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Bronx and Harlem River Communities Celebrate 10 Years of Accomplishments in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership Program

(October 13, 2021 Bronx, NY) --- Today, the Bronx & Harlem Rivers Urban Waters Federal Partnership celebrated its 10th Anniversary on the High Bridge over the Harlem River in New York City. Participants also highlighted future important environmental and infrastructure needs and challenges.

At a press conference, Congressional representatives, federal, state, and New York City agencies, environmental organizations, and local leaders highlighted the need for ongoing revitalization of the Harlem and Bronx Rivers in NYC.

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) is an initiative to reconnect urban communities with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts that promote economic, environmental, and social benefits. The Bronx and Harlem Rivers are part of the larger Hudson River/NY-NJ Harbor Estuary and Long Island Sound systems, and as such, hold enormous potential to provide wide-ranging benefits to millions of people in the region.

Led locally by the US Department of the Interior's U.S. Geological Survey and supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Bronx & Harlem Rivers UWFP works to help overburdened and underserved communities reconnect to their waterways, reduce the adverse impacts of urbanization on water quality and human health, and restore degraded riverfronts and watersheds while pursuing environmental justice.

"We are extremely proud to have been part of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership for the past 10 years, which has been a key facilitator for many projects benefiting the Bronx and Harlem rivers and surrounding communities," said **NYC Parks Commissioner Gabrielle Fialkoff**. "While much has been achieved, there is still more to accomplish, and we look forward to being a part of the continued collaborative efforts of the partnership towards the ongoing restoration and protection of these waterbodies and communities into the future."

"For the last ten years, the Bronx and Harlem Rivers Urban Waters Federal Partnership has worked to reverse decades of environmental racism that has disproportionately affected communities of color within the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary," said **Senator Chuck Schumer**. "Through the work of the partnership, we have strived to improve access to the rivers and parks while simultaneously

restoring the quality of life for those living within the watershed. As we celebrate the partnership's successes over the last decade, we reaffirm our commitment to delivering environmental justice for the communities in the Bronx and Harlem."

"For the past decade, the Bronx and Harlem river communities have made great progress towards achieving environmental justice thanks to vital partnerships of every level of government and local stakeholder advocates, and we all recognize that more work is to be done to improve our waterfront," said **Congressman Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)**. "By working tirelessly to reverse decades of environmental injustice in our neighborhoods, The Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) has become an integral part of our community - and for that we're forever grateful. And as we celebrate their dignified decade of service, we reaffirm our commitment to doing all we can to revitalize our city's river systems from the bottom up."

"The ongoing work and successes of the UWFP program has improved the environmental conditions of the Bronx and Harlem Rivers and the surrounding communities, but more must be done. Bronx residents continue to suffer from the effects of environmental degradation and pollution, and this has worsened throughout the pandemic. We are all committed to continue this partnership and align resources on all levels of government to better serve residents and improve environmental conditions," said **Congressman Ritchie Torres (NY-15)**.

"Restoring urban rivers is essential to protecting Americans' health and improving their overall quality of life. Through the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, agencies and local partners are revitalizing urban waterways and the communities that surround them, transforming overlooked assets and driving urban revival," said **Tanya Trujillo, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of the Interior**. "We are grateful to our partners who are working to restore urban waters not only to improve the water that we all depend on, but also for spurring economic and recreational opportunities."

"This anniversary of the Bronx/Harlem Rivers Urban Waters Federal Partnership is a momentous milestone for the program, and EPA is proud to help support the important work to enhance the Bronx and Harlem Rivers and their watersheds," said **Walter Mugdan, EPA Region 2 Acting Regional Administrator**. "Active engagement and community-focused cooperation are the hallmarks of realizing demonstrable improvements for these rivers and the community's engagement with them as we work together to advance climate justice."

New York State Parks has been a proud participant in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and are so thankful for UWFP's dedicated work to unlock and unblock obstacles to better public access to the Harlem and Bronx Rivers," said **Leslie Wright, NYC Regional Director for NYS Parks**. "Together with community advocates, the UWFP has provided an essential spotlight on the value of these waterways for recreation, transportation, and simple enjoyment as an accessible lovely view."

"The neighborhoods around the Bronx and Harlem Rivers have long been disproportionately impacted by industry, environmental racism, and insufficient infrastructure projects that have marginalized local communities. Our Partnership is committed to actively working to reverse environmental injustices and

improve community well-being” said **Sara Powell, Ambassador for the Bronx & Harlem Rivers UWFP**. “We will continue pushing forward on projects that create waterfront green spaces, continuous greenways, and improve water quality.”

“The Urban Waters Federal Partnership is helping to deliver critical environmental information and stewardship capacity to underserved neighborhoods along the Bronx and Harlem River” said **Robert Pirani, Director of the New York - New Jersey Harbor & Estuary Program at the Hudson River Foundation**. “We are proud to be working with our community and agency partners to create fishable, swimmable waters that are accessible to all.”

“Ten years ago, the Federal government recognized the Harlem and Bronx Rivers among the first in the country to be included in the new Urban Waters Federal Partnership. They noted that both ‘locations had a strong restoration effort underway, spearheaded by local governments and community organizations.’ Along with Representative Congressman Jose Serrano, these urban pioneers collaborated to begin a journey to bring equity, clean water and clean air to the rivers’ shores and uplands,” stated **Chauncy Young of the Harlem River Working Group**.

Without the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, there would be a major gap in the Bronx River Greenway in the South Bronx that is essential for tens of thousands of people to access the river and parks along it,” stated **Maggie Greenfield, Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance**. “The UWFP supported the efforts of the Alliance and NYC Parks to work through myriad issues - liability, assembling capital funding, coordination with Amtrak - to make the work at Starlight Park that is in construction right now possible!”

“As founding members of both community organizations, the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality looks forward to the next ten years of successes. We are proud to partner with both river communities, Representative Serrano, and the UWFP, to celebrate these accomplishments,” stated **Dart Westphal of the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality**, “We look forward to continued progress.”

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership is a federally-led initiative focused on reconnecting overburdened and economically distressed urban communities with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts. The Bronx & Harlem River Watersheds location in New York, NY is led by the U.S. Department of the Interior via the U.S. Geological Survey Water Science Center on Long Island. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency funding administered by the New York-New Jersey Harbor & Estuary Program / Hudson River Foundation supports the Ambassador who works to identify and advance priority projects and coordinate agency and community engagement. For more information, visit www.urbanwaters.gov.

Created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at the request of the governors of New York and New Jersey, the New York - New Jersey Harbor & Estuary Program (HEP) is a collaboration of public agencies, utilities, community and environmental organizations, and independent scientists that work together to improve the health of the Estuary and bring the benefits of the Clean Water Act to people and wildlife. HEP’s 2017 – 2022 Action Agenda presents the shared priorities and the commitment of HEP’s partners to address them. HEP is hosted by the non-profit Hudson River Foundation. For more information, visit www.harborestuary.org.