

YEAR-END SUMMARY REPORT – FISCAL YEAR 2019

Reporting Period: 01 OCTOBER 2018 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2019

Urban Waters Ambassador (UWA): Matthew Vielhaber

Area of Responsibility: Meramec & Big River Partnership Location

On 01 October 2019, the Urban Waters Ambassador position will transition from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to East-West Gateway. As such, Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 will be the last year USACE will handle the Urban Waters Ambassador position after five successful years of partnership between USACE and the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA).

The Meramec & Big River Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) location successfully completed its 5th year of existence in FY2019. The vision for the Meramec and Big UWFP location remains to 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.

The Meramec & Big River UWFP location continued with several overarching goals throughout FY2019 (01 October 2018 through 30 September 2019). The goals of the partnership remain to: 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; and learn from early and visible victories to fuel long-term action.

Throughout FY2019, the UW Ambassador focused on three main themes to achieve success for the Meramec & Big River UWFP location:

- Coordination between Partners
- Resource Alignment and Community Support
- Public Education and Outreach

A summary of the “highlights” are provided in the report subsections below.



Big River at Rockford Beach Park

Coordination between Partners

There are currently multiple ongoing projects occurring within the Meramec and Big River watersheds. These activities are being managed by a variety of groups, including Federal, State, and local organizations. In an effort to promote a more efficient and effective use of resources and break down silos that can

hamper communication, the UW Ambassador regularly focuses on better coordination between agencies and facilitate collaboration. For example, the UW Ambassador held regular weekly coordination meetings between teaming agencies to ensure communication and sharing of information vital to efficiently executing projects within the watershed.

There are currently two large Federal efforts being performed in the watershed to address environmental issues: an ecosystem restoration project led by USACE and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MoDNR); and remediation projects on multiple USEPA Superfund sites. The goal of the USACE ecosystem restoration project is to design and construct a cost effective project that will protect, enhance, and restore degraded aquatic ecosystem within the Meramec River Basin. The goal of the USEPA remediation efforts is to protect public health from contaminants (specifically heavy metals) within the watershed. Both the USACE ecosystem restoration project and the USEPA remediation projects are located in the same general area of the Big River and focus on tackling issues left behind from historic lead mining.

The Big River Task Force (BRTF) is a multi-agency team that has agreed to come together to break down silos, communicate as a group, and work together to increase efficiencies and positive outcomes in the watershed. Led by the UW Ambassador, a BRTF meeting was held on 24-25 October 2018 in Farmington, Missouri. The BRTF is a meeting of State and Federal agencies with responsibilities for remediation and restoration in the Big River watershed. The purpose is to discuss cross-cutting issues from the standpoint of



Big River Task Force Meeting - OCT 2018

coordination and information transfer. The BRTF facilitates an opportunity for local stakeholders and the members of the BRTF to talk about the watershed in a meaningful, consistent, and accessible way. The BRTF was attended by representatives from several Federal and State Agencies to include the USACE, USEPA, US Fish and Wildlife Service, MoDNR, Missouri Department of Conservation, Agency of Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, US Geological Survey, and US Forest Service.

Discussion have started for the planning of the next BRTF meeting to be held in FY2020. The next BRTF meeting is tentatively scheduled to be held during the winter of FY2020 in Farmington, Missouri within the heart of the watershed. The goal will be to continue to facilitate communication between the Federal, State, and local organizations working in the watershed. Additionally, this meeting will be used as an opportunity for outreach to local landowners and the general public.

In FY2019, the Meramec & Big River UWFP location continued its communication efforts with Phase 2 of the UWFP location Communications Strategy. The goals of the Communication Strategy (Phase 2) include: the creation of 1-2 page infographic summary documents that can be used for media packages and partnership website at www.urbanwaters.gov; website discussion and recommendations to assist the partnership by developing options for a website approach/hosting; creation of branding with tagline and logo; and development of media strategy with recommendations for social media activities, including the

use of existing social media activities of the Communication subgroup and affiliated partners. The intent of the infographics and branding with logo is to provide a unified message that can be used for delivery by multiple State, Federal, and local groups in their communication with the public. A central purpose of the Big River Cleanup and Restoration Effort social media strategy is to create low-cost and effective communication tools for the public and interested stakeholders to learn about lead contamination and the Big River to assist with lead education and outreach efforts. The Communication Strategy Team settled on Big River “Clean-Up & Restoration Effort” or CURE for the branding with tagline and logo.



Resource Alignment and Community Support

The UW Ambassador helped facilitate a successful submittal of an USEPA technical assistance grant for the Lower Meramec stakeholder group. The \$100,000 EPA Green Infrastructure (GI) / Low-Impact Development (LID) Technical Assistance work was awarded in FY2018 with work initiated in FY2019. In FY2019, the GI/LID team began developing an easy to use tool kit for healthy watershed options for communities in the project area. The purpose of the tool kit is to guide communities in their selection of healthy watershed practices for existing and new development and provide a process for incorporating these best practices into Hazard Mitigation Plans. The GI/LID team is coordinating with the USACE Lower Meramec Floodplain Management Plan (FMP) to help communities identify and prioritize potential actions and projects. The tool kit will be integrated as much as possible into the FMP at multiple key milestone points such as identifying natural floodplain functions, set goals, identify measures/activities to achieve goals, screening of viable measures/activities and draft action plan.

The UW Ambassador attended the 2018 Urban Waters National Training Workshop on 16-19 October 2018 in Washington DC. The training workshop provided a great opportunity for Urban Waters Ambassadors across the nation to share information with one another, while presentations and break-out sessions provided resources for the Ambassadors to utilize in their respective Urban Waters locations. There were several relevant discussions held including future funding for the UW Ambassador position with future EPA funding in question. Future funding will ultimately need to be sustained by other funding sources for the Meramec & Big River UWFP location to sustain success. Funding identification will be one of the major goals of the UW Ambassador moving forward.

On 25-27 March 2019, the UW Ambassador was part of the USACE St. Louis District contingent that met with multiple Congressional Representatives in Washington D.C. to discuss ongoing Federal projects. The work within the Meramec and Big River watershed was specifically discussed, to include future support and assistance from Congress. The partnership between the USACE and USEPA was also highlighted.

Public Education and Outreach

The UW Ambassador continued interagency coordination of ongoing projects being executed within the watershed, including the USACE/MoDNR ecosystem restoration feasibility study, USEPA remedial activities under Superfund, and TNC's watershed management plan. The UW Ambassador facilitated public involvement for the USACE “St. Louis Riverfront - Meramec River Basin Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility

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Study with Integrated Environmental Assessment” by meeting with multiple landowners to discuss the future work and associated timing of future ecosystem restoration efforts along the Big River. In addition the UW Ambassador supported several USEPA Public Availability Sessions that discussed future USPEA remediation activities to be performed in the watershed, including upcoming sampling events within the Big River riparian corridor.



On 26-27 September 2019, the Urban Waters Ambassador (Matt Vielhaber), several USACE team members, and multiple partners (Federal, State, and Local) hosted a PADDLE YOUR PARKS event at George Winter Park in Fenton, Missouri. Approximately 225 4th graders from the Meramec Valley R-III School District attended the event. The USACE St. Louis District and the USEPA Urban Waters Federal Partnership aims to increase public awareness of watershed issues in the Meramec and Big River watersheds through outreach and education. The students participated on a guided canoe float to help them investigate the complex relationship between land use and aquatic habitats, focus on

watershed concepts, and learn about local water quality issues. In addition to on-the-water learning, a series of on-land labs were provided to introduce students to issues affecting water quality, the diversity of mussels and macro-invertebrates species, the concepts of pollution and bioaccumulation, and general wetland science. The PADDLE YOUR PARKS event successfully supplemented classroom learning with scientific field experiences and motivates the next generation to take action to restore and protect natural habitats. The event was made successful through the hard work of all the partners who donated time and supplies.



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PADDLE YOUR PARKS 2019

