

QUINNIPIAC RIVER FUND FINAL REPORT- SPRING 2014

Date: 3.31.14

Group/Organization Name: Audubon Connecticut

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Project Name: A Fair Haven for Wildlife: Community-based Land Stewardship to Benefit Wildlife and Waterways

Grant Number: 20130052

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Please respond to the following statements:

1. Give a brief summary of what your group/organization's 2013 project is.

Audubon Connecticut's "A Fair Haven for Wildlife: Community-based Land Stewardship to Benefit Wildlife and Waterways" project raises awareness among homeowners in the Fair Haven neighborhood in New Haven about the Quinnipiac River Watershed (QRW) and promotes personal actions in their own yards, local parks, and other municipal green spaces to improve water quality and enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Given the heavily developed landscape of much of the Quinnipiac River Watershed, the health of the watershed could be significantly improved by the collective impact of individual actions by residents within the watershed. Encouraging non-regulatory best management practices, such as community-based land stewardship efforts on private yards and public green spaces, directly supports local and regional watershed implementation plans and pollution reduction strategies. However, the poor habitat quality and lack of environmental services in the Fair Haven neighborhood is exacerbated by the fact that many people in this area communicate primarily in Spanish, making it difficult for them to access information on how to enhance habitat in their neighborhood. There is an urgent need for access to information and resources to help Fair Haven residents enhance wildlife habitat and environmental services on existing green space in the community.

Working closely with members of the local community so they better understand both the value of creating habitat for wildlife and the negative impacts of pesticides and other toxins on waterways, wildlife, and people, this project benefits the residents of Fair Haven, improves the overall health of the Quinnipiac River Watershed, and provides habitat for migrating and resident birds and other wildlife.

The objectives of this program were to: (1) host two Spanish and English language workshops on creating healthy habitats for people and wildlife in yards and green spaces; (2) establish demonstration habitats in three private yards and one public park in Fair Haven; (3) develop and disseminate bilingual materials on creating wildlife habitats in New Haven; and (4) offer follow-up site assessments to community groups interested in creating wildlife habitat in their community. Working in partnership with the Urban Resources Initiative (URI), this program builds on URI's Community Greenspace program, but adds a uniquely Audubon component: making the connection between our personal stewardship, the health of the watershed, and the birds and other wildlife we all enjoy and cherish

2. What has been accomplished to date? Please frame your answer in terms of attainment of the outcomes framed in your proposal.

Activity/Outcome:

Develop two workshops, one in Spanish and one in English, on creating healthy yard habitats for people and wildlife. The workshops will reach a total of 40 participants representing 20 community groups, who will share what they learn with up to 250 people from the various community groups.

Progress to Date:

URI offers a series of workshops for the 50 community groups they work with each year, focused on different topics that can help guide and inform the land stewardship projects that a community group may choose to undertake. As part of this project, URI and Audubon worked together to develop a bilingual workshop focused on creating healthy yard habitats for people and wildlife, bringing together URI's expertise in facilitating community-based land stewardship initiatives and Audubon's expertise in habitat enhancements that benefit priority bird species.

The workshop focused on the ecosystem services provided by different tree species and how tree selection can improve water quality and watershed health in the QRW. It also focused on plant species selection and landscape designs that can provide habitat (food sources, cover, and nesting areas) for priority resident and migratory birds, as well as other pollinators, including butterflies and bees. The workshop emphasized the value of planting appropriate species within yards and other open spaces, such as public parks, that can improve both water quality and conditions for wildlife. The workshop also emphasized the value of individual actions within yards and community green spaces to improve water quality, conserve water, reduce the use of harmful chemicals and fertilizers, and improve conditions for wildlife.

The Fair Haven Neighbors in Action Community Greenspace volunteer group hosted the first workshop, and selected three front yards to serve as demonstration sites for the workshop. Ten community members attended this front yard workshop held on June 20, 2013, which was conducted in both English and Spanish (an interpreter was utilized to help facilitate this workshop).

The Dover Beach Park Community Greenspace volunteer group hosted the English-language workshop, with the demonstration site located on public green space directly adjacent to the Quinnipiac River. This community group had already demonstrated an interest in creating habitat for wildlife by developing a butterfly garden at the park with past support from URI. The workshop, held on June 19, 2013 at Dover Beach Park, was attended by eight community members.

We invited members from all 50 Community Greenspace volunteer groups to participate, either via email/Internet or through announcements sent by regular mail. We also sent reminder notices to invitees. However, despite these efforts, the workshops were attended by fewer participants than originally expected. We learned during our outreach efforts that the concepts to be presented at the workshop were new ideas to the community members we contacted. It will likely take repeated and ongoing outreach to familiarize local residents with this program and encourage more community involvement, a lesson we will apply to future outreach activities in this community.

Activity/Outcome:

Establish demonstration habitats in three private yards and one public park in Fair Haven.

Progress to Date:

Through this project, Audubon and URI helped the local community establish demonstration habitats in three private yards on Exchange Street and in Dover Beach Park in Fair Haven. Sites were selected in partnership with community members and reflected the groups' interests and needs. URI and Audubon staff guided the selection of plants and landscape design, and URI provided the materials, plant supplies, technical advice, and a Yale graduate student intern (from May to August) to support the community groups in planting and maintaining these demonstration sites. Community volunteers (assisted by AmeriCorps volunteers at the Dover Beach Park site) led all planting efforts and are committed to long-term maintenance. At the Dover Beach Park, volunteers planted seven trees, 10 shrubs, and 26 perennials. At the Exchange Street front yard sites, volunteers planted a total of three trees, four shrubs, and 25 perennials. More than 50 community members worked to establish these demonstration sites.

An interpretive sign about the value of this "urban oasis" for birds, other wildlife, and improved water quality is in the final stages of production by the Yale Peabody Museum and will be mounted at Dover Beach Park in May 2014. The Dover Beach Park Community Greenspace group provided input on this sign, and their participation in this initiative is acknowledged on it. Support for this initiative from the Quinnipiac River Fund is also acknowledged on the sign.

Activity/Outcome:

Develop and disseminate bilingual materials on creating wildlife habitats in New Haven to 1,000 community group members.

Progress to Date:

With the support of the Quinnipiac River Fund, Audubon translated and printed the Spanish version of their colorful "Pocket Guide to Bird-Friendly Plants." Project partners distributed guides to participants of the workshops, volunteers involved in the creation of demonstration sites, and attendees at two major events.

At the Migration Festival at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven in September 2013, Audubon made available the Pocket Guides, as well as information related to the Quinnipiac River Watershed and this project, to the approximately 1,200 people who attended. More than 50 of the guides, in both English and Spanish, were disseminated, as well as over 30 informational flyers on bird-friendly landscaping. Audubon experts spoke with numerous attendees about the trees and plants that help birds and other wildlife, and improve water quality in riparian areas. In October 2013, we returned to Lighthouse Point Park for the Community Greenspace and Community Garden Celebration, co-hosted by the New Haven Land Trust and URI. This event was attended by the mayor of New Haven and approximately 150 volunteers, celebrating the success of their community's efforts to create and protect green spaces. The event also provided us with an opportunity to discuss this program and to offer volunteers the opportunity to have Audubon staff make a site visit to their community project site and offer an assessment, with recommendations on how the site may be enhanced to provide habitat for wildlife.

Finally, through our partnership with URI, we successfully incorporated Audubon's plant recommendations into "The Guide to New Haven's Trees." This document, which guides all selection decisions for trees planted on municipal property in New Haven, now includes bird-friendly plant recommendations, as well as information on how each tree attracts and supports native birds, attracts and supports insect pollinators, and/or provides food for migratory birds. This guide is available online or from URI (in English and Spanish) and used by all municipal staff responsible for tree planting and landscaping. In addition, URI printed and distributed 500 copies of the guide (with support from a different funder).

Activity/Outcome:

Offer follow-up site assessments to community groups interested in creating wildlife habitat in their community

Progress to Date:

At the Community Greenspace and Community Garden celebration, Audubon staff provided information about site assessments to the community groups and volunteers in attendance. Two groups expressed interest in participating in a site assessment. Unfortunately, due to staff changes at Audubon CT, we were unable to complete these assessments within the project period. With the hiring of Audubon CT's new Bird-Friendly Communities Coordinator in March 2014, we now have the staff resources necessary to complete this objective and plan to do so in Spring 2014.

Conclusion

Audubon Connecticut's "A Fair Haven for Wildlife: Community-based Land Stewardship to Benefit Wildlife and Waterways" project seeks to both protect the Quinnipiac River Watershed and enhance the surrounding community that both people and wildlife call home. It emphasizes the personal actions that people can take in their own yards, local parks, and other municipal green spaces to improve water quality and enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife. At the same time, it recognizes and strives to overcome the barriers that can prevent communities from accessing the information and resources they need to fully engage in conservation and community-building. This project worked to close the gap between the needs of the local community and the tools necessary for addressing those needs most effectively to create a cleaner watershed and healthier environment. In addition to providing information, training, and

resources to workshop participants, supporting the creation of demonstration habitat, and disseminating information to the wider community, this project improved the capacity of URI to incorporate landscaping for wildlife principles into all of the community-based land stewardship efforts they conduct throughout the city of New Haven, with far reaching impacts beyond the immediate scope of this project.

Audubon's work in communities to create healthy yard and public green space habitats is part of our Bird-Friendly Communities initiative. This national initiative was created in response to the growing recognition that urbanization and development are the greatest threats to biodiversity throughout the world, yet cities and communities have the greatest concentration of constituents to resolve those threats. Our Bird-Friendly Communities strategy has the unique responsibility to engage people of all ages and inspire communities of all types and sizes to protect, create, promote, and sustain healthy bird habitat. Audubon recognizes the collective power of the individual and the need to provide people with the information, tools, and resources to make choices that benefit both our communities and our precious natural resources.

3. Expenditure of Grant Funds

Quinnipiac River Fund	
Salary and Fringe	
Patrick Comins	\$1,000
Taralynn Reynolds	\$1,000
Leslie Kane	\$1,000
Subcontract	
Urban Resources Initiative	\$5,000
Spanish translator	\$750
Design and Printing	\$1,005
Fossil Graphics for interpretive signage	\$1,000
Allocating toward 2014 QRF project	\$245
Travel	\$800
Food for workshops	\$200
Total	\$12,000

The expenditure of grant funds is closely aligned with the original budget. During the grant period, we were able to minimize design and printing costs, and allocate those savings toward support for interpretive signage. In addition, we completed the project \$245 under budget. At this time, we would like to request permission to allocate this amount toward our recently-approved 2014 Quinnipiac River Fund project.