

Urban Waters Federal Partnership – Denver Pilot
Initial “Fed-to-Fed” Discussion Meeting – Monday June 27, 2011
USFS Regional Office Auditorium

What is the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP):

The UWFP is an initiative to improve coordination between federal agencies and their collaboration with local community-led efforts to revitalize and improve urban waters and reconnect residents to these waterbodies.

The national announcement of the UWFP was made on June 24 at a press event in Baltimore, another one of the pilot sites. A number of high-ranking federal officials, including EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Agriculture Deputy Undersecretary Harris Sherman, and representatives from CEQ, the White House, HUD, and many others, were in attendance to show support for the initiative. Also present were many community representatives and local groups. The speakers provided very inspiring messages – connection to communities, federal family working together to get more done. The backdrop for the event was Middle Branch Park with people using the river in an urban setting. There was an environmental education hour before the press event where the officials interacted with the local community groups. A community stakeholder call was held later in the afternoon for local groups to identify their roles and what they can bring to the partnership.

More information can be found on the UWFP website: www.urbanwaters.gov

Purpose of UWFP Denver Pilot “Fed-to-Fed” meeting today:

There are 4 objectives for today’s meeting:

- For federal agency representatives to meet each other in an informal setting
- To discuss and understand the UWFP, the proposed Denver Pilot and how each agency wants to be involved
- To modify the current proposed Denver Pilot with input from all participants
- To plan for future actions, including a “Fed-to-Local” meeting.

Introductions:

Each one present at the meeting introduced themselves and provided a short description of their agency and their work in their agency.

Polly Hays	USFS – Water Program
Stacey Eriksen	EPA – Urban Programs
Darcy Campbell	EPA – Source Water
Susan Alden Weingardt	USFS – Partnerships
Susan Ford	USFS – State and Private Forestry
Vicky Reinold	CNCS – AmeriCorps NCCC
Randy Karstaedt	USFS – Physical Resources
Brian Sanchez	US FWS
Guadalupe Herrera	US HUD
Cathy Tate	USGS

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Joy Lujan	NPS RTCA
Alan Ragins	NPS RTCA
Karl A. Hermann	EPA – Monitoring
Chris Poulet	CDC/ATSDR – Region 8
Kristy Floyd (phone)	NRCS
Lana Suarez (phone)	EPA – Headquarters
Joan Carlson	USFS (note taker)
Claire Harper	USFS – Water Partnerships
Michael Wenstrom	EPA – Environmental Justice

Kristy Floyd (NRCS) is sitting in for Jonas Feinstein.

Sara Mayben (USFS, Renewable Resource Staff Officer, Pike and San Isabel National Forests) was introduced but couldn't stay for the meeting.

Avra Morgan (US Bureau of Reclamation) was unable to attend the meeting.

Federal DOT was invited to attend the meeting but was not able to send anyone.

Also absent is US Army Corps of Engineers (COE). Omaha District out of Nebraska office is working on some wetland and ecological restoration projects on the South Platte in Denver with local folks.

A spreadsheet listing organizations and contacts was distributed to the group by email, and available as a handout at the meeting. If you know of other federal partners or other organizations that are not, but should be engaged, let Stacey or Polly know. (CDOT should be added to the list)

More about the UWFP Denver Pilot:

South Platte was nominated as pilot for EPA's urban waters initiative, and for UWFP. Concurrently the Forest Service is interested in work being done to connect the headwaters as the source of drinking water supplies, to the downstream communities. These two efforts were combined into the UWFP Denver Pilot.

Stacey Eriksen (EPA) has the lead for the Denver Urban Area and Polly Hays and Claire Harper (USFS) have the lead for the South Platte Headwaters Area.

There are a number of projects currently on-going led by collaborations between various federal agencies and local community groups in the headwaters and urban area that this group can build upon. These projects are described on the UWFP Denver Pilot "fact sheet" available on the UWFP website.

Stacey and Polly have been working on a draft partnership document/template that will be the foundation for the partnership. Education, Research and On-the-ground projects are the sections of the template document. This document was not distributed as it is incomplete. More information from the other agencies needs to be added.

There is currently no new money with this initiative – it is really about how the feds can work together more efficiently, to be aware of what each other are doing and to better help the local communities.

There was an urban partnership back under the Clinton administration, where the funds were not spent as intended. So need to pay attention to congressional intent and authorities.

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Local press interest – Stacey was interviewed by KUNC and Colorado Public Radio. The questions were mostly about what is new about this initiative and what about the money.

EPA used to have more community programs, but not so much these days. There is a need to work thru the community groups. EPA gives them a little bit of money and some publicity, but they do most of the work.

With this partnership building on existing activities, don't want to create the appearance that the feds are taking over or taking credit for things that the community groups are doing.

Planning to have a meeting with community groups later in the fall but wanted to meet the fed family first to figure out how to work together in this partnership.

A question: will this partnership be an effort to work more strategically – e.g. the feds helping the local communities to develop a big community-wide vision and then provide the little bits of money to implement?

Answer: Good question for the partners to discuss.

Individual agency reports:

Each agency representative present was asked to discuss the following questions:

- What can you bring to the table?
- What direction have you been given from within your agency for participation in UWFP?
- What potential challenges and opportunities do you see?

CDC/ATSDR (Chris Poulet)

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is a small agency associated with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The agency was created with CERCLA. ATSDR is a federal public health agency that acts in an advisory capacity to EPA, other federal and state agencies and the public providing information, evaluation and education about human exposure to toxic substances in the environment. The agency has small offices that are collocated with EPA offices. The ATSDR employees have a variety of expertise – microbiology, environmental engineering, environmental health, doctors, pharmacists, toxicologists, etc. ATSDR is not a regulatory agency.

ATSDR has people available to review data (In Colorado there are 2.5 people that do work). They also have some grant programs for states. They cannot collect environmental data but anyone can ask them to review data or situations (e.g. "The plant across the street is making me sick."). They will investigate and using their comparison values (i.e. reference levels) with safety factors to determine the health risk and recommend next steps. Examples of their recent work: health consultation on hydraulic fracking effects on groundwater in Pavillion, WY and a state cooperative agreement to do an assessment of air pollution effects from energy development in Garfield County, CO.

Website: www.atsdr.cdc.gov has a lot of information – chemical fact sheets, reports of evaluations, education material...

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The director of ATSDR signed on to the UWFP, so they are in. Chris was asked by his supervisor to “find out what EPA was doing with the federal partnership” and so here he is.

EPA – Monitoring (Karl Hermann)

EPA’s water monitoring is for Clean Water Act purposes – identification of impaired waters, meeting water quality standards, TMDLs, etc.

All Denver streams are impaired – high levels of e coli bacteria, selenium, nutrients (not officially yet). The sampling is also finding pesticides, pharmaceuticals and other emerging contaminants, which do not currently have water quality standards.

A number of groups are doing monitoring. EPA’s monitoring program tries to fill in the gaps between other monitoring efforts in the basin. Karl is working with Denver Environmental Health and CDPHE on a monitoring study in the South Platte Basin. Eighty sites along the entire Front Range were sampled in 2010. The study is targeting a subset of those sites with monthly sampling in 2011. They are taking advantage of the capabilities we now have for detecting emerging contaminants and analyzing for 300 constituents.

The study has generated a wealth of data, but question is what does it all mean collectively? How do we get from understanding what’s in there, to actually doing something about it?

Karl is also working with Greenway Foundation to describe and address the trash problem along the South Platte.

NPS RTCA (Alan Ragins and Joy Lujan)

National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS RTCA) is the community assistance arm of the NPS. Their purpose is to support other peoples’ projects in conservation and outdoor recreation. RTCA’s role is to help with planning efforts.

They have been hearing a lot of noise from higher levels of the agency about DOI’s participation in this partnership and to figure out what they can do.

NPS hasn’t done much in South Platte but they have been approached about working on the Bear Creek planning project. Notes that Greenway Foundation and the City of Denver already have a pretty good plan with shovel ready projects and are looking for money. Still trying to figure out if there is a niche for RTCA in the South Platt and what that would be. They could help with planning river access – how to get people to the river (but not in it ...) from the neighborhoods. They could also help integrate the multiple levels of planning that are currently completed or on-going – bring people together to integrate priorities. Also could help with planning educational opportunities.

Re the bigger NPS – have their land and water program in which NPS funds the state parks to support recreational land acquisition and water access. Given the President’s interest, the Great Outdoors program may be getting more funds and may get into setting national priorities, etc. (perhaps need to add state parks to the partnership list). Current priority is trails. States are currently running the Great Outdoors, so would need policy change to change that. This is potentially an opportunity to integrate.

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A question – Is this UWFP a just marketing deal on how great the feds are or is it an opportunity to set priorities and really make a difference? And who sets the priorities?

A suggestion – get the locals to tell us what their priorities are, and figuring out how the feds can help them.

USGS (Cathy Tate)

USGS is a non-regulatory agency in DOI. Their mission is collecting data and getting information out. Cathy represents two programs of the agency that can help with this partnership – the NAWQA program and the Colorado Water Science Center.

NAWQA: Initial NAWQA assessment of the South Platte watershed was completed in the early 1990's. Water quality sampling is continuing at a site on Cherry Creek above the confluence with the South Platte as a long-term trend site. NAWQA study generated some data on pesticides and biological data.

An educational tool, though not specific to the South Platte, related to NAWQA is a study of the Effects of Urbanization on Streams. The Front Range was one of the sites in this study. A link to this study is on the national NAWQA webpage. Also available are podcasts with information on the general results of this study and other national perspective studies.

Colorado Water Science Center: USGS is known for gauging stations and they operate a series of stations across Colorado, including on the South Platte and tributaries. Real time flow data from the gauging stations is available on their website (www.co.water.usgs.gov). Water quality data for the “South Platte River at Englewood” station is also available on the website. USGS has some other information dissemination tools on the website. One is “Water alert” services in which a person can sign up to get an email, text, or phone message when a particular station reaches a specific stage. There are only a few stations with that capability in the Denver area. “USGS stream mail” is another tool available in which the public can get flow data via email or phone.

Other research/monitoring projects of the CO water science center include cooperative programs. For example, USGS is working with Urban Drainage and Flood Control to collect stormwater samples (nutrients, suspended solids, metals) for the South Platte TMDL. Several researchers (Deb Martin, J. Moody) are studying hydrologic and erosion response of burned watersheds following the Buffalo Creek Fire and Four Mile Canyon Fire. There have also been a number of studies on the Denver basin groundwater aquifer; however current groundwater studies are not located in the Denver area.

Donna Meyers, head of water quality office in national NAWQA has given permission to Cathy to provide 10 to 15 % of her time to this partnership. Cathy thinks she can provide information, and would start by updating the websites to make them more user-friendly.

USFWS (Brian Sanchez)

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been working with Greenway Foundation to restore some Denver area superfund sites with the settlement funds. Also doing some invasive species work. They have a biomonitoring program where they are partnering with the Audubon Society and other groups to do bird counts and other migratory bird habitat projects. Also have a project in the Upper South Platte

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regarding the Pawnee Montane Skipper in the Hayman Fire area. And they are concerned about the risk to fish from pharmaceuticals.

Direction from agency – there is no new money, so not sure what USFWS participation will be, however the work on the Denver area superfund sites should fit in.

A question – Should the Rocky Mountain Arsenal be included in the partnership?

HUD (Guadalupe Herrera)

Guadalupe is a sustainable community officer – basically an organizer/coordinator/administrator. She has worked with Denver local govt. in the past and has lots of consolidated/community planning experience.

HUD has a lot of different programs – Guadalupe hopes to help facilitate getting the right HUD people involved with the projects that others are working on.

There are a number of public housing projects along the South Platte because many of the older neighborhoods were along the river. Some of the projects have some storm drainage problems that will affect the river.

HUD has a sustainable community's grant and a challenge grant – pretty cool grant programs. Notice of Funding Availability (NOFAs) is out or will be out soon. These are planning funds to help communities go beyond just basic planning to make communities better. They have a number of grant programs for local groups to tap into.

There is an environmental component to HUD programs – HUD is interested in the quality of life for the residents and in connecting housing projects residents with greenspace/open space and natural resources in their communities. HUD works thru the local communities with their grant programs.

HUD Secretary Donovan really pushes sustainable communities and the Department has signed on to the partnership.

CNCS/AmeriCorps NCCC (Vicky Reinold)

AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is a part of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). AmeriCorps is a fully federally funded program. Three hundred young people (18 to 24 year olds) come to Denver each year. They are required to make a 10 month commitment to the program. There are 28 teams based in Denver that work on projects within the Southwest region. Projects can be in the areas of environmental conservation, energy conservation, infrastructure, disaster relief (highest priority) and urban/community. Each project can be 6 to 8 weeks long.

AmeriCorps can bring human resources to the partnership – they already have partnerships with some of the other agencies. Unlike other Youth Corps groups (Mile High Youth Corps, for example) that are fee for service, AmeriCorps can do projects for organizations that can't afford to pay for labor.

Organizations are required to provide housing for the AmeriCorps crew. However, AmeriCorps has

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housing available locally in Denver so project sponsors here would not have to provide housing as they normally would. Projects are selected thru and RFP process.

AmeriCorps is a nimble organization that can do pretty much anything, including environmental education projects.

The head of CNCS has signed on to the partnership.

USFS – State and Private Forestry (Susan Ford)

Susan works with the Urban and Community Forestry programs in the State and Private Forestry Branch of the Forest Service. Urban and Community programs provide financial and technical assistance to local community groups to enhance urban environments. Their focus is on leveraging other dollars and it is a voluntary program, not regulatory.

They currently have a wide range of projects working with schools and city parks, green infrastructure, wildfire issues, wood as energy, biochar – a number of programs for urban and non-urban areas, and some grant programs. They work with a variety of partners: association of mayors, state foresters, Front Range Round table, Front Range Urban Forestry Council, listed too many to capture on paper ...

Interestingly, back in the 1990's, there was an initiative similar to UWFP in Denver. Denver Urban Resources Partnership had \$1 million per year. The Forest Service coordinated with HUD and other agencies to work on small projects in underserved communities. They were able to do some good things, but had struggles with bureaucracy and limits of agency authorities. The partnership shared funding between agencies, with NRCS and USFS as the primary sources of money and some from EPA. Non-federal agencies (CSU and DRCOG) were used as financial agents to manage the funds. The partnership expanded to Longmont and to Douglas County communities.

USFS – Partnerships (Susan Alden Weingardt)

The partnership program works at facilitating and leveraging resources to accomplish their goals; they don't have any money to provide grants and the like. Currently working on a number of collaborative projects focused on getting kids outdoors. Also facilitated the Hayman Fire Restoration project with Vail Resorts and National Forest Foundation. National Forest Foundation has just opened an office here in Denver so should add them to the list of partners.

Susan is at the meeting today because her director told her to attend.

Each Region is being asked to develop a "Children's Forest". Most of them are up in the National Forests away from urban areas. They can't get the kids out of the city, so perhaps there is a way to have a Children's Forest Corridor (Johnson Habitat Park?) in Denver as a collaborative effort along the South Platte? Working on outdoor education/outreach communication tools – website is in development.

EPA – Source Water Program (Darcy Campbell)

Source water protection program is a voluntary program that encourages communities to do planning for protection of the source areas for their municipal water supplies. Darcy has a vision to work with

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Denver Water to complete a Source Water Protection Plan. Colorado is lagging behind other states because Denver doesn't have a protection plan in place.

EPA is also interested in environmental education – it is surprising how many adults don't know where their water comes from and where does it go once it leaves their house. Darcy has been working with a number of school programs. She would like to see a public education effort as part of this partnership. Some local groups are already on board

EPA has an event scheduled for world water monitoring day in September – are other agency's interested in participating?

EPA – Environmental Justice (Michael Wenstrom)

EPA's environmental justice programs work with connecting minority communities with urban waters. The wealthy white communities are active in urban restoration, but the communities of color are not as involved because of social, cultural and economic barriers. EPA's programs work on how to get past the barriers and how to communicate with these communities. Michael is interested in planning and implementation, and also education. He understands how to work in these communities – how to share communication in a meaningful way and have people/kids in these communities participate to get the kids out and connected.

EPA – Urban Programs (Stacey Eriksen)

Stacey is the Urban Watershed Revitalization Coordinator and works with brownfield restoration and urban programs.

EPA has a number of grant programs. They are going to have some funding for this next year (\$2 million) to fund 3 large grants and a number of smaller capacity-building grants. There are funds for brownfields and wetlands to be used mostly to establish programs and do assessments. EPA also gives money to states for nonpoint source programs and projects. This year CO is funding PURE's trash project and a watershed plan for Bear Creek. State revolving loan funds and grants are also available. Used to have more money but the pot is shrinking – now mostly just have small pots of funds to distribute. There are restrictions on how the money can be used, for example Denver has a MS4 permit. Nonpoint Source funds, state revolving funds or wetland funds cannot be used for activities required under the permit.

USFS – National Forest System (Polly Hays)

There are 3 branches in the agency– State and Private Forestry (S&PF), Research & National Forest System (NFS). Frank McCormick in Boise is the representative for FS Research for the Denver Pilot. Polly is the lead for the NFS part of the agency.

NFS doesn't have grant programs. Our interest is in how we set priorities on our National Forest lands and how that integrates with other organizations. Some priorities get set by nature (fire, bark beetles), but other priorities can be influenced by potential partners. For example, we have an agreement with Denver Water to cooperatively fund fuels treatments in their source water area to protect their water

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supply infrastructure. We also have a large interest in the public education message and managing our resources to keep the water clean when it leaves NFS land.

Sometimes we have a competitive process within the NFS for funding of restoration projects. This partnership may make South Platte projects more competitive for national money. We also have some authorities to do work on nonfederal land with federal dollars, but it would need to be very specific and has to have benefit for the public land.

Moving Forward – where do we go from here:

EPA and Forest Service have been getting direction from higher levels in their agencies to do something with this urban partnership, but messages on the expected deliverables are mixed. Holding a “fed-to-fed” meeting and a local press event are the givens as to what the pilot partnership is supposed to do. Headquarters would prefer to have a kick-off press event to launch the partnership sooner rather than later. Also thinking of having a “fed-to-local” meeting later this year, but wanted to get the feds together first to figure out what the Denver Pilot should be.

Given the short time frame desired by headquarters for a local press event, one idea is to tack onto someone else’s already scheduled event. We could do something more low key that way than we would with our own large press event. A potential event to consider is the “Reception on the River” at Confluence Park which will be held sometime in last two weeks in August.

Response to that idea was lukewarm:

- would meet the need to “check the box” of having a press event, but would not be very strategic in terms of moving the partnership forward
- might be better if we decide the role of the partnership and have some idea of what the partnership can accomplish before having a big press event
- HUD director is interested in a big press event

Brainstorm of ideas of what the partnership can/should do – given that there is no money for this and that we all have other things to do:

- pick 2 or 3 projects that we can brand as our dramatic partnership projects and make better than they would have been without fed cooperation
- do a website to highlight what our programs do and to provide a link to all the agency’s stuff
- every agency has an education component – identify gaps and where the partnership can fill-in
- Fed to local mtg is a good idea
- Need both external and internal component to the education stuff – need to educate each other
- Commit to 3 events over next 6 months, training events at the various federal agencies –about water quality, about urban forestry or tree planting, etc. A field trip could be one of the events.
- reverse request for proposals, ask what people want to do and the partnership helps to find the money and get the project done
- identify what is currently being done along the river and what is not there. Brag on what is there and work on what’s not there.
- World water monitoring day in September could be an opportunity for a partnership event – maybe tell a South Platte story

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- build a road show to get people informed
- Need to start on a focused area then branch out later (both geographically and with education programs)
- Need to identify a time frame in which to get something done – but don't want to get burned out either.
- Need to pick something that we can get done and feel good about, because we all have plenty of work to do – if this doesn't go anywhere soon, will move on to other things
- Plan quarterly outputs
- Partnership should operate “Bottom up” rather than “top down” – i.e. let the local groups take the lead on setting priorities rather than the feds.
- Partnership agencies should each sign-off on an action plan to indicate commitment to the partnership.

What should the geographic extent of the partnership be:

- City and County of Denver, South Platte River and the Headwaters area originally included – mainstream was the original thought
- Should we also include Chatfield, Bear Creek, Clear Creek, etc beyond the South Platte?
- Should include Bear Creek watershed plan as it fits in great with this partnership.
- DOI would be interested in including the connection between the National Park and the Arsenal.
- Karl will develop and distribute a map of the nested watersheds to facilitate discussion of geographic scope.

Topics for discussion at the next meeting:

- Geographic scope of the partnership
- Types of projects and/or programs that the partnership should focus on
- Objectives for a “fed-to-local” meeting
- What locals should be included on the list
- How to handle funds for the partnership – is there an organization that can be used to “park” federal moneys that may be available before project plans are in place

Next steps:

- In person meeting sometime in the week of July 11
- Location either downtown (REI or EPA) or in Lakewood (Forest Service, Fed Center, ??)
- Block out 4 hours for the meeting, may need less time.
- Polly will send out a doodle poll to get consensus on meeting date once a location has been decided
- Polly, Stacey and Joy will work on the agenda – working off of the “Moving Forward” bullets on today's agenda – send any other agenda ideas to anyone of them
- Send any other thoughts on organizations to include in the partnership spreadsheet (fed or locals) to Stacey.