

brownfields

Success Story

REINVIGORATING THE USE OF THE ELIZABETH RIVER IN ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY

In Elizabeth, NJ a partnership between EPA and the National Park Service is helping to transform an urban waterway into a community asset.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Elizabeth River, a river which poses unique challenges for the City of Elizabeth, New Jersey, will soon become a focal point for those who live in, work in, and visit the state's oldest city.

The foundations of the River Trail project are built upon input from stakeholders and the community.

A trail is being planned adjacent to these urban waters which will restore natural beauty, become an avenue for pedestrian traffic, and provide recreational and educational activities. The one-mile river trail accentuates the profound Elizabeth history with artwork from local artists.



Stakeholders laying out their thoughts on the River Trail at the Design Charette

EPA's Brownfields and Land Revitalization program and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program have had a successful 12 year partnership with Groundwork USA. Groundwork USA is a network of independent non-profit organizations called Groundwork Trusts focused on stabilizing and revitalizing their communities through projects and programs that improve their environment, economy and quality of life.

Similar to the community led efforts of the Brownfields Program, the Urban Waters initiative is an effort to restore and protect urban water bodies and adjacent lands. The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) goal is to integrate and leverage existing programs to foster increased understanding and a sense of ownership of waters and surrounding land in communities

across the country. This is especially important as urban waters impact large populations and can influence far-reaching land-use decisions.

Project Motivation

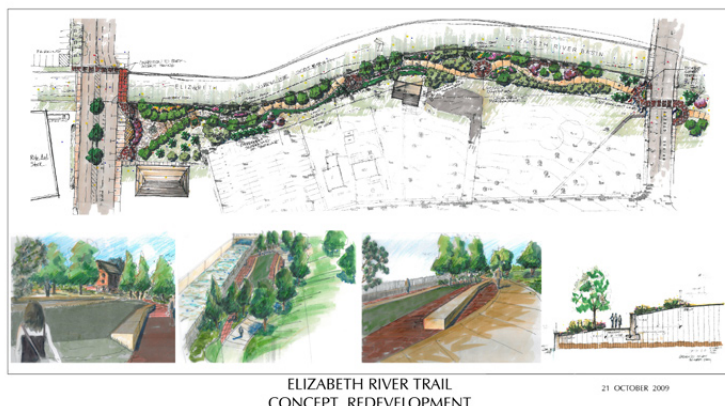
The Groundwork Program, initiated by the National Park Service in Partnership with EPA's Brownfields Program, came to Elizabeth in Union County in 2002, to address the improvement of the City of Elizabeth's brownfield properties and enhance the city's sense of community.

Part of the goal for the nonprofit was to echo the vision of the National Park Service RTCA Program and EPA, and bring the population closer to its heritage of "urban waters" by designing and constructing a river trail. The Elizabeth River Trail Project began in 2003 and quickly became a focal point of the only Groundwork Trust in the State of New Jersey. Groundwork Elizabeth has assembled a large support structure to help with planning and construction of the trail. Currently, the trail is in its final New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) permitting stages, and the program has overcome a number of unforeseen challenges, such as permitting setbacks and archeologic discoveries, which have taken years to solve.

History of Elizabeth and its River

The original land use along the river was agricultural, but by the middle of the 19th century had become highly industrialized. One of the more prominent manufacturers was the Singer Sewing Machine Company, which produced thousands of sewing machines each year. Housed in block long textile style buildings, the company at one point employed thousands of full time workers. By the 1980s global competition had a significant impact on the company's profits and Singer closed down its operation in Elizabeth. Several other businesses, which had enjoyed successful manufacturing operations in the city, also vacated the area. This exodus of manufacturers left behind many structures, known as brownfields, and Elizabeth began to stockpile inventory of such vacancies. With jobs lost and buildings left vacant, Elizabeth soon had to deal with the challenges of a distressed urban area.

As a consequence of urban growth, the Elizabeth River, which had once served as an irrigator for a multitude of successful farms along its banks, became more of a problem as farms turned to paved streets. From the middle of the 1800s, the river would often flood its banks during rainstorms.



The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) identified the City of Elizabeth as a targeted flood area; it was funded for flood control improvements in the Flood Control Act of 1965. USACE channelized the parts of the Elizabeth River that ran through the most densely populated parts of the city and built walls and dirt berms to contain the potentially devastating effects of river flooding. During the construction of the 1970s and 1980s, USACE continually tested the water quality and sediments and found that little contamination and pollution had affected the river's health in the long term. Current land uses along the banks of the river are parks, public facilities such as schools and hospitals, retail businesses, brownfields, remaining industrial areas, and residences.

Partners and Funding

Groundwork Elizabeth administers the Elizabeth River Trail Project. The organization works with a variety of community volunteers and public and private partners, including EPA's Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization, the National Park Service, the City of Elizabeth, and Union County. The project received funding from several entities. With the assistance New Jersey Senators and Congressional representation, Groundwork funding was written in the Transportation Act of 2006 receiving \$340,000 over five years. The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders leveraged \$500,000 towards the design and construction of the program soon afterwards. Through the NJDEP's Green Acres Program, the program was afforded more funds with which to build the trail and demonstrate the historical significance of the river and the city.

Art Connects River and Community

The National Recreational Trails Program funded artwork along the trail which was completed in 2009. Dario Scholis, a local artist and resident of Elizabeth, worked with Groundwork to design historic slides, which are reused recycled signage from Union County to portray the city's rich history. The slides have already been installed adjacent to the trail location. The community appreciates the artwork, which is positioned on iron fencing put in place during the USACE flood control project. Some of the slides portray two of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, who lived in Elizabeth. Others show the manufacturing companies which have come and gone along the river's shores. One of the more popular slides is of Frederic Law Olmsted, the founding father of Landscape Architecture, who is best remembered as the architect for Central Park in New York. Mr. Olmsted was commissioned by Union County in the early 1900s to design the concepts for most of Union County's parks including the location of the future River Trail.

Ongoing Project Success

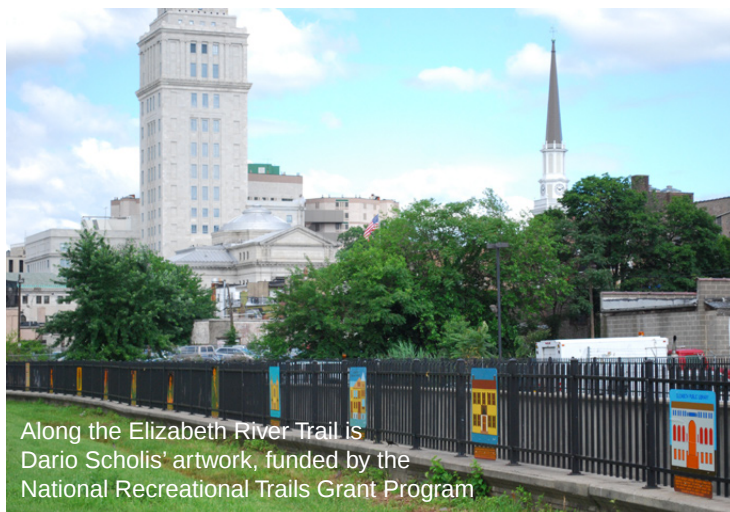
The construction of the project has been delayed due to necessary authorization and permitting from various entities within local, state and federal governments for the last seven years. Also, a two-year archeological investigation

discovered pottery shards from the colonial era. Even with these hurdles, the City of Elizabeth is close to its dream of "bringing back nature to the city and having a river trail to do it by," said Mr.

Phillips. Stakeholders and community

members attended the Vision Planning Charette in 2006, and the city has hosted events such as River Awareness Day. The river trail will be adjacent to the high school and the city's only hospital. This proximity offers high school students the opportunity to take coursework about the river's dynamics, environment, and ecology. Hospital patients will be able to step outside and rehabilitate in fresh air surrounded by beautiful scenery. The community will benefit from non-motorized boat launches, fishing holes, educational and scenic overlooks, walking trails, and historic artwork.

**According to
Jonathon Philips,
Executive Director of
Groundwork Elizabeth,
"A project with so
many challenges
is that much more
rewarding in the end."**



Along the Elizabeth River Trail is Dario Scholis' artwork, funded by the National Recreational Trails Grant Program

The City of Elizabeth is working with another nonprofit, the Elizabeth Development Company, to address approximately 200 brownfields sites that have known contamination and active case numbers through the NJDEP. Groundwork Elizabeth, as a partner with the city, county and EPA, has significantly restored the city's charm, its attraction as a business destination, and improved the quality of life for its residents and visitors. Groundwork Elizabeth's efforts to build the trail, which began in 2003, are soon to be realized. Design is completed, final permitting is underway, and bidding for construction of paths, boat ramps, and other amenities should begin in 2011.

The trail will afford the public another way to get around the city, and it will educate, entertain and engage the public by providing a sense of place along an urban waterway. The community's desire of returning a place of nature to its city is about to come true.

URBAN WATERS

Urban environments, particularly in underserved communities, are typically characterized by paved or covered “impervious” surfaces, working waterfronts with industrial facilities, abandoned industrial sites, and other underutilized or contaminated lands. These characteristics, in combination with aging and inadequate storm water management infrastructure, generate excess and untreated runoff that transports sewage and hazardous wastes into local water bodies. Urban patterns of historical development often make waterways inaccessible to adjacent neighborhoods. Lack of access to waterways limits the ability of communities to connect and participate in restoring waterways as healthy living ecosystems and reap the benefits of living close to the water in the city. Addressing these issues to ensure healthy and accessible urban waters can help grow local businesses and enhance educational, recreational and social opportunities in nearby communities.

EPA is learning from community efforts already underway and supporting communities as active participants in the restoration and protection of urban waters. EPA works to increase access to waterways, which promotes a sense of public ownership of water resources and integrates environmental goals with other pressing priorities like economic development, education, job creation, and greenspace creation and preservation.

URBAN WATERS RESOURCES

www.epa.gov/urbanwaters

Watershed Planning and Management

- Managing Wet Weather with Green Infrastructure - cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program_id=298
- Directory of EPA Watershed Publications - water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/publications.cfm
- Key EPA Water Internet Tools Course - www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/wacademy/epatools
- Watershed Central and Wiki - wiki.epa.gov/watershed2

Water Quality and Pollution Prevention

- EPA Enforcement and Compliance History Online - www.epa-echo.gov/echo
- Nonpoint Source Pollution - www.epa.gov/owow/keep/NPS/index.html
- Water Quality Assessment Tools and Models - water.epa.gov/scitech/datait/models/index.cfm

Community Information

- Groundwork USA - www.groundworkusa.org
- National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program - www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/rtca
- Adopt Your Watershed - www.epa.gov/owow/keep/adopt/index.html
- Community Culture and the Environment A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place - www.epa.gov/care/library/community_culture.pdf
- EPA Smart Growth - www.epa.gov/smartgrowth
- Surf Your Watershed - cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm

Outreach Development

- Coastal Urban Waters Toolkit - www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/debris
- Getting In Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns - www.epa.gov/owow/nps/toolbox/guide.htm
- Non-Point Source Toolbox - www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox

Funding

- Brownfields Grants to Support Assessment/Cleanup of Contaminated Property, Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grants, and Targeted Brownfields Assessments - www.epa.gov/brownfields/grant_info/index.htm
- Catalog of Federal Funding Sources for Watershed Protection - cfpub.epa.gov/fedfund
- Sustainable Finance Website - www.epa.gov/owow/funding/trainings.html
- Watershed Funding Resource Directory - water.epa.gov/aboutow/owow/funding.cfm

Case Studies

- Case Studies for Stormwater Management on Compacted, Contaminated Soils in Dense Urban Areas - www.epa.gov/brownfields/tools/swcs0408.pdf
- Urban Agriculture on Brownfields Website - www.epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag
- Targeted Watershed Grant Case Studies - water.epa.gov/grants_funding/twg/initiative_index.cfm

For more information on the Elizabeth River Trail Project, and on other brownfield related Groundwork projects, contact Groundwork Elizabeth at 908-289-0262, or visit the Groundwork Elizabeth web site at: www.groundworkelizabeth.com