

# NEW LIFE FOR THE MERAMEC RIVER AND BIG RIVER

## THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

### ABOUT THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

The Meramec River and Big River Restoration Project is one of eleven newly selected locations for the nation's Urban Waters Federal Partnership. This partnership will reconnect 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)

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are currently evaluating a joint feasibility report and project management plan to encompass the ecosystem restoration mission of the USACE and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) mission of the EPA. Further collaboration is occurring between Missouri Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to act as cost share partners and stakeholders.

### WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW

The following are some federal and/or local projects that the Partnership currently has efforts to improve water quality, make public access safe, and restore the watershed's ecosystem:

#### **Meramec and Big River Ecosystem Restoration Project**

– EPA and USACE are participating members of the Big River Task Force, a group of multiple governmental organizations from federal to local, set up to facilitate the cleanup, restoration, and remediation efforts on the Meramec and Big Rivers. This will be a unified step toward advancing the clean up, resulting in significant improvements in water quality within the Big River, Meramec River, and Mississippi River. The Partnership with assistance from the Urban Waters Federal Program will redefine their partnering capabilities for the good of the citizens they serve.

**Overview and Status** – Mining activities began in Southeast Missouri in the early 1700s, where historical records indicate that over 190 mining sites were once operating. The EPA Southwest Jefferson County Mining Superfund Site continues to focus their efforts on residential yard clean up and is additionally focusing on unconsolidated mine waste. USACE is currently working on completion of a reconnaissance study concerned with issues of fish passage, bed and bank stability, habitat loss, and



### ABOUT THE COMMUNITY AND THE MERAMEC AND BIG RIVERS

Once a booming lead-producing region, the towns of the Meramec and Big River watersheds hold the leftovers of over 200 years of lead mining. Large stockpiles of sediment containing high levels of heavy metals and lead are exposed to storm water, bank instabilities, and other issues. This leads to the sediment directly entering the Meramec River and Big River, increasing the health risks associated with the rivers.

sedimentation.

Each agency has specialized expertise and a critical role to play in this effort. Mussel populations are becoming locally extinct as the mining sediment moves downstream. Fish in Big River show elevated concentrations of lead, and fish consumption advisories have been in place on the Big River since 1981. Monitoring has shown sediment lead concentration levels that are dangerous to human health.

**Big River Watershed Master Plan** – This plan is funded through a cooperative agreement involving Jefferson, St. Francois, and Washington counties. The purpose of the plan is to focus on river remediation and restoration in these three counties. Numerous meetings held in 2011 in each county focused on informing the public about past activities in the watershed and to present the current environmental conditions. Attending these meetings were members of the community representing different viewpoints, including sod farmers, beef cattle farmers, crop farmers, gravel miners, fisherman, and many others. This plan is ongoing, and the final product will be a watershed plan that focuses on the primary interests of the public with regard to watershed remediation and restoration.

## 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

**Public Education and Outreach**– The education of residents on the risk associated with the heavy metals within the Big and Meramec Rivers is a major undertaking within the project site. Of particular importance is the migration of these heavy metals into the food chain.

Mussels, fish, mammals, birds, and other aquatic organisms have all been documented with elevated lead and heavy metal levels. Fish consumption warnings have been in place for decades, but individuals are still seen fishing and presumably supplementing their diets along the contaminated reaches.

Obtaining local input and support for the cleanup efforts is another major goal of the program. Many groups serve this area; through the help of the existing federal, state, local partners as well as the addition of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership these messages will be disseminated through every community.

## WHAT'S NEXT

**Additional partnerships** –Additional partnerships are promising as the Missouri Department of Natural Resources has identified the Big River as one of three priority waters within the state.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources has created the initiative “Our Missouri Waters” and the Big River was chosen as one of the three priority watersheds. The partners and stakeholders invested in the watershed initiative include landowners, farmers, grain/sod/livestock producers, and citizens. A social media site was started and now individuals interested in the cleanup efforts promote a multitude of events including events for local food pantries, charity events, and other non-government organizations’ missions.

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership will help connect the project with additional partners that can help advance the goals of the cleanup effort. Additionally, the Federal Partnership can also assist by helping to create a unified voice that will resonate with the individuals and citizens of the area.

**For more information on the Meramec and Big River Ecosystem Restoration Project Urban Waters Federal Partnership, please contact the lead agency representative:**

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