Mid-America Regional Council

Regional Water Quality Public Education Program

2018 ANNUAL REPORT

Clean Water. Healthy Life.
CLEAN WATER. HEALTHY LIFE.
MARC Regional Water Quality Public Education Program Annual Report, 2018

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 15 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. The water quality survey provides a benchmark for objective evaluation of public education initiatives over time, and provides guidance for future public policy, planning and education efforts. Our eighth biennial survey, conducted in late 2018, highlighted the following:

- **Sixty-five percent** of those surveyed were supportive of funding the restoration of stream corridors. (Eighteen percent increase from 2016.)
- **Seventy-one percent** of respondents were supportive of funding the restoration of urban waterways. (Seventeen percent increase from 2016.)
- **Fifty-nine percent** of respondents were supportive of purchasing land along stream corridors. (Fifteen percent increase from 2016.)
- **Eighty-eight** percent of those surveyed were supportive of adopting ordinances that require developers to conserve natural areas. (Eleven percent increase from 2016.)
- **Eighty-nine** percent of those surveyed were supportive of encouraging the development of sustainable practices to minimize negative impacts on waterways in the area. (Eleven percent increase from 2016.)
- **Fifty-six 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. (Eleven percent increase from 2016.)
- **Seventy-eight percent** of those surveyed agree that public entities should be doing more to directly
implement protection and restoration of urban waterways. (Nine percent increase from 2016.)

- **Forty-three 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. (Eight percent increase from 2016.)

- **Eighteen percent** of those surveyed used social media as a source of information about water quality. (Fourteen percent increase from 2016.)

View the full report at www.marc.org/Environment/Water-Resources/Reports-and-Publications/Reports

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**2018 PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

**Direct Outreach and Education**

The program developed a new database of homeowner and neighborhood association organizations to more directly engage citizens with information about how to prevent stormwater runoff and pollution in their communities. In November, an email blast sharing ways to improve water quality in neighborhoods reached more than 500 homeowner and neighborhood associations. The messaging also informed readers about WQEC’s mini-grant program, and featured a new animated video addressing litter, starring the water quality droplet character. The new animation was produced in 2018, diving deeper into the issue of littering with a vintage video game theme.

**Philly Award**

The committee received a silver Philly Award from Nonprofit Connect in the short video category for its series of four educational animations featuring ways to prevent NPS pollution. The committee’s entry was among 160 entries from over 90 nonprofit organizations. The annual Philly Awards recognize outstanding achievement in nonprofit communications.

**Social Media Posts**

Each month best practices for preventing NPS pollution were shared on MARC’s main social media accounts. In addition to educational posts, MARC also promoted partner events.

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*Stills from new “Game Over” animation, addressing litter.*
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.

Over the past 10 years, the committee has awarded $262,811 in grants to prevent NPS pollution of the region’s waterways. More than 30 organizations implemented a variety of projects from stream cleanups, and raingarden installations to watershed festivals, puppet shows and educational float trips.

Grants were awarded to the following organizations:

**Blue River Watershed Association ($4,100)**

“Revolving Green Around the Blue” is a restoration event that invites participants to volunteer by providing streambank invasive vegetation removal and litter cleanup. This public event included a bicycle ride, bike safety and maintenance training, lunch and entertainment. The litter cleanup and invasive removal site is on Indian Creek, an urban section of a tributary of the Blue River in Kansas City, Missouri. This public event has multidimensional goals, including habitat restoration for a section of the Blue River in the Conservation Opportunities Area, emphasizing stream quality, good forest management practices and watershed health; promoting awareness, understanding and appreciation for Missouri’s natural resources; recruiting new outdoor users; and attracting and engaging new partners while strengthening existing partnerships.

**Bridging The Gap ($5,000)**

Bridging The Gap coordinated adult volunteers to clean up five streams in Johnson County, Kansas: Indian Creek, Turkey Creek, Clear Creek, Bull Creek and Mill Creek. The focus of the cleanup workdays was litter, highlighting the two major factors in litter build-up in waterways — proximity to highways and its prevalence at retail centers. Bridging The Gap worked in communities with heavy automobile and retail traffic, near Interstate 35 and Shawnee Mission Parkway.

**Clement Waters Headquarters Green Space ($2,000)**

The Clement Waters Headquarters Green Space Project’s goal is to create a welcoming space for people to reflect on sustainable
improvement of their living environment. The project included maintenance of a tributary stream of the Blue River, which runs through an easement used to access the property at the southwest corner of Gregory Boulevard and Jackson Avenue. Volunteers built a cob (a mixture of clay, sand and straw) sculpture bench creekside, which functions as a resting spot and educational resource along a popular hiking and mountain-bike trail. The trail serves as an access point to green spaces surrounding the adjoining Lakeside Nature Center in Swope Park. A demonstration wetland garden was constructed near the trail. New hiking trails were created alongside rock bluffs to an elevated garden spot that will serve as a hilltop outdoor classroom, consisting of a rain garden and educational resources.

**Little Blue River Watershed Coalition ($5,000)**

The coalition held a “View From the River”, an educational experience for participants of all ages. The program promoted awareness, understanding and appreciation for the Missouri River. Stormwater education was provided through 12 workshops, each taking participants to large stormwater outfalls to illustrate non-point source pollution and river cleanups. Participants were outfitted with lifejackets before boarding the Cypress, a 28-foot, covered boat that traveled downstream along the Kansas City riverfront, allowing them to experience the view from the river.

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

This community outreach program provided a unique, two-day water festival at Theis Park next to Brush Creek, with free admission to the public. The festival focused on educating adults and children about how their actions effect the water system, and offered best management practices people can implement. This new event was an expansion of the successful annual Mother’s Day for Mother Earth giant puppet show. StoneLion built upon the pre-show activities held last year, creating a new, five-hour event with two presentations over Memorial Day weekend called “Illuminated Waters.” This reinforced the theme of the event, clean water, and provided concrete examples of behavioral change to the audience, while reaching more citizens. “Illuminated Waters” featured five different areas of interest with specific themes, such as reduction of pesticides or plastics that pollute our waterways.
Webcasts
The committee hosted six webinars by the Center for Watershed Protection in 2018:

Native Plants and Rain Gardens
• Continued to distribute “Build Your Own Rain Garden” brochure.
• Continued to distribute “Know your Roots” brochure.
• Continued to distribute rain gauges with a native plant species design as promotional giveaway items.
• Continued to distribute outdoor-rated, “Do Not Mow/Native Planting” signage for BMPs.

Pet Waste
Continued to distribute:
• “Pick Up After Your Pet” brochures.
• Outdoor-rated, “Pick Up After Your Pet” signage to local municipalities.
• Portable, refillable pet waste bag dispensers with “Pick Up After Your Pet” message as promotional giveaway items.

Lawn Care
• Continued to distribute “Build Your Own Rain Barrel”, “Redirect or Disconnect Your Downspout”, “Know Your Soil”, “Making and Using Compost” and “Use Lawn Chemicals Wisely” brochures.

Brochure Translations
• Continued to use existing supply of Spanish-language brochures.
• Continued to distribute double-sided doorhangers (in English and Spanish) as a companion outreach tool for neighbors near storm drain marker installations.

General Stormwater Education
• Continued to distribute stormdrain inlet markers for local municipalities.
• Continued to distribute “Know Your Watershed”, “Protect Our Streams” and “Stormdrain Stewardship” brochures.
• Continued to make the committee’s Water Quality Education Program banner available for community events and functions.
• Continued to distribute automotive trash bags with the “Stop Littering” imprinted message.

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FUNDING

In January 2018, MARC submitted a program funding request to local governments for $165,000. During the course of the year, 20 local governments supported the program. Participating governments are listed below.

PARTICIPATING GOVERNMENTS

Clay County, Missouri  Liberty, Missouri
Excelsior Springs, Missouri  North Kansas City, Missouri
Gladstone, Missouri  Overland Park, Kansas **
Independence, Missouri  Peculiar, Missouri
Jackson County, Missouri  Platte County, Missouri
Johnson County, Kansas *  Raymore, Missouri
Kansas City, Missouri  Raytown, Missouri
Lake Lotawana, Missouri  Weatherby Lake, Missouri
Lake Waukomis, Missouri  Unified Government of Wyandotte County /
Lee’s Summit, Missouri  Kansas City, Kansas**
Lenexa, Kansas **

*(Contributes for all Johnson County cities and unincorporated areas)
**(Contributes additional funding above standard per capita rate)

WQEC COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

Lara Isch, Water Quality Educator  Tom Jacobs, Director of Environmental Programs
KC Water,  Alecia Kates, Water Quality Planner II
City of Kansas City, Missouri  Kym Bledsoe, Public Affairs Coordinator
Heather Schmidt, Water Quality Specialist  Nordia Epps, Public Affairs Coordinator
Public Works and Infrastructure,  Carmellya Anderson, Marketing Coordinator II,
Johnson County, Kansas  Government Training Institute

MARC STAFF

Kitty Steffens, Environmental Planning Intern

CONTACT

To learn more about the MARC Regional Water Quality Education Committee, contact Alecia Kates at akates@marc.org or 816-701-8233