

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



*Mid-America Regional Council*

## **Regional Water Quality Public Education Program**

Clean Water. Healthy Life.

## Regional Water Quality Public Education Program Annual Report, January–December 2020

### COMMITTEE HISTORY

Since 2003, MARC has convened a committee of representatives from local governments and environmental organizations to develop a Regional Watershed Public Education program. The committee was formed in response to numerous requests from local governments to develop a cooperative approach to water quality public education and to meet federal NPDES Phase I/II regulatory requirements. The committee's efforts have provided a firm foundation for its goal of educating the general public about actions to reduce non-point source (NPS) pollution.

### PROGRAM DETAILS

The Regional Water Quality Public Education Program is a comprehensive approach to raising public awareness about watershed issues and water quality in the Kansas City region. The long-term water quality public education strategy capitalizes on momentum created by past water quality awareness topics and community initiatives such as the Kansas Healthy Yards and Communities program. The program's outreach campaign structure identifies several specific water quality issues to address throughout the year. However, the structure remains flexible by promoting additional messages as opportunities arise. Campaigns consist of varying levels of support and methods of outreach, as explained below.

### PROGRAM FOCUS

During the past 17 years, the program has addressed several top NPS pollution issues facing our region. The program's theme — "Clean Water. Healthy Life." — focuses on changing behaviors to improve water quality, community health and quality of life. Each year, the Regional Water Quality Education Committee (WQEC), with MARC staff support, develops an NPS pollution-focused message that supports the program's theme and determines the most effective means for disseminating the message. The committee's education and outreach activities vary each year but typically consist of a media campaign, a mini-grant program, training, and education and outreach materials.

### PUBLIC ATTITUDE SURVEY

The committee administers a biennial public attitude survey to gauge the public's knowledge of and attitudes about water quality in the metropolitan area. Survey questions are designed to measure the impact that education efforts have on the public's overall awareness of water quality concerns and on behaviors that impact water quality in the region. It provides a benchmark for objective evaluation of public education initiatives over time and provides guidance for future public policy, planning and education efforts. Our ninth biennial survey, conducted in late 2020, highlighted the following:

- Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed were supportive of funding the restoration of stream corridors. (Eight percent decrease from 2018.)
- Sixty-one percent of respondents were supportive of funding the restoration of urban waterways. (Ten percent decrease from 2018.)
- Forty-nine percent of respondents were supportive of purchasing land along stream corridors. (Ten percent decrease from 2018.)
- Eighty-six percent of those surveyed were supportive of adopting ordinances that require developers to conserve natural areas. (Two percent decrease from 2018.)
- Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed were supportive of encouraging the development of sustainable practices to minimize negative impacts on waterways in the area. (Two percent decrease from 2018.)
- Fifty-four percent of respondents would be willing to pay more for a property in a community that focuses on protecting water quality by conserving natural areas. (Two percent decrease from 2018.)

- Seventy-three percent of those surveyed agree that public entities should be doing more to directly implement protection and restoration of urban waterways. (Five percent decrease from 2018.)
- Thirty-eight percent of respondents would be willing to pay an increase in taxes to improve the quality of water in lakes and streams in the community where they live. (Five percent decrease from 2018.)
- Sixteen percent of those surveyed used social media as a source of information about water quality. (Two percent decrease from 2018.)

[View the full report at www.marc.org/Environment/Water-Resources/Reports-and-Publications/Reports](http://www.marc.org/Environment/Water-Resources/Reports-and-Publications/Reports)

### 2020 PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### *"Don't Leave It Behind" Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Campaign*

From August to October 2020, the Water Quality Public Education Committee ran an online media campaign to inform metro area residents about the importance of properly disposing of PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign was posted on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest as well as the home page of the public education website CleanWaterKCMetro.org where it was viewed 10,713 times by 7,159 visitors.

Online media campaign results:

- Total impressions: 2,162,304
- Total views: 211, 996
- Total clicks: 3,796

#### *Messaging*

PPE left on streets and in parking lots washes into storm sewers that lead to rivers and streams. Plastics and other materials in PPE generally take years to breakdown and sometimes leech toxic chemicals into the water supply. Picking up PPE and disposing of it properly is a simple way you can help keep our water clean. To learn more about water quality in Greater Kansas City, visit CleanWaterKCMetro.org.

#### *Plan It Native Partnership Messaging*

The 2020 Plant It Native Conference, hosted by Deep Roots, promoted native landscapes for a healthy planet. A video presentation on the importance of picking up PPE was shown at the virtual 2020 event in addition to a \$1000 sponsorship.

### EDUCATION AND OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

#### *Native Plants and Rain Gardens*

Continued to distribute:

- "Build Your Own Rain Garden" how-to brochure.
- "Know your Roots" brochure.
- Rain gauges designed with native species landscapes as promotional giveaway items.
- Outdoor-rated, "Do Not Mow/Native Planting" signage for BMPs

#### *Pet Waste*

Continued to distribute:

- "Pick Up After Your Pet" brochures.
- Portable, refillable pet waste bag dispensers with "Pick Up After Your Pet" message as promotional giveaway items.



Messaging and Droplet Character



WQ Education Postcards



Branded Car Litter Bags



Stormwater Educational Door Hanger (English/Spanish)

**Lawn Care**

Continued to distribute:

- “Build Your Own Rain Barrel” brochure.
- “Redirect or Disconnect Your Downspout” brochure.
- “Know Your Soil” brochure.
- “Making and Using Compost” brochure.
- “Use Lawn Chemicals Wisely” brochure.

**Brochure Translations**

Continued to:

- Use existing supply of Spanish-language brochures.
- Distribute double-sided doorhangers (in English and Spanish) as a companion outreach tool for neighbors near stormdrain marker installations.

**General Stormwater Education**

Continued to:

- Distribute stormdrain inlet markers for local municipalities.
- Distribute “Keep Sediment Out of Our Water”, “Know Your Watershed”, “Protect Our Streams” and “Stormdrain Stewardship” brochures.
- Make the committee’s Water Quality Education Program banner available for community events and functions.
- Distribute automotive trash bags with the “Stop Littering” imprinted message.

**NEW ITEM: Water Quality Education Postcards**

The Committee used artwork developed by the Kansas City Art Institute to develop educational postcards for metro area residents. Postcards outlined actions individuals could take to improve stream water quality, including using less fertilizer, landscaping with native plants, and picking up pet waste. 7500 postcards were mailed out to residents of Wyandotte County, KS with support from the United Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, KS.

**Printed Materials by the Numbers:**

Brochures	Storm Drain Markers	Portable/Car Litter Bags
500	250	500
Native Planting Public Signage	Pet Waste Bag Dispensers	WQ Education Postcards
23	500	7500
<b>Total</b>		
9273		

**TRAINING**

**Webcasts**

The committee was involved in five webinars in 2020:

- "Climate Adaptation: Watershed Management and Transportation Planning in the Blue River Watershed", May 1, 2020.
- "Riparian Management Strategies in the Blue River Watershed", May 8, 2019.
- "Environmental Justice", Summer 2020.
- "Stormwater Webinar", Summer 2020.
- "Landscape & Green Infrastructure Model Ordinance Workshop", August 5, 2020.

**GRANT PROGRAMS**

Each year, the committee offers funding opportunities to local nonprofit and educational organizations for education and outreach events related to reducing stormwater runoff and improving water quality in area creeks and streams. Proposals undergo a competitive selection process and are evaluated by a grant selection subcommittee.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, several grantees adjusted the scope and/or timeline of their projects to better align with the need for social distancing and other public health and safety measures. The Water Quality Education Committee awarded grants to the following organizations:

**Green Works in Kansas City (\$5,000)**

Due to social distancing requirements, Green Works pivoted away from holding an in-person event in the Tower East neighborhood, to focusing on public information and educational activities they could safely carry out from their classroom space at the Green Works midtown office (607 East 31st Street). Activities include designing and installing two water quality window displays at the classroom (one during the winter and one during the spring); creating two video public service announcements highlighting specific water quality issues and actions; hosting First Friday openings at the on-site retail store; and selling native plants at spring retail openings.

**Due to COVID-19, this project will be completed by May 31, 2021.**

**KC Farm School at Gibbs Road (\$2,500)**

KC Farm School at Gibbs Road planned and built a physical rain garden between the farm driveway and peach orchard to demonstrate how stormwater runoff could be used as a resource for homeowners, gardeners and students through hands-on workshops and socially distanced classes at the facility's on-campus farm. The garden was scientifically designed, dug and planted during fall 2020. Local youth and adult visitors got to learn about rain garden design and water conservation techniques during this process. KC Farm School also developed 4 learning modules with the help of stormwater professionals, environmental specialists and teachers. These modules were used to engaged 53 youth participants in activities involving the raingarden build. They will continue to support K-12 and adult classes, creating a permanent educational feature and multi-level class curricula.

### **Little Blue River Watershed Coalition (\$3,000)**

Originally, the Little Blue River Watershed Coalition (LBRWC) planned to hold a watershed festival at the Anita B. Gorman Discovery Center on March 27th. However, due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the festival was canceled. Grant funds were reallocated to the Big Muddy cleanup planned for October 3rd on the Missouri River at Kaw Point Park; and the 30th annual Project Blue River Rescue was also rescheduled for October 2020. To accommodate the restrictions on large gatherings and social distancing, LBRWC combined these two weekend events into a five weekend, month-long series of opportunities for families and neighbors to get outdoors and get engaged with the water systems in their own backyards. The LBRWC campaign "30 days of river cleanups to celebrate 30 years of Project Blue River Rescue" was promoted through e-mails, social media and partner newsletters with a total of over 3,500 impressions. Individual groups scheduled a time to either pickup trash with a guide at a Blue or Missouri River site, or clean up a local park or river of their choosing. Due to health department restrictions, fewer than 100 students, corporate employees and family members cleaned one site on the Missouri River and 10 sites on the Blue River. Despite the low attendance, the volunteers managed to collect almost a ton of trash, including several tires, a car battery, and household hazardous waste such as oil and paint.

### **Missouri River Relief (\$2,644)**

After cancelling the original Kansas City clean-up in April 2020 due to COVID-19, Missouri River Relief created new policies and procedures, as well as program adaptations to continue programming during the pandemic. Going forward, Missouri River Relief will plan and implement a large-scale community-based cleanup on the banks of the Missouri River in Kansas City, MO on August 21, 2021. Volunteers will work in teams to remove tons of illegally and improperly disposed of trash and debris from the banks, instilling a sense of responsibility for volunteers to take back to their communities, reinforcing long-lasting solutions to our regional watershed issues. This program is now part of a series of rolling cleanups that will take place along the 200-mile stretch of the Missouri River between Kansas City and Jefferson City during fall 2021.

**Due to COVID-19, this project will now be completed by October 31, 2021.**

### **Manheim Park Community Garden (\$2,100)**

Manheim Gardens planned and built a rain garden along the building frontage to deal with runoff that obstructed the public sidewalk. Manheim Gardens also planned to design and install informational signs describing the stormwater retention system, and the importance of systems like it. Manheim Garden's board, along with 20 neighborhood volunteers, were involved in the planning and installation of this project; as was The Water Gardens Society of Greater Kansas City and House of Rocks Inc. Many of the design and installation elements were delayed due to COVID-19 causing an inability to host regular volunteer days. But Manheim was able to get the major part of the work done in smaller groups despite these challenges. There are now over 700 families in the Manheim Neighborhood who can now safely walk down the sidewalk without slipping and falling — while enjoying the unique flora and fauna that will grow up around this feature. Due to COVID-19, Manheim Park Community Gardens was not able to hold a planned "Water Day" party on the grounds of the newly improved system. However, Manheim Park was able to conduct self-guided water garden tours and welcomed many visitors in 2020.

### **Oakhill Day School (\$4,756)**

Oakhill Day School is building a water quality education trail alongside an existing 700-square-foot rain garden that will include several water quality best practices demonstrations including rain barrels, native shrubs, and compost bins. One permanent informational sign will accompany each feature along the trail. The easy walking trail will open up the site beyond science class, allowing Oakhill to create a reaching and teaching space to educate members of the communities of Gladstone, Clay and Platte Counties. Oakhill will also build an outdoor stream modeling table to promote understanding of watersheds.

**Due to COVID-19, this project will be completed by May 31, 2021.**

### **StoneLion Puppet Theatre (\$5,000)**

Due to Covid-19, StoneLion Puppet Theatre had to cancel their annual Illuminated Waters Festival, originally scheduled for Memorial Day weekend in 2020. Instead, StoneLion Puppet Theatre will produce twelve filmed environmental education public service announcements based on trending social media memes. These puppet parodies will carry a clean water message and a call for action from puppets designed to look like the items and materials contaminating water systems (takeout sacks, plasticware, cigarettes, etc). The campaign's name and hashtag will be #puppetstrashtalking. These PSAs will be posted on social media platforms, aired on television stations on local college campuses, and given to area schools to distribute. Ten local elementary schools will be offered a six-week series of PSAs and a live environmental puppet-making workshop on the Zoom teleconferencing platform. The engagements are designed for students to foment a conversation on how each and every one of us can make a difference to mitigate stormwater runoff and non-source point pollution (NPP). Each school will also be given a link to a filmed virtual puppet show from StoneLion's live touring roster to share with their students and families for up to one week. This unique program will be offered free of charge and is focused on providing education for children and adults about the effects of their actions on the water system, and to teach more environmentally-friendly water management practices to implement at home.

**Due to COVID-19, this project will be completed by March 31, 2021.**



**Manheim Park Community Garden**

## FUNDING

In January 2020, MARC submitted a program funding request to local governments for \$141,350. During the course of the year, 14 local governments supported the program. Participating governments are listed below.

## PARTICIPATING GOVERNMENTS

Clay County, Missouri

Fairway, Kansas\*\*

Gardner, Kansas\*\*

Gladstone, Missouri

Jackson County, Missouri

Johnson County, Kansas \*

Kansas City, Missouri

Leawood, Kansas\*\*

Lenexa, Kansas \*\*\*

Lee's Summit, Missouri

Liberty, Missouri

Merriam, Kansas\*\*

Mission, Kansas\*\*

Mission Hills, Kansas\*\*

Olathe, Kansas\*\*

Overland Park, Kansas \*\*\*

Platte County, Missouri

Prairie Village, Kansas\*\*

Raymore, Missouri

Raytown, Missouri

Roeland Park, Kansas\*\*

Shawnee, Kansas\*\*

Westwood, Kansas\*\*

Westwood Hills, Kansas\*\*

Unified Government of Wyandotte County /  
Kansas City, Kansas\*\*\*

*\*(Contributes for all Johnson County cities and unincorporated areas)*

*\*\* (Cities covered by Johnson County contribution)*

*\*\*\* (Contributes additional funding above standard per capita rate)*

## WQEC COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

Justin Stuedemann, Stormwater Specialist  
Community Development  
Lenexa, Kansas

Zachary Kramer, Inspector  
Planning & Zoning Department  
Clay County, Missouri

## MARC STAFF

Tom Jacobs, Director of Environmental  
Programming

Synthia Isah, Water Quality Planner

Joe Gauer, Public Affairs Coordinator

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## CONTACT

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[www.marc.org/water](http://www.marc.org/water)