



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Mid-America Regional Council
**Regional Water Quality
Education Program**

Clean Water. Healthy Life.

Committee History

Since 2003, MARC has convened a committee of stormwater and public education representatives from local governments and environmental organizations. The MARC Water Quality Education Committee was founded to approach water quality public education cooperatively, meeting 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, coordinating water infrastructure training opportunities and providing a forum for regional stormwater professionals.



The Regional Water Quality Education Program takes 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



For the past 21 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 and 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.

2024 Program Accomplishments

KC Plogtober

During the month of October, MARC conducted the fourth metro-wide Plog-a-thon to reduce the impact of trash and litter on regional water quality. "Plogging" is a Swedish term for picking up litter while jogging or walking outside.

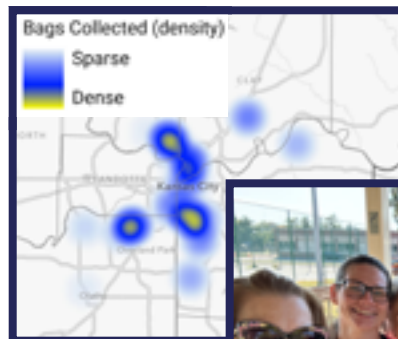
In 2024, a new data collection method was piloted that allowed ploggers to enter their trash collection efforts onto a regional map for points and prizes.

Throughout October, MARC and partner municipalities promoted independent

plogging as well as nine organized events on regional trails and in neighborhoods — sharing the message that every corner of KC is connected to a regional watershed. Contamination on the ground anywhere eventually ends up in our streams and rivers. Forty-one people collected nearly 114 bags of trash across the region, with Johnson County winning the largest county-wide participation on a single day, and Jackson County winning for greatest number of participants overall.

Media Campaign

In 2024, the Water Quality Education Committee promoted 20-second videos of Dewy, the committee's mascot, on social media showing on feeds 534,484 times reaching 235,206 individuals with 1,030 clicks to the cleanwaterkcmetro.org website (alongside 419,623 streams on Youtube). During the Plogtober campaign, ads were run on three platforms, promoting the event and the online documentation tool, resulting in 335,254 impressions reaching nearly 120,000 individuals.





Mid-America GSI Maintenance Certification Program

In recent years, Kansas City region cities have installed green infrastructure projects for improved stormwater management. Many 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) and MARC developed the **Mid-America GSI (Green Stormwater Infrastructure) Maintenance Certificate Program** in 2024. Local government representatives and technical experts guided development of this new certification program that verifies the skills and knowledge of maintenance professionals.

This work is timely, considering the update to the **American Public Works Association Section 5600** that will combine Section 5600 with the **MARC/APWA Manual of Best Management Practices**, resulting in one integrated standards manual. The manual will modernize the region's approach to stormwater management and provide improved design guidance for practitioners.

City engineering, permitting and planning staff; developers; and environmental nonprofits highlighted a significant need for improved GSI maintenance practices in their feedback of the manual. A team of local government staff and consultants contributed expertise and materials to the development of a series of five interactive online training modules with accompanying reference materials and a program plan.

The program plan was approved by a newly formed governing board composed of local government representatives from Gladstone, Missouri; Johnson County, Kansas; Kansas City, Missouri; Lenexa, Kansas; North Kansas City, Missouri; Platte County, Missouri; Shawnee, Kansas; and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas. Program materials and registration for the training will be available at marc.org/GSI in January 2025.



A videographer films an instructional module for Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) training

Education and Outreach Materials

In 2024, the committee, determined to cut down on paper waste and under-utilized physical public education collateral, created a poster series for local government and partner use. They also agreed to release digital files that were commercial printer-ready for participating municipalities that still wanted to print and distribute high-quality physical materials to their constituents.

The digital posters provide QR codes for additional information on a variety of topics. They were created to drive public traffic to the committee's **cleanwaterkcmetro.org** public education website. This website, which provides a wealth of informative tips and insights, will be receiving a user interface and branding update in 2025.

Native Plants and Rain Gardens

Available for commercial printing on-demand (via municipality's printer of choice):

- NEW "Know your Roots" rack card and poster with QR code pointing to additional info online
- "Know your Soil" rack card & poster with QR code (*coming Q1 2025*)
- "Redirect Your Downspout" how-to brochure, rack card and poster with QR code (*coming Q1 2025*)
- "Build Your Own Rain Garden" how-to brochure, rack card and poster with QR code (*coming Q1 2025*)

Continued to distribute:

- Outdoor-rated "Do Not Mow Native Planting" signs for existing BMP (update potentially needed for new BMPs)

Pet Waste

Available for commercial printing on-demand (via municipality's printer of choice):

- NEW "Pick Up After Your Pet" rack card and poster with QR code

Continued to distribute:

- Outdoor-rated "Pick Up After Your Pet" signs
- Water Quality branded pet waste bag dispensers

Residential Chemical Use

Available for commercial printing on-demand (via municipality's printer of choice):

- NEW "Use Lawn Chemicals Wisely" rack card and poster with QR code
- "Winter Illicit Discharge" rack card and poster with QR code (*coming Q1 2025*)
- "Summer Illicit Discharge" rack card and poster with QR code (*coming Q2 2025*)

Brochure Translations

Continued to distribute:

- Spanish-language versions of existing brochures

Stormwater Education

Continued to:

- Distribute storm drain inlet markers for local municipalities
- Make the committee's Water Quality Education Program banner available for community events and functions
- Distribute automotive trash bags with branded "Stop Littering" imprinted message
- Distribute Water Quality Education postcards



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. In 2024, the Water Quality Education Committee awarded grants to the following organizations:

Heartland Conservation Alliance (\$3,500)

Grant funds supported the HCA Blue River Outdoor Education program. The 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 coordinated six guided hikes with a total of 40 participants to learn about native bird, plant and tree species. Three "Green Guard" trash cleanups with 14 attendees helped keep public lands pristine. Six special events with 199 participants educated youth on workforce development opportunities, hosted kayaking on the Blue River and facilitated exploration of the Kansas City Blue River Parkway, Minor Park and Alex George Wetland.

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

LBRWC held "Blue at the Zoo" at the Kansas City Zoo & Aquarium as part of their Earth Day: Party for the Planet event. There were five exhibits with 5,000 attendees at the event including families with children.

Exhibits included Enviroscope 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.

Exhibit partners: Missouri Department of Conservation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, Heartland Conservation Alliance, Little Blue River Watershed Coalition and the Healthy Rivers Partnership.

StoneLion Puppet Theatre (\$3,500)

StoneLion Puppet Theatre organized a festival and parade of puppets, music and costumes at the National WWI Museum and Memorial. The event was attended by 271 participants of all ages and celebrated the biodiversity that is affected by water quality. Eight open studio sessions were attended by 245 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.



Children observe a sandbox watershed activity at the "Blue at the Zoo" event.

Funding

In March 2024, MARC submitted a program funding request to local governments for \$115,000. During the course of the year, 16 local governments supported the program. Participating governments are listed below.

Participating Governments

Excelsior Springs, Missouri

Gladstone, Missouri

Independence, Missouri

Jackson County, Missouri

Kansas City, Missouri

Lenexa, Kansas

Lee's Summit, Missouri

Liberty, Missouri

Mission, Kansas

North Kansas City, Missouri

Platte County, Missouri

Raymore, Missouri

Raytown, Missouri

Shawnee, Kansas

Unified Government of Wyandotte
County / Kansas City, Kansas

WQEC COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

Justin Stuedemann,
Stormwater Specialist
Lenexa, Kansas

Hobie Crane,
Planning & Zoning Engineer
Platte County, Missouri

MARC STAFF

Tom Jacobs, Chief Resilience Officer

Natalie Unruh, Water Quality Planner

Joe Gauer, Public Affairs Coordinator

Kate Ludwig, Environmental Programs Assistant

Nordia Epps, Public Affairs Coordinator

Carmellya Anderson, Conference Center
Coordinator

Ashlyn Stone, Special Events Manager,
Government Training Institute

To learn more about the MARC Regional Water Quality Education Committee,
contact Natalie Unruh at nunruh@marc.org or 816-701-8225



Clean Water. Healthy Life.
www.marc.org/water