



Collaborative Action For A More Resilient Future



Introduction

Everyone feels the impacts of climate change and our urban waterways are not immune from this crisis. With an increase in extreme heat, more intense storms, and a growing demand for increasingly limited water resources, climate change is putting pressure on our water systems from all directions. Increased rain leads to increasingly polluted waterways and more frequent flooding that damages property and creates a breeding ground for a host of diseases. Extreme heat and drought conditions dry up water resources and damage the local ecosystem.

For the past two decades, Groundwork has been working hand-in-hand with community members across the country to restore, protect, and nurture our urban waters. Whether you've been a long-time environmental champion or you're just dipping your toes into the cause, there's plenty you can do to protect our cherished urban waters.

Here, Groundwork staff from across the network offer actionable steps you can take in your community to restore, project, and adapt urban waters for a more climate safe future.

Tackling these challenges will depend on every one of us!



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Take action at home to improve your relationship with water.

Turning off the water while brushing your teeth and taking shorter showers may be the most pervasive advice for improving how you manage water at home, but the list doesn't end there. Whether you rent or own your home, there are steps you can take to decrease your water consumption, reduce harmful stormwater runoff, and contribute to collective efforts to protect our waters.



Use locally sourced native plants from a nursery to replace swaths of lawns. If you're a renter, join up with efforts to remove invasive plants from local parks or green spaces!

Jeremy, Groundwork USA



It starts with the relationship we have with our waters. Spend time with the water that you are trying to protect. Sometimes, that looks like cleaning up trash or planting native plants, sitting quietly by the water, or recreating in it. Through this connection, an appreciation for water and ideas for how to protect it can emerge.

Angelique and Jessica, Groundwork Denver

As a homeowner, consider replacing concrete or asphalt driveways with gravel or native plants to prevent flooding and stormwater pollution.

Rebecca, Groundwork USA

Learn from the many great resources available and collaborate with others. [At the Urban Waters Learning Network, we've curated a number of useful resources specifically relevant to urban waters.](#) Use these and other networks and libraries to reach out to others who are immersed in this work and collaborate with them, both within and across watersheds.

Maria, Groundwork USA

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Join with neighbors to take care of important water infrastructure.

It takes a village to maintain our parks, green spaces, and waterways – and the good news is there are lots of ways to get involved. This could be personally committing to keeping your street trash-free and your stormwater system free from leaves and debris to championing an effort in your business or organization to adopt parts of a river to keep clean and maintained. It can be showing up to volunteer tree plantings or depaving parties (which are a real thing, we promise!).

Collectively, these keep our waterways clear of trash, protect drinking water, reduce flooding, and create safe neighborhoods for all.



Keeping your stormwater system clean matters more than you think for flooding and water quality. Join local community efforts to keep trash from entering your stormwater system, or commit to helping keep the water grates on your block clear before it rains!

Abbie, Groundwork USA

Don't forget about the water! It's important to highlight waterway restoration, clean-up, and protection as components within our climate resilience projects. Often, bodies of water are unsung heroes that quietly go unattended. Organizations can adopt parts of rivers to do water quality monitoring, cleaning, and maintenance, which can make a huge difference.

Deja, Groundwork Milwaukee

If you're an artist of any kind, take the time to learn about the history surrounding your community's relationship to water and use your skills - visual, storytelling, or other – to share your knowledge with others to raise awareness about the importance of protecting urban waters.

Roxanne, Groundwork USA

Engage the community in green infrastructure efforts through educational programs; this is critical for achieving success.

Currie, Groundwork Rhode Island

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Be an advocate and champion for green infrastructure.

Our green infrastructure needs advocates and there is no one better to champion the importance of these investments than people that do, or can, benefit from these resources. Join your neighbors to show up at community meetings and connect with your local representatives to let them know your priorities and the changes you'd like to see. While change won't happen overnight, it can't happen at all without community leadership and voices advocating for infrastructure improvements. [Take a look at 'Changing Systems: A Guide to Jumpstart Local Climate Action' to help you get started!](#)

Through a combination of policy and practice, communities, organizations, and individuals can make a huge difference in protecting urban waters from climate change impacts like flooding, pollution, and heat. Policies requiring new and updated developments to incorporate green spaces, trees, and nature-based stormwater features are essential for managing urban water issues.

Amelia, Groundwork Rhode Island

It's crucial that the community's voice leads the way in addressing urban water issues. When residents' needs are given top priority, they become empowered to actively participate in identifying problems and advocating for essential developments within the watershed.

Leslie, Groundwork San Diego - Chollas Creek



Communities can advocate for more natural ecology at parks along rivers, such as planting native plants that are super absorbent and super soil-stabilizing and more green spaces in general, especially throughout the watershed, to intercept and filter stormwater runoff.

Sophie, Groundwork Somerville



Advocating for sustainable water management and urban planning policies can encourage the adoption of nature-based solutions. Cities can mitigate stormwater flow by reducing impermeable surfaces in flood-prone areas, using bioswales and rain gardens to retain water during storms and sequester pollutants, and creating water plazas that intentionally flood during cloudburst events - sudden, extreme rainstorms - and keep rainwater out of city streets.

Candida, Groundwork Hudson Valley



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