

Public-private groups win funds to clean up NY, NJ waterways

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Cafeteria Culture

Cafeteria Culture, a group that works with students in New York schools to recycle lunch items, is one of the groups to win funding through an Environmental Protection Agency program.

Washington — Seven community projects have been awarded a total of \$365,000 in federal grants to keep plastic out of waterways in New York and New Jersey.

The public-private partnerships, under the banner of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Trash Free Waters initiative, are a collection of diverse groups approached to combat plastic marine debris.

"Our oceans and lakes and rivers are being choked with plastic debris," said U.S. EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck. "Estimates are that by 2025 there will be 1 ton of plastic for every 3 tons of fish in the world's oceans. These projects offer real solutions that focus on reducing plastic waste at the source."

Awarded through a competitive grant process run by New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC), all the projects are aimed at keeping plastics out of local lakes, rivers and oceans and supporting the Trash Free Waters initiative's goal of reducing the volume of plastic trash

entering fresh and marine water environments, approaching zero-loading into U.S. waters within 10 years.

The Hudson River Foundation/NY-NJ Harbor and Estuary Program, in cooperation with Montclair State University's Passaic River Institute will receive \$67,693 to collect data on how litter enters local waterways, devise strategies to reduce it and develop a community outreach program, all focused on "floatable" trash, particularly plastics.

Cafeteria Culture, a project of the Fund for the City of New York, will use its \$60,111 grant to help fund its Community Arts+Media school-community partnership project. Students at participating schools work with intergenerational teams to conduct trash studies and cleanups, launch and run rewards systems with local businesses and develop creative social media and video messaging about curbing trash.

Reducing the amount of single-use plastics — bags, bottles, cups, lids, straws and plates — in the waste stream from hotels, restaurants and campgrounds along Long Island's North Fork is the focus of The Product Stewardship Institute's \$56,425 grant project.

The Bronx River Alliance will use its \$52,866 grant to fund "Project WASTE" (Waterway and Street Trash Elimination), which partners with New York City's Parks' Natural Resource Group and the New York Botanical Gardens to conduct floating trash assessments at collection booms and analyze the data from up-, mid- and down-stream locations to determine sources and suggest targeted mitigation programs. Once the programs are in place, continued monitoring and analysis will help track their effectiveness.

EPA's \$48,125 grant will fund the North Hudson Sewerage Authority's "Preventing Aquatic Trash" program, which will retrofit 250 faceplate covers on catch basins in high-volume traffic areas in Union City and West New York, N.J. to capture trash before it enters waterways.

The \$47,250 grant to the Clean Water Fund's "ReThink Disposable in Jersey" program will help the non-profit work with the local food industry to cut down the use of packaging in take-out food, including providing education and training on preventing marine debris to restaurants, food trucks and other food establishments along the boardwalk and in the downtown areas of Asbury Park, N.J..

Single-use plastics bags will be the target of the NYC Department of Environmental Protection's \$32,500 funding. The "Trash Free NYC Waters: Bag Challenge" will use a combination of public outreach, market research and messaging to educate the supermarket industry and the communities they serve on how plastic bags impact local waters.