

Future of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

Call with State Government Officials and Organizations

Meeting Summary
Monday, June 6, 2016
2:00 PM-4:00 PM EDT

Conference Call Participants

Speakers:

- Julia Anastasio, Association of Clean Water Administrators (ACWA), Executive Director
- Hannah Ruback, Association of Clean Water Administrators (ACWA)
- Jim Taft, Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA), Executive Director
- Michelle Bushman, Western States Water Council Office
- Jeanne Christie, Association of State Wetland Managers (ASWM), Executive Director
- Michelle Bushman from Western States Water Council
- Robert Vanderslice, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), Senior Director, Environmental Health
- Alexandra Dapolito Dunn, Environmental Council of the States (ECOS), Executive Director and General Counsel
- Kate Almen, Environmental Council of the States (ECOS), Law Clerk
- Nathan Bowen, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), Director, Public Policy
- John Tubbs, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (Montana DNRC), Director
- Kerry Callahan, Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management Officials (ASTSWMO), Senior Program Manager
- Scott Lauher, Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management Officials (ASTSWMO), Junior Program Manager
- Zach Schulze, Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management Officials (ASTSWMO), Summer Intern
- Meade Anderson, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (Virginia DEQ)
- Tim Fields, MDB, Inc. (Facilitator)

Listeners:

- Mike Shapiro, EPA Office of Water, Deputy Assistant Administrator
- Roy Simon, EPA Office of Water
- Abu Moulta Ali, EPA Office of Water
- Jennifer Ousley, EPA Region 7
- Robin Parker, EPA
- Julie Mawhorter, Forest Service, Mid-Atlantic Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator
- Charles Kovatch, White House Council of Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President, Deputy Associate Director for Water
- Lynne M. Westphal, US Forest Service, Project Leader & Research Social Scientist
- Linda Garczynski and Tara Failey, 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 and possible expansion beyond the current [19 designated](#) locations. He explained that it would 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 government organizations, and will be held with nonprofit groups and community-based 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 support 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. So we want the States' input on the best approach to move forward. Several communities and metropolitan areas have expressed an interest in joining the Partnership. This conference call explored and discussed 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 he will call on participants. After all had a chance to go through the three questions laid out for this call, it was 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?

Jim Taft, ASDWA: Mr. Taft stated that the opportunity for stakeholders to make progress introduces many opportunities for synergy. Currently, 19 locations have made a variety of real accomplishments. Through synergies, there are ways to gain access to other funding sources. It's vital to gain an understanding of where support might exist. Mr. Taft also noted that achievement awards may serve as an incentive. He mentioned that he has seen collaborative opportunities take off in ways we could not envision. By creating incentives, healthy competition is fostered and spawned.

Alexandra Dapolito Dunn (Alex), ECOS: Ms. Dunn thanked the organizers for convening this call. She's always been excited about the UWFP program, and everyone's enthusiasm for it. During a recent meeting of the Environmental Council of the States she attended, they heard from different groups on urban water restoration, and bringing economic vitality back to the region. The discussion focused on Nashville, which is not among the 19 designated UWFP partners. In Nashville, they've revitalized banks

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of rivers, which is one avenue to promote improved resources in a community. It is used for recreational purposes (e.g., beach, kayak rentals, etc.). It's clear that being an affiliate enables best-practices sharing, but how can we clarify: who is eligible? Ms. Dunn also mentioned that Nashville could be an eligible candidate for an UW Partnership. In addition, she mentioned that a logo for the UWFP could be a useful tool and that differing levels of partnership may be useful (e.g., associate, full, etc.)

Nathan Bowen, NASDA: Mr. Bowen said it's important to keep in mind the other perspectives at the table. For instance, these issues extend into various rural areas, as well. These are new to our organizations. Outreach to rural players and state Departments of Agriculture is also really important, and these players bring many important perspectives on watershed conservation.

Julia Anastasio, ACWA: Ms. Anastasio said that being part of the UWFP offers a variety of local community benefits. But the role of the states is not clear. She identified the need for affirmative action in the EPA grants community. Assistance was available to 19 communities, but it's unclear what role state partners play in this.

Roy Simon, EPA HQ: Mr. Simon responded, saying a lot of Federal folk have been involved in designating the 19 partnerships. This was in response to a clearly identified need where local money wasn't available to put forward. However, there was an interest and commitment to create partnerships. Usually, three or four state agencies are often involved in each location (e.g., the Bronx/Harlem partnership with the State Transportation Agency). Not all who wished to be a designated partnership could be included.

Robert Vanderslice (Bob), ASTHO: Mr. Vanderslice said the Partnership is a bit like stone soup where you make something out of nothing. No single group may be able to offer a tremendous amount of support, but if you can get a lot of partners to contribute, a lot can be accomplished. Groups coming together can form storm water districts, or develop a system for stormwater control. He noted the designation of the Blackstone as a heritage river in Rhode Island as an example to explore.

Jeanne Christie, ASWM: Ms. Christie noted that ASWM is new to these ideas, and collaborations take time, and some work, while others do not. But collaboration is very important for capacity building. There's a need to demonstrate you're making progress. There is a need for coordination in the permitting process. She also emphasized the following points:

- Peer-to-peer mentoring is one of the most powerful ways to provide some kind of sharing to those who want to participate.
- There would be more interest, if there's a perception of cost savings. There need to be concrete demonstrated benefits, similar to FEMA's community rating system for reduction of insurance costs.

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- There could also be different levels to identify levels of affiliation (e.g., one star, two stars). This could include some kind of designation or award program based upon level of involvement in a community.

Michelle Bushman, WSWC: Ms. Bushman said it's important to break down agency silos within the Partnership. Agencies have learned to talk to one another. This has been a great benefit to get groups to talk. She emphasized the following ideas:

- Since funding has gone down, it's important to maximize communications techniques, so groups know when there are funding opportunities. This doesn't just include direct funding, but also pertinent data available. There is a real desire for "one stop shopping."
- USGS has looked at reducing information costs, so locals communicate to the local community to learn from each other. It's important to know who to talk to.
- For Partnership, there have to be at least two agencies involved in each project. The more groups are involved, the more red tape will need to be worked through.
- Ms. Bushman said she really likes that the Partnership is locally driven, and is not one-size-fits all. By taking this approach, locations can pick what resources they want to maximize. Locations can identify what's important and what they want to buy into.

John Tubbs, MDNR: Mr. Tubbs said that one key benefit is the identification of one key point of contact (POC). A key POC can serve as a conduit to the various federal agencies. Through this mechanism, Mr. Tubbs said it can be easier to discuss issues and problems, and it can be a great benefit to state and local partners. He said that one key to success is to have a key person who engages. As an example, the national drought partnership has both EPA and DOI cooperating. On the other hand, lack of communication can be a conundrum for local sponsors. He said:

- There's a need to get a key stakeholder who really engages, and who gets people to attend meetings and workshops. We really need the commitment of an entity to coordinate.
- Should there be a key federal contact as part of each partnership?

Kerry Callahan, ASTSWMO: Ms. Callahan said that as we initiate new partnerships, it's important to have peer-to-peer exchanges, a learning network, and other tools to facilitate communication.

Meade Anderson, VDEQ: Mr. Anderson said that, if funding isn't available, it's very important to get creative to think outside of the box. Sometimes, we need a spark to get going. Smaller communities experience extremely distressful resource situations.

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

Jeanne Christie, ASWM: Through her work with the Association of State Wetland Managers, she's noted that it's really important to designate a goal or mission statement. Groups need to know basic

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information when they get started. So, it's critical to have a clear mission and vision and also seed funding. Objectives should be clear and measurable. There's a need to have performance measures (quantitative and qualitative).

Alexandra Dapolito Dunn, ECOS: For a voluntary program, called the EPA [WasteWise program](#), there are clear benchmarks to document performance measures. Once participants enroll in WasteWise, they have to submit baseline data and regularly participate. Using this data, EPA gives out annual Wastewise Awards, giving high performers public recognition. Ms. Dunn said that this is a program that UWFP could also learn from.

Julia Anastasio, ACWA: On the UW website, there's a list of guiding principles and potential commitments that remain applicable. UWFP has already identified commitments, so look at those and use them.

Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.: There's a varying degree of state involvement at designated locations. Mr. Fields asked: if there's a new partnership in a place like Nashville, what would work?

Jim Taft, ASDWA: Mr Taft asked: would it be appropriate to require a minimum timeframe? Should we provide 18 months – 2 year timeframe, so groups could more deeply engage with the Partnership?

Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.: In the UWFP handbook, one key element looks at sustaining the partnership over time. So, there is a need to look at sustaining new Partnerships over some period of time.

Michelle Bushman, WSWC: On commitments, Ms. Bushman said it's important to have a goal or statement on what needs to be accomplished. She said that lots of partners may really benefit from a peer-to-peer element. This will help folks find information, so financial burden is limited. There will be some partners who will think it seems too hard, so consider offering a stated benefit, correlating to different categories (phases) of the Partnership. Phase 1 would look at the mission, support, and performance metrics, while phase 2 could delineate different categories.

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

Michelle Bushman, WSWC: Ms. Bushman said there's a need for a mechanism to tell groups that they're going to be pulled in. She said they need to have a process to tell groups their help is needed, so it's not a last minute type of involvement and to engage groups early on. If there are clear commitments established upfront, agencies ought to have option of saying, "yes, we're a part of this." The more active a Federal agency will be, the more robust the review process should be. If the Federal Partnership is signing off on something, someone has to say, "Yes, we're a part of this within this jurisdiction."

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John Tubbs, MDNR: There's a need for a commitment among primary agencies. EPA kicked off the UWFP. As a state agency, he said they have the same hard work to do. There is a need for State agency acceptance.

Jim Taft, ASDWA: Mr. Taft said a commitment needs to be satisfied by folks who want to engage, but folks need to commit to the overarching goals. He said it's important to keep it simple, but have some minimum criteria in place. He said it's very important to have minimal commitments. If people meet those commitments, it should be fairly flexible as to how they get involved. However, a third party (or someone in UWFP) needs to review the submissions of partners that come in.

Jeanne Christie, ASWM: Ms. Christie said a hybrid approach would be useful. This would need to be a two-step process. She also said she's not sure what a Partnership location would look like over time: What requirements would need to be satisfied for a project to apply or self-declare? She strongly recommends defining the level of state participation. Right now, she thinks it's a little nebulous, making it difficult for state partners to comment. However, she thinks that, if the federal role is well-articulated, that would be helpful. Could a document summarize state involvement, so groups are very clear on what state involvement has been in the past and what it could be in the future? That makes it easier to talk to members about what can/ can't be done.

Roy Simon, EPA HQ: Mr. Simon said that EPA headquarters will work on this. He said they already have a variety of info on this. He noted what areas were encompassed in the 19 partnerships by GIS mapping. Many smaller communities are also involved, and it is a watershed-based approach.

Open Dialogue on Future of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

Participant mentioned there is a need for a new fact sheet on defining urban waters.

Julia Anastasio, ACWA: She said it would be helpful to States to receive communications on the information discussed by Roy Simon. She said it would be helpful to articulate the benefit to States. She also asked if there would be a continued focus on distressed communities.

Roy Simon, EPA HQ: He emphasized that many of these issues would be discussed at the National Workshop from July 26-28. There is no fee required to attend. The continued emphasis on distressed communities remains very important.

John Tubbs, MDNR: He stated that they had reached out to upstream sources of contamination of waterways and they had linked the rural and urban communities together in their approach.

Roy Simon, EPA HQ: He mentioned that Minneapolis and St. Paul wish to be a partnership in this effort.

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Tim Fields, MDB, Inc.: He stated that a summary of the call would be forthcoming. He thanked all State agencies for attending and participating in the call.

- *Next Steps: Future calls with NGOs/CBOs; Urban Waters National Training Workshop – Arlington, VA – 7/26/16-7/28/16; Follow Up Actions from this Call*