

Instructions

QUINNIPIAC RIVER FUND GRANT AWARD - FINAL REPORT QUESTIONS

This form is to be completed by all nonprofit organizations that received a grant through the Quinnipiac River Fund.

Grant Details

Grant Details

Organization Name

River Advocates of South Central Connecticut

Grant Description

to support a coliform bacteria testing program that uses trained volunteers to collect and a professional lab to analyze to support a coliform bacteria testing program that uses trained volunteers to collect and a professional lab to analyze bacteria in stream and river segments of the Quinnipiac Watershed, and to support advocacy for state and local permits affecting water quality of the Quinnipiac River.

Total Grant Amount

15,000.00

Report Questions

1. List the specific objectives/outcomes of the project and tell how they were met during the grant period. Also, provide an update on any special conditions of the grant (if applicable).

River Advocates, as part of an Urban Waters coalition, established Impaired River Investigation and Advocacy, a coliform bacteria testing program modeled after Harborwatch's Norwalk River Watershed program that uses trained volunteers to collect and a professional lab to analyze bacteria in stream and river segments of the Quinnipiac Watershed, with a goal to remove watershed segments from the Impaired Waters of the U.S. list and open them to recreational use.

We will also continued advocating on state and local permits affecting water quality.

Our objectives was to study the Norwalk River model and copy it, to create trained volunteers from the community (interns and volunteers) who can collect samples in the approved manner and have them analyzed in a certified lab for coliform bacteria. We also hoped to identify other funding sources to pay for lab fees. We began looking for other volunteers to assist in monitoring and advocating on state and local permits.

Having previously chosen accessible sites for sampling in the lower Quinnipiac watershed and two adjacent basins, we established relationships with an E. coli testing lab for freshwater samples (Regional Water Authority in New Haven) and an Enterococcus testing lab for brackish water samples (EML in Wallingford) and recruited and trained adult and high school volunteer teams in the correct protocols for sampling, recording and cooling samples for the analysis. We later identified another lab at Yale University for less expensive testing. In coordination with the Norwalk model, DEEP and the labs, we chose wet day vs. dry day sampling, and added a follow up sampling event to determine recovery time after bacteria contamination.

We started using student interns to create municipal permit monitoring using home computers to follow commission agendas and learn each commission's requirements for testimony. This will be followed by land use training of volunteer advocates in each municipality to sift through and comment on permits. River Advocates staff also investigated with DEEP the possibility of phosphorus credit trading among permit holders in the same basin and followed the ongoing progress of reviewing and updating allnex' NPDES permit. We studied and then advocated for metals cleanup by soil removal at the former Ametek site on Toelles Rd., Wallingford and it was removed. We testified in support of wider buffers, smaller parking lot requirements and other changes to reduce stormwater impairments to streams and drinking water in Wallingford. We won (temporarily) public access to the Quinnipiac River in conjunction with the reconstruction of Toelles Rd. bridge. This win was later reversed by the town.

2. Please share your successes, challenges and any lessons learned through the implementation of your project. Were there any unintended consequences or lessons learned that may affect how you operate your program moving forward?

The bacteria monitoring produced eye-opening results. The entire lower Quinnipiac basin, plus the adjacent Mill and West River basins, meets recreational water standards on a dry (sunny) day, with the exception of New Haven, which fails because combined sewer overflows (CSO's) continually introduce significant bacteria loads to New Haven's rivers near the Sound. On a rainy day, the entire lower Quinnipiac basin, plus the adjacent Mill and West River basins, fails recreational water standards. Waters are unsafe to enter throughout the basin.

We were asked by the public to determine how fast the rivers recovered after a rainy day. Due to limited funds for lab analysis, we tested a single tributary, Allen Brook, the day after a rain event, and found it had returned to recreational standards in one day. This was reassuring.

We learned that phosphorus trading, while functional, cannot proceed unless the law is changed to allow it.

Concerning public access, our permission to use Toelles Rd. for public access was revoked when the Town of Wallingford learned we wanted to protect the public access parking lot from illegal dumping by installing a gate. The town considers a gate "not open to the public" but the private landowner prefers to avoid illegal dumping.

3. What are the opportunities and needs of your organization as it continues to move forward with its work to positively impact the Quinnipiac River?

We monitor New Haven Harbor as part of the EPA's Unified Water Study and with the Foundation's help we have begun a comprehensive bacteria testing program, because EPA determines impaired waters by bacteria counts and it is our goal to remove greater New Haven tributaries and rivers from the impaired waters of the U.S. list. We will not be able to pay for continuous sampling and monitoring at the level of Norwalk's program with our current program, although DEEP would welcome it. The challenge will be to work with partners including the Southwest Conservation District to set up a local lab that is cheap to use and allows monitoring throughout the water recreation months.

For now, we will use 2022 to target a single tributary and see if we can find the sources of incoming bacteria by sampling at regular intervals along the stream. These may include geese, dogs and septic tanks.

Attachments

Financial information (required): Please provide a detailed accounting of how the specific grant dollars were spent based on the budget submitted in the grant application.

Detailed Accounting

Project Budget Sheet 2021 River Advocates.docx

Pictures (optional): Please attach 1 to 3 pictures of activities that have occurred throughout the grant period (with a description for each) as a result of grant funding. All pictures should be submitted in JPEG format and may be uploaded to www.thequinnipiacriver.com and used in Foundation publications.

Picture 1

20210908_092450.jpg

Description

River Advocates Volunteer Chris McLaughlin grabs a Quinnipiac River water sample for dry day bacteria analysis below Wallace Dam, Wallingford, Sept. 8, 2021.

Picture 2

IMG_4075 (2).jpg

Description

River Advocates executive director Mary Mushinsky grabs a wet day sample for bacteria analysis from the Quinnipiac River at Sackett Point Rd., North Haven, Sept. 24, 2021.

Picture 3

Central Area-Culvert_2021-10-22.jpg

Description

Site of soil removal to reduce nickel contamination at the former Ametek industrial site on Toelles Rd., Wallingford, Oct. 22, 2021. River Advocates endorsed the proposal and advocated for a permit for the landowner to remove nickel and avoid further contamination of Wharton Brook and Quinnipiac River.