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White House & Partners Announce Series of Investments Connecting More Baltimore Families to Healthy Parks, Green Spaces & Waterways

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Baltimore, MD – At a press conference in west Baltimore today, the Obama Administration, joined by officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service and the U.S. Geological Survey, announced a series of targeted investments to enhance local parks and green spaces, clean waterways, expand environmental education programs and increase access to environmental data. More than 50 federal, state and local officials, nonprofit leaders, philanthropists and community activists attended the ceremony at the Parks & People Foundation to applaud the additional resources and participate in a White House Roundtable focused on future federal, state and local environmental collaboration in the city.

Investing in green space has become a key strategy for revitalizing urban communities – improving residents’ health, offering educational and recreational opportunities for young people, fostering a sense of community and enticing more businesses to build a vibrant local economy. Parks and green spaces also increase a city’s sustainability, reducing storm-water run-off and protecting streams and rivers from pollution. Unfortunately, there are too few parks and green spaces in Baltimore, leaving many children without a single clean, green space where they can safely run and play. And, though Baltimore sits on the Patapsco River and has dozens of smaller tributaries and streams, many families cannot access these bodies of water, which could and should provide recreational and economic opportunities for all residents.

As part of a long-term commitment by the Federal government to address both environmental health and justice in Baltimore, the White House announced the following new resources and initiatives:

- **Launch of Baltimore City Pilot GROW Center to keep parks and gardens beautiful:** Baltimore City and the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced their commitment to pilot the city’s first Green Resources and Outreach for Watersheds (GROW) Center, providing free/low cost materials and technical assistance to residents working to revitalize vacant lots and manage storm water.
- **Expansion of the Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership to support the Middle Branch watershed:** In 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the first Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership in the nation at Masonville Cove. Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expanded the partnership throughout South and West Baltimore, positioning the region for better access to Federal resources. A map of the expanded partnership focus area is available here: www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/pdf/BaltimoreBusinessPlan.pdf

- **Planning for the future of Baltimore’s park system**: The National Park Service and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources announced funding for Baltimore City Department of Recreation & Parks (BCRP) to develop a new comprehensive plan for the city’s park system – the first such plan since 1926. BCRP’s planning and community engagement strategy complements the City’s Green Network Plan, which focuses on reclaiming vacant land.
- **Creation of 10 new schoolyard habitats introducing young people to environmental science and stewardship**
The U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, along with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and CSX Corporation announced funding for demonstration schoolyard habitats at 10 schools across Baltimore. The flagship project will be at Green Street Academy, and include a series of workshops introducing educators to the habitat as a teaching tool.
- **Launch of first-in-the-nation Village Blue Project, making real-time water quality data public**: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) announced the launch of their first Village Blue Project, providing real-time water quality information from the Jones Falls River via EPA and USGS websites. The EPA and USGS will work closely with local groups Waterfront Partnership and Blue Water Baltimore to raise awareness of the tool.

In tandem with today’s announcements, the White House highlighted actions being taken by organizations in the Baltimore region, including:

- **National Aquarium of Baltimore**, which has received Federal grants from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Institute of Museum and Library Services to engage every Baltimore City sixth-grader in an innovative watershed education experience, using their new model urban waterfront as a classroom and living laboratory.
- **Chesapeake Conservancy**, which has created a virtual tour of the Baltimore Harbor and Patapsco River, allowing anyone to explore the river from their computer and better understand the richness and beauty of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail and the Bay. View the tour at: <http://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/riverview>
- **Chesapeake Center for Youth Development**, which partnered with the American Planning Association (APA) Community Planning Assistance Team to create a new Brooklyn/Baybrook Community Action Plan. The plan offers a vision for a more resilient, revitalized Brooklyn through green infrastructure and the transformation of Garrett Park into a multigenerational community resource with improved facilities, programs, and native plantings.

Today’s announcements build on the Obama Administration’s strong record of collaboration with Baltimore City leaders to help revitalize the city. Over the past 18 months, the Administration has partnered with Mayor Rawlings-Blake to expand the summer YouthWorks program and to fund the new One Baltimore for Jobs workforce program; invested in major infrastructure projects around the Port of Baltimore and North Avenue; provided capital for the Food Hub in east Baltimore in partnership with the American Communities Trust, the City and the State; and made a series of grants to support the mental health and safety of Baltimore students.

Today’s announcements also speak to the high level of innovation and intense commitment to partnership taking place in Baltimore. Public officials, nonprofit organizations, corporations and private citizens alike are equally engaged in addressing the city’s most pressing environmental challenges. Together, with the White House’s support and admiration, these stakeholders are building a stronger city, in which all children and families have access to the beautiful, clean parks, green space and waterways they deserve.