

# REVITALIZATION AT THE MIDDLE BLUE RIVER

## COLLABORATION FOR RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE REUSE

# THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

## ABOUT THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

The Middle Blue River in Kansas City, MO is one of eleven newly selected locations for the nation's Urban Waters Federal Partnership. This partnership reconnects urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits. Specifically, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership will:

- Break down federal program silos to promote more efficient and effective use of federal resources through better coordination and targeting of federal investments.
- Recognize and build on local efforts and leadership, by engaging and serving community partners.
- Work with local officials and effective community-based organizations to leverage area resources and stimulate local economies to create local jobs.
- Learn from early and visible victories to fuel long-term action.

Led by these federal agencies and coordinated by the White House Domestic Policy Council and White House Council on Environmental Quality, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership closely aligns with and advances the work of the White House's place-based efforts, including the **Partnership for Sustainable Communities**, to revitalize communities, create jobs, and improve the quality of life in cities and towns across the nation. The Urban Waters Federal Partnership also advances the work of the **America's Great Outdoors Initiative** (<http://americasgreatoutdoors.gov>).

For more information, visit [www.urbanwaters.gov](http://www.urbanwaters.gov)

## ABOUT THE KANSAS CITY MISSOURI PARTNERSHIP

The Kansas City Missouri Partnership has formed around four existing projects that have commonalities in their visions, planning elements, partners, and geographies in the Middle Blue River reach. The partnership will be led by a steering committee of EPA Region 7, the Mid America Regional Council (MARC) – the local planning agency, the Heartland Conservation Alliance, a non-profit focused on increasing conservation in the Blue River watershed, and City of Kansas City Missouri's Planning and Water Services departments. This location is also at the confluence with Brush Creek, one of the Blue River's most visible and degraded tributaries currently being studied by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE) and local sponsors for restoration opportunities. The partnership leads will work with other federal agencies, the city of Kansas City Missouri, state agencies, businesses, local partners and urban agricultural non-profits to collaborate and coordinate on-the-ground work to share and leverage resources.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW

The four projects of the Middle Blue River Partnership in KCMO are to connect and leverage resources:

**Municipal Farms Area Wide Brownfields Pilot** – The KCMO city council has adopted an integrated sustainable development strategy created for the 400 plus acre site near the confluence of the Middle Blue River and Brush Creek. Once the location of a municipal corrections facility, farm, and sanatorium, it is historically and culturally significant while largely void of infrastructure, the site has multiple brownfield locations and significant natural wetlands, uplands, and streams. The centrality of the location is also a potential hub of connectivity for greenway corridors and future public transport. It is in an underserved and distressed part of the city and yet offers rich opportunities to connect with the three other partnership projects to serve defined community needs, while enhancing riparian corridor and stream restoration and future protection. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) is also studying the feasibility of solar and biomass energy production on site.

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY AND THE MIDDLE BLUE RIVER

The focus area for this project has suffered from frequent and serious flooding, degraded water quality, habitat loss from channelization, and economic disinvestment and blight. Yet, the area is rich with sustainable redevelopment and restoration potential. Sitting in the shadow of the Kansas City Royals' and Chiefs' stadiums, the largely abandoned, multiple brownfields site - Municipal Farms - has deep historical and cultural significance to the city and its residents. It also has extensive native wetland and upland areas, and a geographical nexus with the Blue River and Brush Creek confluence through a native stream – Round Creek. The former farm can be redeveloped to be a hub of connectivity to the other partnership project's riparian greenways, conservation opportunity areas, and restoration sites, addressing the identified needs of local residents for connectivity, livable neighborhoods, recreation, river access, economic development, sustainable jobs, and access to fresh food.



### **Blue River Greenways Ecosystem Restoration**

**Project – Phase II Study** – The ACOE and KCMO as the local sponsor are studying restoration potential for the confluence area, including the western portion of the Municipal Farms site. Plans include significant acres of bottomland hardwood forest, wetlands, and upland prairie at the convergence of two regional greenways. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is also conducting flood inundation mapping and wetland delineation throughout the Blue River and Brush Creek Watersheds.

**Brush Creek Feasibility Study** – The ACOE, local sponsors (KCMO and Johnson County, Kansas), and the Brush Creek Corridor Committee – a partnership of watershed stakeholders – are conducting a Feasibility Study that has modeled and sought community input for restoration alternatives at two urban reaches of Brush Creek. The partnership has also created a habitat model unique to this urban watershed and is developing a watershed management plan. This highly impacted stream is the most visible and troubled tributary to the Blue River and their confluence area is where the federal partnership is focusing.

### **Upper Blue River Conservation Opportunity Area—**

The only urban Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) in Missouri, this designation demonstrates the restoration potential that exists. Running from the state line, through the Blue River / Brush Creek Confluence area, this lengthy, very urban, riparian zone overlaps the 3 other project sites. A large area of the COA is undergoing active restoration through grants and volunteer action through a conservation partnership – KC WildLands, and those successes with volunteer engagement and public education are transferrable to the confluence site.

### **WHAT'S NEXT**

This new partnership has identified the following as important next steps to developing the partnership and taking action.

**Leadership** – The partnership steering committee is determining roles and responsibilities for their leadership and best structures and strategies for advancing connectivity between the four partnership projects, while focusing on facilitating and leveraging action over the next two years.

**Next Actions** – The partnership will identify the next actions for each project, how they would benefit from additional federal, state, and local involvement, and how these actions can best be coordinated and leveraged.

**Broaden Federal Partnership** – As the partnership identifies areas for other federal, state, and local entities to engage, EPA Region 7 will have primary responsibility for connecting specifically identified needs to other federal agencies' programs and resources. The whole leadership team will facilitate broadening engagement with state and local entities, and coordinating and leveraging connections and resources overall.

**Community Outreach and Engagement** – Each partnership project has an independent community education and engagement component. The partnership will help to coordinate, strengthen, and broaden them to better integrate community input for restoration and water quality education.

**Monitoring, Assessment, and Restoration** – Utilize the existing partnership to begin water quality monitoring, habitat assessment, wetland delineation, and invasive removal activities.



MVSC, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

## **THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP**

The partnership includes: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of the Army (Army Corps of Engineers), U.S. Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Corporation for National and Community Service, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Transportation

**For more information on the Middle Blue River Urban Waters Federal Partnership, please contact the lead agency representatives:**

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