

Draft Martin Pena Initiative Plan

4/09/13

Objective: This action plan is being developed so that EPA Region 2 can implement a strategy that focuses its programs and regulatory authorities in activities that comprehensively address the environmental issues affecting the Martin Pena communities. With this purpose in mind, this plan presents a series of actions that have been done, are ongoing or may be pursued immediately. It also shows actions that will be tracked for future implementation. This represents the beginning of a process that will become more valuable as interagency communications develop. This plan will be revisited and revised as needed.

Background:

The Martin Peña Channel (MCP) is a 3.75 miles long tidal channel located at the heart of the San Juan Bay National Estuary. The channel ranges in width from 6 to over 400 feet. It is very shallow, with an average depth of 4 feet (1.2 m). During the first half of the 20th century, impoverished people from rural areas of Puerto Rico moved into San Juan and built their houses in the mangrove wetlands bordering the MPC. This development largely occurred without planning or government involvement. For decades, refuse and debris were used as fill material to create land to build homes. Household garbage, discarded furniture and appliances, plastics, car batteries and tires, construction debris and other materials may be observed in the channel. Along the banks, some mangroves and other upland and wetland species are found interspersed with substandard dwellings that lack adequate infrastructure. In addition to these issues, over 3,000 structures discharge raw sewage to the MPC through direct pipelines, ditches and a precarious storm water system, contributing to the environmental degradation of the channel and the San Juan Bay Estuary. For decades, a combined sewer system which collected wastewater from the Financial District office buildings and residential condos used to discharge over 1,000,000 gals/day of raw sewage into the MPC in dry weather. Fecal coliform concentrations in the channel's waters range from 270,000 to 2,000,000 colonies/100 ml. Due to incompetent

sewer systems and the blockage of the MPC in certain areas, frequent flooding constantly exposes the residents to the sewage polluted waters, threatening public health and damaging property. Recent studies have demonstrated a correlation between exposure of area residents to contaminated flood waters and the development of allergic illnesses, gastroenteritis and asthma. The approximately 4,000 children living in the area (as per the 2010 U.S. Census) are most susceptible, with asthma rates doubling those for the rest of the island. The environmental restoration of the MPC depends on solving social, housing, and major infrastructure problems in the area.

Intra Agency and Interagency Communication

CEPD identifies in this plan intra-agency opportunities to address priority problems at MPC that can be implemented in a short time frame by focusing existing EPA programs and making MPC as an area of priority. In addition, this plan may reach other agencies and interest groups by fostering interagency coordination and partnerships targeting the MPC under the Urban Waters Federal partnership. A forum for interagency communication will be established to help the Region to focus on the most significant MPC issues and to find opportunities for synergy in addressing them.

Continued communication will be essential to our ongoing goals for focusing our efforts in protecting and providing assistance to MPC communities.

The following sections present a preliminary list of projects that will be updated through close intra-agency and interagency coordination.

Ongoing projects:

Since this initiative became a regional priority for EPA in FY'10, we have worked with local partners, such as Proyecto Enlace and the San Juan Bay Estuary, to advance activities that support the dredging of the channel, improve water quality and increase the communities' well-being. Some of these activities include:

- ***Facilitating storm sewer cleanup and evaluation*** – As part of ongoing enforcement actions against PRASA and the Municipality of San Juan.
 - ✓ **UPDATE: Cleanups 80% completed; evaluations 60% completed. Remaining 20% - schedule to be submitted by PRASA on 2/25/12. A meeting to discuss an updated calendar and project priorities is scheduled for 4/9/13.**

- ***Nominated Martin Peña as an Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) Test Pilot Site during FY2012*** -
 - ✓ **UPDATE: Martin Peña was selected as one of the 11 new pilot UWFP sites in February 2013. A final announcement of the selections was put on hold due to the budget sequestration. The initial call for EPA leads in the project has been scheduled for April 11, 2013. Next steps will be determined in the call, including intra-agency briefings on the selected sites and a national webinar after the pilot announcements.**

- ***Entered into an MOU with the PR Ponce School of Medicine*** - Environmental health studies and related research focused on MPC. 90% completed of health questionnaire and chemical and bacteriological analysis of drinking water. The students also worked on obtaining data needed for the Municipality of San Juan/DNER/EPA MS4 CD.
 - ✓ **UPDATE: PSM is completing the results of additional drinking water sampling in order to complete data analysis. The report is expected to complete peer review, with a final report available as soon as possible.**

- ***Developing a children's health Key Performance Indicator (KPI)*** - developed by CEPD and approved due to its community-based approach and the use of promising practices. Results from the on-going Ponce School of Medicine (PSM) health studies will be addressed thru the KPI
 - ✓ **UPDATE: Enlace is currently using preliminary data from the PSM studies for non-traditional education of school children within the Martin Peña district with funding from an Urban Waters small grant. CEPD continues participation in EPA's Community Based Network, and delivered a presentation on the project on March 28, 2013. The next network meeting is scheduled for the end of May 2013.**

- ***Pest Management Control assistance at MPC preschools*** – Visited all MPC preschools to evaluate and make recommendations on how to implement a pest management program.

- ✓ **UPDATE: EPA and the PR Department of Agriculture visited the pre-schools and comiled reports on the findings, which will be shared with Enlace for further action and integration into the community education efforts.**

- ***Continue providing guidance to the Ecosystem Restoration (channel dredging) Project's Technical Committee*** - The Draft Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft FR/EIS) submitted to the USACE on October 22, 2012 for review. These documents are undergoing review by ENLACE and other groups. CEPD will continue providing guidance in support to activities leading up to the approval of the documents.

- ✓ **UPDATE: The environmental documents for the dredging project are expected to be completed by May 2014 (assuming the budget sequestration will not affect the on-going process). EPA continues providing guidance and assistance to Enlace and the Corps of Engineers, as required.**

Could be implemented immediately or in short term:

Assistance to MPC schools -

- ***School evaluation visits*** - Protect children's health in this community by conducting visits to Martin Peña schools to evaluate environmental conditions in schools and make recommendations to the PR Department of Education. These evaluations will include health risks associated to PCBs, Pesticides, lead, asbestos, solid and chemical wastes.
 - ✓ **UPDATE: This action was discussed with Enlace, who offered assistance in the coordination with local schools and the PR Department of Education. CEPD is coordinating a meeting with Enlace to discuss the specifics of the assessments to be conducted and an action calendar. A date for this meeting is expecte mto be finalized by mid-April, 2013.**

- ***Distribution of Pest Management CD to schools and MPC communities***- A CD on how to establish an integrated pest control management has been developed in Spanish. CEPD will be providing training along with copies of the CD shortly.
 - ✓ **UPDATE: Enlace requested additional information on the available information in order to assist EPA is identifying a suitable, effective use**

of the materials. We expect to begin coordination concurrent with the meeting (s) to discuss the calendar for school assessments.

- ***Composting at MPC schools*** - Contact the Syracuse Environmental Finance to pursue including MPC schools in the USDA Organics Project.
 - ✓ **UPDATE: CPD mneed to obtain additional information on this project in order to coordinate efforts effectively.**

Expanding conversation on "green practices" throughout MPC-

- ***Coordinate workshops with ENLACE and other MPC community groups for residents and establishments about green practices*** - take the opportunity to listen to community concerns on emerging issues and identify ways to address them.
 - ✓ **UPDATE: Initial internal discussion regarding possible coordination with EPA's Sustainability Council and other appropriate organizations began on April 2013. Enlace also requested EPA's assistance in the revision of a construction and resource conservation guidance document that they are preparing in-house. Given the prioritization of the environmental documents for the channel dredging project, plus possible coordination thru the UWFP, this project is expected to continue development throughout the remainder of calendar year 2013.**

Water conservation at MPC -

- ***Coordinate with PRASA the distribution of water conservation kits and distribute at MPC communities*** - similar projects have proven to be successful in other areas of Puerto Rico and can be implemented at MPC.
 - ✓ **UPDATE: Initial internal discussion regarding possible coordination with EPA's Sustainability Council and other appropriate organizations is expected to begin shortly. The availability of the water conservation kits and related resources remains to be determined. Enlace also requested EPA's assistance in the revision of a construction and resource conservation guidance document that they are preparing in-house and that may incorporate elements from this initiative. Given the prioritization of the environmental documents for the channel dredging project, plus possible coordination thru the UWFP, this project is expected to continue development throughout the remainder of calendar year 2013.**
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Climate Change –

- ***Developing the first community-based climate change adaptation plan for Puerto Rico.*** The first phase of the plan will be focused on the Vulnerability and Risk Assessment as petitioned by ENLACE for Buena Vista Community. The goal is for this plan to serve as a model for future community adaptation plans in Puerto Rico. The plan will be prepared by a multi-stakeholder team, including the local community, ensuring a bottom-up perspective to climate resilience. CEPD is developing this project in conjunction with ENLACE and the Puerto Rico Coastal Zone Management Program through the PR Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and a student from the Graduate School of Planning of the University of PR who is doing an internship at CEPD. Other stakeholders to be included: Municipality of San Juan, PRASA, PREPA, etc.

✓ **UPDATE: ?**

SEPs focused on MPC –

- **Develop a list of potential SEP projects to have available for consideration to augment MPC efforts**

✓ **UPDATE: ?**

Facilitating the discussion and planning among federal agencies

- ***Bring other federal partners to the table - Conducting periodic meetings among federal partners*** - The environmental restoration of Martin Peña Channel depends on the coordination of efforts from a number of federal agencies who must assess the project, coordinate efforts, provide guidance or assist through the development of permits, certifications, and related documentation. Among these agencies are those in charge of protecting water bodies and associated resources, such as EPA, USACE, NOAA and USFWS. We will also reach out to HUD, DOT, DOE, NRCS and others.

✓ **UPDATE: This task may be largely coordinated through the UWFP.**

Road to 2016 “C” Day

- *Continue coordination and identification of opportunities to assist the Enforcement Team to make sure we do everything we can to make it happen.*