

NOI Full Text

Project Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of this project is to improve water quality of streams in New River Gorge National River to sustain the river's environmental, cultural, recreational, and economic benefits. The recipient will coordinate the New River Clean Water Alliance, a group of local citizens and community leaders concerned about the health of the New River in West Virginia. The recipient will help the Alliance develop and implement a strategic plan focused on three primary objectives: 1. Build community support: Strengthen the regional voice for clean water by building capacity and expertise for local organizations to educate and engage communities. Use citizen science initiatives to increase awareness and involve local citizens in meaningful ways. 2. Examine and characterize current conditions: Monitor water quality and ecosystem health, identify sources of impairment, and develop reports and outreach materials that characterize current conditions and help to frame a discussion about potential solutions. 3. Develop Solutions: Identify and support best management practices and projects that improve wastewater treatment systems, develop innovative wastewater treatment alternatives, incorporate green infrastructure, and protect watershed health and resilience.

Unique Qualifications

The New River Conservancy (NRC) is uniquely qualified to achieve these project goals and objectives because of their experience, capacity, and technical expertise running similar programs within the New River watershed, upstream of New River Gorge National River. NRC is a leader in studying, monitoring, and improving the condition of the New River watershed. For forty years, the organization has focused its programs on (1) sharing and fostering research, (2) educating and engaging communities, and (3) protecting and restoring the New River and its tributaries. NRC's current programs are centered primarily on the New River in Virginia and North Carolina; however, these programs are scalable and transferable to the New River in West Virginia. For example:

- (1) Sharing and fostering research: NRC hosts the New River Consortium, which brings together university students / faculty, agency representatives, and other partners to collect, analyze, and report on scientific data related to river ecosystem attributes, processes, and stressors. The resulting research is used to help agencies develop science-based policies and to help watershed associations and other partners take direct actions to improve watershed conditions. NRC maintains an online library of published scientific reports and hosts a biennial conference to share research results and project accomplishments. Through the Consortium, NRC is uniquely qualified to connect the New River Alliance with researchers and agency representatives, promote new research opportunities, and provide a unique platform for sharing program results.
- (2) Educating and engaging communities: Through their New River Water Watchers program, NRC trains volunteer citizen scientists to collect water quality data using a protocol and quality assurance plan that meet standards of the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Data are publicly available through their web-based database. NRC's experience with citizen science programs, state agency collaboration, volunteer coordination, data management, and website management would be directly transferable to the Alliance's priority objectives in West Virginia and provide an opportunity to create watershed-scale programs that are consistent across North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.

- (3) Protecting and restoring streams: NRC has experience leading projects to plant trees and shrubs in riparian buffers to reduce erosion and improve water quality. They also host volunteer events to clean up trash from streams and riparian areas. NRC has also improved water quality by educating and assisting landowners about green infrastructure, such as building rain gardens that filter stormwater runoff. NRC's experience would help the Alliance develop similar programs for the New River and its tributaries in West Virginia.