



News Release

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Partners in Springfield engage urban communities in conservation; receive federal recognition

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today joined partners in Springfield, Mass., to designate the Springfield Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, part of a national effort to connect city residents with the outdoors and contribute to wildlife conservation in their communities.

“Beyond wildlife conservation, it’s important that we create a lasting connection between young people, our urban residents and the great outdoors,” said Deborah Rocque, Northeast Deputy Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “That is why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service started an urban conservation program. It’s about making sustainable connections, and providing opportunities for people to experience nature where they live.”

Working closely with the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, ReGreen Springfield, local schools and several other partners, the partnership aims to highlight the importance of conserving the Connecticut River Watershed and restoring urban streams and forests in the Abbey Brook Conservation Area. The site has suffered from pressures common to urban streams, such as erratic storm water flows, invasive plants, and adverse amounts of sedimentation. With careful planning and adequate resources, partners hope to reverse these over time, resulting in a haven for wildlife and an asset to the city’s residents.

With 80 percent of Americans living in cities, the urban wildlife conservation program seeks to meet children and families where they live and work so that they can care for nature in their cities and beyond.

“This partnership presents a great opportunity for all the project cooperators to directly impact the quality of life for Springfield’s residents,” said David Bloniarz of ReGreen Springfield. “Working together, the efforts of our project partners will be enhanced and magnified, through a cohesive framework of innovative initiatives that will improve the natural landscapes and waterways of Springfield. Making Springfield a better place to live for our residents, through environmental stewardship, advocacy and enhancement, are the major benefits of this partnership and the Urban Waters grant funding.”

In addition to the designation, ReGreen Springfield will receive \$39,000 through the Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program, which is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, FedEx, Southern Company, Bank of America and Pacific Gas and Electric.

“It is exciting to see Springfield receive this special designation,” said Congressman Richard Neal. “Now one of 17 urban refuge partnerships, we join the ranks of several large cities across the country. That distinction is due to the grassroots support by the neighborhoods, schools, local government and partners in Springfield who saw an opportunity to work with Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and successfully compete for federal funds.”

According to Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, “This is another example of Springfield’s dedicated commitment to improving the environmental health of our community, knowing that our efforts make a big difference in the quality of life for Springfield residents”. He added, “Working in partnership with our local non-profit partners, federal and state agencies and our neighboring communities, the award of this grant demonstrates our continued efforts to build partnerships that maximize the investment of resources in environmental stewardship.”

The overarching goal is to build long-term collaborative partnerships between schools, community organizations, public agencies, and private organizations committed to restoring Springfield’s natural areas, while also improving access to those urban green spaces.

Through our tree advocacy efforts, ReGreen Springfield has collaborated with businesses, community organizations, educational partners and government agencies to promote the reforestation of Springfield, improve growing conditions for trees and engage new allies in tree care and monitoring, education and citizen science. We realize that the strength of our city is found in the neighborhoods. With this as the foundation for our work, we have embarked on an effort to 'regreen' the city... one tree at a time.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, <http://www.fws.gov/>

