



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



*Mid-America Regional Council*

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

Clean Water. Healthy Life.

# 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 goals include educating the general public about actions to reduce non-point source (NPS) pollution and providing a forum for regional stormwater professionals.



The Regional Water Quality Public Education Program is a comprehensive approach to raising public awareness about watershed issues, water quality, and water-related projects and supporting professional development 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.

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 in this report.

# Focus



During the past 19 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, supporting municipal stormwater management best practices, and efforts by environmental organizations to improve water quality, community health and quality of life. 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.

## KC Metro Area Green Infrastructure Contractor Training Program Plan

In recent years, Kansas City regional cities have installed green infrastructure projects for improved stormwater management. Private landscape contractors do not yet have a developed knowledge base for the technical skills required for these projects. To address this gap, the Center for Watershed Protection (CWP) -- a national leader in stormwater management for close to 30 years -- has developed the Kansas City Metro Area Green Infrastructure Contractor Training Program. MARC has provided guidance and funding for this program, that will focus on green infrastructure (GI) maintenance, design, and installation.

This work is timely considering the update of the American Public Works Association Section 5600 stormwater standards that will combine Section 5600 with the MARC/APWA Manual of Best Management Practices and result in a combined standards manual (the Manual).

City engineering, permitting and planning staff, developers and environmental nonprofits have highlighted a significant need for improved GI maintenance practices in their feedback on the Manual. The training development will use existing materials from CWP's Clean Water Certificate program and KC Water's Green Infrastructure Training, and it will be housed within the Academy for Sustainable Communities in the MARC Government Training Institute training system.

Members of the WQEC voted to fund the development of phase one of the Training Program, which includes curriculum development of a 4-hour on-demand virtual training certification targeted to private landscape contractor crews and public employees. Further development will be dependent on federal funding opportunities, regional interest and regional funding.

# 2023 Program Accomplishments

## KC Plogtober

In October 2023, MARC conducted the third metro-wide virtual Plog-a-thon to reduce the impact of trash and litter on regional water quality. Plogging, a Swedish term for picking up litter while running, was first introduced to the metro in 2019.

During Plogtober 2023, participants were encouraged to clean up litter to prevent contamination of local waterways.

On October 14 and 21, MARC and partner municipalities organized (count) county-wide Plogs on regional trails. 174 people participated in Plogtober, collecting nearly 200 bags of trash across the region.

Clay County received the title of Top Plogger for the largest county-wide participation over a single day with 75 volunteers, followed closely by Kansas City Missouri and Johnson County, Kansas.

TOP THREE POINTS TOTALS FOR COUNTY TEAMS		
	Largest Single Day Participation	Overall Participation
Clay County	75	75
Kansas City, MO/ Urban Core	14	56
Johnson County	15	53

## Dewy the Droplet

In 2023 the Water Quality Education Committee promoted 20-second videos of Dewy, the Committee's mascot on social media that were created in partnership with ArtClass Media in 2022, with media showing on feeds 1,349,364 times reaching 532,378 individuals and 849 clicks to the [cleanwaterkcmetro.org](http://cleanwaterkcmetro.org) website.



Volunteer poses with trash haul from 2023 KC Plogtober cleanup.

## Education and outreach materials

### Native Plants and Rain Gardens

Continued to distribute:

- “Build Your Own Rain Garden” how-to brochure.
- “Know your Roots” brochure.
- 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” 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.
- Distribute Water Quality Education postcards



## Training

### 2023 KC Urban Stormwater Conference

MARC’s Water Quality program hosted the biennial KC Urban Stormwater Conference to help area public works employees meet professional development requirements for their certifications. Over 200 attended the conference, which included keynote presentations from Dr. Robert Traver and Dr. Trisha Moore on regulatory approaches to stormwater infrastructure, and vegetation’s role in increasing its resilience. The two-day event provided seven and a half hours’ worth of professional development hours across 45 breakout sessions taking place on-site.

## 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. The Water Quality Education Committee awarded grants to the following organizations:

### Deep Roots KC (\$2,500)

Deep Roots organized two webinars: "Bioswales of Anita B. Gorman Discovery Center" and "Manheim Gardens: A Comprehensive Stormwater Management Approach" as episodes of "Native Plants at Noon". The show had approximately 135 live attendees, and nearly 100 repeat views on YouTube.

The Gorman Discovery Center presentation featured tours of high-performing regional rain gardens and explained their importance in managing stormwater. The Manheim Gardens presentation included species identification of plants that are optimal for rain gardens and stormwater management. It also showed a 6,000+ gallon rainwater harvesting system that was financially supported by a KC Grow water access grant, KC Water, and Kansas City Community Gardens.

Funds also provided for interpretive signage and material costs for the construction of a spring-fed water feature landscape, adjacent to the sidewalk at the base of the garden's slopes.

### Groundwork Northeast Revitalization Group (\$3,500)

Groundwork NRG's Green Team used grant funds to host a community rain barrel workshop at the Righteous Roots Garden at 710 Oakland Ave with over 30 residents in attendance and 20 rain barrels distributed.

Green Team youth and Economic Community Health Organization members collaborated to organize the event, which fostered intergenerational knowledge-sharing and introduced future collaboration. Funds were also used to improve community green space and to install a rain garden with educational signage at the garden site.

### Heartland Conservation Alliance (\$5,000)

HCA used funds to help hire a Blue River Nature Guide. The primary goal of this position is to increase diverse use of the Blue River, lead visitors on Blue River tours, provide outdoor education about the Blue River at on-site events, host volunteer projects, and connect with community organizations who have not traditionally engaged with the Blue River.

The Blue River Nature Guide Program provides public education about best practices to protect recreation sites that reduce stormwater runoff and water pollution in the Blue River and its tributaries. The Blue River Nature Guide hosted 4 guided hikes with a total of 43 participants and a festival with 95 attendees. Additional tasks included working with Jackson County Parks + Rec to develop consistent outdoor education opportunities along the Blue River.

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

LBRWC held "Blue at the Zoo" at the Kansas City Zoo as part of their Earth Day: Party for the Planet event. There were six exhibits with 3,000 attendees at the event. Exhibits included Enviroscape NPS and floodplain models and macroinvertebrates as pollution indicators, plus a mapped-out Blue River with watershed features, issues, and involvement opportunities. Also featured were wildflower seed ball giveaways and found river trash with source explanations and methods to remediate sources.

### My Region Wins! (\$3,500)

My Region Wins! applied grant funds towards Boone Area 1, a community space with activities including a learning library and rain garden educational signage. Development is ongoing and a grant extension has been requested.

### StoneLion Puppet Theatre (\$3,500) (pictured on the report cover)

StoneLion Puppet Theatre organized a festival and parade of puppets, music and costumes in the historic 18th & Vine District. The event was attended by 221 participants of all ages and celebrated the biodiversity that is affected by water quality. Seven open studio sessions were attended by 133 participants to create unique puppets with a professional puppet builder. The program focused on educating adults and children about how their actions affect the water system and provided best management practices for their daily lives. Festival exhibitors included KC Water, KC Water Bar, Lakeside Nature Center, KC Farm School at Gibbs Road, and Little Blue River Rescue.

## Funding

In January 2023, MARC submitted a program funding request to local governments for \$150,000. During the course of the year, 14 local governments supported the program. Participating governments are listed below.

## Participating Governments

Clay County, Missouri	Mission, Kansas**
Excelsior Springs, Missouri	Mission Hills, Kansas**
Fairway, Kansas**	North Kansas City, Missouri
Gardner, Kansas**	Olathe, Kansas**
Gladstone, Missouri	Overland Park, Kansas***
Independence, Missouri	Platte County, Missouri
Jackson County, Missouri	Prairie Village, Kansas**
Johnson County, Kansas*	Raymore, Missouri
Kansas City, Missouri	Raytown, Missouri
Leawood, Kansas**	Roeland Park, Kansas**
Lenexa, Kansas **	Shawnee, Kansas**
Lee's Summit, Missouri	Westwood, Kansas**
Liberty, Missouri	Westwood Hills, Kansas**
Merriam, 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

Meghan Woolbright,  
Assistant City Administrator  
Mission Hills, Kansas

Hobie Crane,  
Planning & Zoning Engineer  
Platte County, Missouri

### MARC STAFF

Tom Jacobs, Director of Environmental Programming

Synthia Isah, Water Quality Planner  
(through April 2023)

Natalie Unruh, Water Quality Planner  
(starting May 2023)

Eric Ettner, Water Quality Intern

Joe Gauer, Public Affairs Coordinator

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### CONTACT

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