



A grant-funded pilot program focusing on cleaning up Coyote Creek | May 31, 2011

This snapshot provides the structure and key messages of the new Clean Creeks, Healthy Communities Program, which officially launches in June 2011 when San José City Council takes action to accept EPA grant funds to support the program. Contact Ella.Samonsky@sanjoseca.gov or 408-793-4379 for more information.

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

Problem

Despite being a beautiful waterway, Coyote Creek is trash-impaired* meaning trash is significantly damaging the creek as a healthy habitat for fish and wildlife. The creek project area is notably polluted by homeless encampments and illegal dumping.

- In 2009, the Regional Water Quality Control Board designated Coyote Creek as among 24 Bay Area creeks that are impaired* for trash.
- In the last three years, San José-Water District cleanups have pulled approximately 180 tons of trash from homeless encampments in Coyote Creek; of this, approximately 101 tons were from the project area.
- An estimated 100 homeless individuals are encamped along the creek in the study area, which includes the open lands of Kelly Park. The creek is impacted by trash, litter, human waste, and other encampment activities such as clothes washing.
- Four chronic dumpsites exist in the project area, enabled by easy access from nearby roadways. A 2010 San José-Water District cleanup removed 8 tons of trash at one of these dumpsites.

** "Impaired" means a state water quality standard for a certain pollutant has been exceeded, and the water body can no longer support its intended use (in this case, healthy habitat for fish and wildlife).*

Program Solution

The four-year pilot program brings together an interdisciplinary partnership that will target improving creek health with a three-prong approach:

#1—Engage neighbors as creek stewards - Engaging area residents as creek stewards will help eliminate undesirable behaviors in the creek corridor and lead to a safer, healthier creek and community.

- The three targeted neighborhoods are Strong Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) areas:
1) Tully/Senter, 2) Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace, and 3) Spartan/Keyes
- City staff and two grant-funded, part-time community workers will work to increase awareness of Coyote Creek as a neighborhood asset and how active stewardship can deter litter, encampments, and illegal dumping.
- The project envisions 48 educational events, 48 creek and neighborhood cleanup events, and two public art projects in the creek corridor over a four-year project term.

#2—Employ and assist the homeless - Recruiting the homeless from the creek to the creek cleanup program includes providing incentives and assistance to the homeless.

- Downtown Street Teams (DST) will recruit and employ homeless individuals living in the creek encampments in removing trash/litter from the creek and project area; participants will be housed in temporary housing secured by DST until they can move into permanent housing, using Section 8 vouchers. They will also receive food vouchers, case management services, employment skills, and assistance in transitioning into permanent housing.
- Participants will engage in peer-to-peer outreach to other homeless individuals along the creek, encouraging them to get involved in the program, to properly handle their trash, and to transition from the creek.

#3—Deter dumping and litter - Eliminating illegal dumping and trash accumulation in the creek through a combination of creek stewardship activities, creek cleanups, and physical improvements.

- Illegal dumpers are unloading e-waste, batteries, furniture, construction debris, and surplus trash in the creek.
- The Neighborhood Watch program and residents will be enlisted in surveillance of the four chronic dumpsite areas.
- San José will install site improvements and physical barriers at chronic dumpsites to prevent auto access to the creek.
- Joint San José-Water District crews will conduct two large-scale encampment cleanups and four general creek cleanups each year of the four-year pilot program; periodic trash assessments will help quantify the program's results.

over for list of partners/roles and funding information

Partners and Roles

- *Environmental Protection Agency* – Providing a \$680,000 SF Bay Water Quality Improvement Grant for community engagement, dumpsite abatement, initiation of the Downtown Streets Team, and two part-time community activity workers.
- *City of San José* – Providing project administration and coordination, conducting neighborhood outreach to foster creek stewardship, providing for creek cleanups and assessment, and installing barriers to deter dumping.
- *Downtown Streets Team* – A non-profit with a model of engaging and employing homeless persons in cleanup projects; is leading project's element of employing and helping to transition the homeless in the creek project area to permanent housing.
- *Santa Clara Valley Water District* – Providing \$130,000 to support the Downtown Streets Team program and staff and equipment to support large encampment cleanups.
- *Destination: Home* – A public-private partnership focusing on ending homelessness in Santa Clara County; is providing assistance vouchers and assistance with securing additional funding. Ebay is contributing \$20,000 through Destination: Home specifically for this project.
- *San José State University* – Providing project evaluation and community survey services through the Urban & Regional Planning Department and Environmental Studies Department.

Funding Information

Total project budget: \$942,867

EPA grant: \$680,000

Local match: \$262,867

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