

## **Urban Water Partnership Meeting**

**Caño Martín Peña, San Juan, PR**

**November 16, 2015**

### **Meeting Notes**

#### **I. Participants**

Refer to Attachment 1 for list of participants.

#### **II. Welcoming remarks and introductions**

Ingrid Vila, Urban Water Ambassador (UWA) and Judith Enck, Region 2 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator offered welcoming remarks to meeting participants. Participants introduced themselves stating the agency or entity they represent.

#### **III. Urban Water Activities**

Evelyn Huertas presented the result of the Soil Shop Fair conducted by EPA and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) on October 3, 2015 in the Buena Vista community to disseminate the results of the study on bioavailability of metals (Arsenic and Lead) in Martín Peña urban gardens, conduct Lead (Pb) soil and blood screenings. Workshops were offered regarding health and best management practices for urban farming.

Evelyn Huertas recommends better coordination and dissemination of information within the communities when activities like these are coordinated, because although participants were satisfied with the activity, number of participants was below expectations. She also indicated she had already discussed this with Enlace to ensure better coordination and engagement in the future.

#### **IV. Work Plan Progress**

Ingrid Vila (UWA) facilitated a discussion regarding the progress of the Caño Martín Peña Work Plan adopted in July 2015.

##### **a. Ecosystem restoration and infrastructure projects**

Ingrid Vila informed that the Caño Martín Peña has been making important strides in the past months. She presented a summary of news coverage during the months of September and October 2015 that include the signing of Consent Decrees between EPA and the Municipality of San Juan (MSJ) and between EPA and the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA). Both of these include needed infrastructure projects that will improve conditions in the Caño Martín Peña communities. Furthermore, on October 29, 2015 the EPA, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and Enlace signed a Memorandum of Understanding that delineates the path towards the dredging of the Caño Martín Peña.

Lyvia Rodríguez also informed of the progress in the USACE Ecosystem Restoration Process. After more than 5 years of studies and negotiations, the USACE published for public comment the draft Feasibility Study and Environmental Impact Statement for the dredging of the Caño Martín Peña. Two public meetings were held on October 14, 2015 to receive comments from the general public. The public comment period ended October 26, 2015.

Important next steps include the finalization, adoption and approval of the Feasibility Study and Environmental Impact Statement. This will require close coordination with the USACE in order to finalize in the first semester of 2016. Also the identification of local funds to match federal funding. The estimate is that a local appropriation of \$5 million per year for 15 years is required.

#### **b. Economic Benefit Analysis**

A close collaboration between Enlace, the UN Global Cities Compact and the RMIT University in Australia is enabling the commencement of the Economic Benefit Assessment Study of the dredging and revitalization of the Caño Martín Peña.

The purpose of the study is to validate and further define the socio-economic benefits of the Caño Martín Peña dredging, which will improve quality of life conditions for residents and stimulate economic activity and competitiveness of the Metropolitan Area.

This initial stage will consist of community surveys, coordinated through Enlace, to compile socio-economic information which will be analyzed by RMIT University professors.

#### **c. Infrastructure and Housing**

Jose Javier Pérez from the PRASA informed of delays in project schedules because of lack of access to financial markets due to the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico.

Ingrid Vila informed that a proposal was prepared and presented by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico for HUD's National Disaster Resiliency Competition presenting the Caño Martín Peña as the selected location for action. Results are expected in January 2016.

Lyvia Rodríguez informed that the Municipality of San Juan (MSJ) identified \$1 million in funding for the housing relocations needed for the Rexach Siphon project.

#### **d. Socio-economic Development**

María de los Angeles de Jesús, from the Small Business Administration informed that the Small Business Administration (SBA) was starting to delineate with Enlace possible collaboration opportunities to support the development of small enterprises in the communities.

#### **e. Climate Change and Resiliency**

Regarding initiatives related to climate change adaptation Carmen Guerrero, Secretary of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER) informed that the Caribbean Climate Change Conference will be held in San Juan Nov.17-18, 2015 and that the Caño Martín Peña will be part of the agenda.

Tischa Muñoz Erickson from US Forest Service also mentioned the selection of San Juan as part of the The Urban Resilience to Extremes Sustainability Research Network (URex). URex envisions a new framework aimed at integrating social-ecological-technical/infrastructural system dimensions to conceptualize and analyze infrastructure decisions in a more holistic way, and to work directly with cities and practitioners to envision and implement transitions to more resilient and sustainable infrastructure. She indicated that although this is a city level initiative, the Caño Martín Peña is key in the development of the program.

EPA informed that a green infrastructure project (rain garden) would be developed in the Caño Martín Peña. The contractor has been selected and work should commence in next couple of months.

#### **f. Energy Projects**

Ingrid Vila and Carlos Muñoz from Enlace informed of initial conversations with Univ. of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez professors for identification of opportunities for conservation/efficiency/ renewable energy projects within the communities. Weatherization funding could be a first step. Ingrid Vila will coordinate a meeting with the Energy Affairs Administration to explore this possibility.

### **V. Expand Support**

Javier Laureano, Executive Director of the San Juan Bay Estuary Program (SJBE) informed that the National Estuaries Program Annual Meeting will be held in San Juan

December 2-4, 2015. The program includes a visit to the Caño Martín Peña as well as a panel on the Caño Martín Peña communities.

Javier Laureano also informed that a proposal writer to help initiatives related to the Caño Martín Peña had been identified. Isabel M. Rosa will be sharing her time between the SJBE and Enlace in the identification and preparation of proposals.

Ingrid Vila informed that over 63 projects had been incorporated into the Geoplatform database for the Caño Martín Peña area. Information from Enlace and the Puerto Rico Housing Department is still pending. Partners and the general public can access the Geoplatform to gain better sense of work being developed. It can serve as a useful tool to expand support to the program.

**VI. Next meeting**

The next meeting will be scheduled for March/April 2016.

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## **Attachment 1 – Sign-in sheet**

URBAN WATER PARTNERSHIP MEETING SIGN-IN SHEET			
UW Location: Caño Martín Peña, San Juan, PR		Meeting Date: November 16, 2015	
Meeting time: 3:30pm - 5:00pm		Place/Room: Rainforest Room, EPA Offices, Guaynabo, PR	

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* Tisha Muñoz	USFS		
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