simon clarified that based on the current understanding of federal agency budgets, they foresee UWFP expansion being financially challenging. He noted that the Federal Agency partners do value the program, and have seen benefits from existing UWFP location work.

Anne-Marie Mitroff, Groundwork USA: Ms. Mitroff suggested that if locations are interested in 'self-affiliating' in a transparent way that addresses the UWFP goals and includes a structure, then there may not be a need to limit the number of applicants. She suggested a letter of intent that outlines the project be submitted. She concluded by noting that limiting affiliations may not be necessary and that 'if they are interested, they will rise to the occasion.'

Brad Buschur, Groundwork Lawrence: Mr. Buschur asked if current locations had recorded the extent to which they have leveraged federal resources.

James Rasmussen, Duwamish River cleanup: Mr. Rasmussen noted the need to measure leveraged resources.

Roy Simon, EPA: Mr. Simon noted that UWFP is beginning a process to collect that information. The initial information may include anecdotes as it is a challenging concept to measure.

Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance: Ms. Jelks noted that the WAWA is starting to attract other resources and to leverage federal resources. They are also starting to measure success.

Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.: Thanked attendees and stated that a summary of the call would be forthcoming. He thanked all NGO/CBO representatives for attending and participating in the call.

- *Next Steps: Urban Waters National Training Workshop – Arlington, VA – 7/26/16-7/28/16; Summary of Follow up Actions from this Call*