Advancing Environmental Justice and Equity in the Region 4 Water Division

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Environmental Justice (EJ)

- **Fair treatment** and **meaningful involvement** of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

- **Fair treatment** - No group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.

- **Meaningful involvement** - People will be considered, participate in, and influence decision-making about activities that may impact their environment and health.
Executive Order 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad

Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
The Region 4 Environmental Justice Advisory Council (Council) was established to provide coordination, direction, and day-to-day oversight of the Region’s cross media and divisional EJ work.
General Environmental Justice Integration Practices

The Water Division Environmental Justice (EJ) Workgroup was formed to help facilitate EJ integration in the Division.

The workgroup is comprised of representatives from each Branch, and it holds monthly meetings.

Representatives participate on the Regional EJ Workgroup and other program specific National Workgroups.

A Division EJ lead acts on environmental justice complaints that come from Region 4 and OEJ offices, sends them to the appropriate program and reports the outcomes.

Each Branch and/or Section identifies investments or environmental justice related activities that will be addressed by programs within the Branch and provides updates.
EJ Workgroup

• Denisse Diaz, Deputy Director
• Bonita Johnson, Co-lead
• Erica Jones, Co-lead
• Erskine Benjamin
• Janine Morris
• Jennifer DiMaio
• Meghan Wahlstrom-Ramler
• Emma Inhorn
• Chauncey Orr

• Margaret Stebbins
• Karrie-Jo Shell
• Lauren Petter
• Cynthia Van Der Wiele
• Sylvester Stokes
• Rainey Ragland
• Sibyl Cole
• Lapapa, Brianna (DW-ECAD)
• Arzon, Arturo (DW-ECAD)

Region 4 Water Division
(Draft) Environmental Justice Strategic Plan
FY 2022-2026
1/10/2022
Goal 2: Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights

Objectives

2.1: Promote Environmental Justice and Civil Rights at the Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Levels

2.2: Embed Environmental Justice and Civil Rights into EPA’s Programs, Policies, and Activities

2.3: Strengthen Civil Rights Enforcement in Communities with Environmental Justice Concerns
EJ INVESTMENTS

- Capacity Development/Training
- Community Focused Technical Assistance
- Cross-Programmatic Collaborations
- Engagement/Outreach
- Funding Support
- Identifying/Targeting Communities with EJ Concerns
- Policy Development/Review
- Tool Development
Examples of Investments

Policy and Methods Development/Review
- Developing a DWS EJSCREEN SOP to target public water systems that potentially serve areas of EJ concern.

Policy and Methods Development/Review
- Working with FDEP Water Quality, Monitoring, TMDL, and EJ programs to develop approaches to integrate EJ into monitoring and TMDL development decision-making processes.
Examples of Investments

**Capacity Development/Training** - Providing analytical assistance to inform watershed projects and other actions by state NPS programs.

**Cross-Programmatic Collaborations** – Providing technical support to the South River community and USFWS on possible dam removal to aid water quality and climate resiliency.

**Community-Focused Technical Assistance** – Aiding in the development of a Communication Plan for the Indian River Lagoon NEP to develop engagement opportunities for underserved communities.
Examples of Investments

Engagement/Outreach - Providing Children’s Health presentations to students living in underserved communities and attending five Title I partnering schools in Georgia and one in Alabama.

Funding Support - Helping to identify funding sources to implement green infrastructure, flood mitigation, climate adaptation and resiliency plans.

Identifying/Targeting Communities with EJ Concerns - Targeting communities for resilience efforts using "socioeconomic" metrics and "social vulnerability" from various screening tools.

Water Division Representative on the Region’s EJ GIS Tiger Team
Common Coastal Community Issues

- Storm surges and hurricanes
- Flooding
- Adverse environmental impacts from industries
- Water Quality
- Erosion and sea level rise
- Loss of economy
- Uninhabitable houses and businesses
AfricaTown, Alabama

- Founded in 1866 by 32 of the last 110 Africans documented to have been brought to the United States via the Middle Passage
- The oldest settlement in Alabama
- Sits on the bank of the Tensaw River Delta
- Shares land with Mobile and Prichard
- Chemical corridor was filled with factories and mills that emitted pollution for decades
AfricaTown Strategic Framework

AFRICATOWN STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

STAKEHOLDERS

AFRICATOWN COMMUNITY

PARTNERS

Africatown Neighborhood Plan

KEY AREAS of IMPACT

Infrastructure
- Housing
- Roads

Environment
- Waterways
- Brownfields Grant
- Blight

Economic Development
- Tourism (Welcome Center, Heritage House, Tours)
- Entrepreneurship
- Marketing

Engagement
- Neighborhood Associations
- National/State/Local Partners
- Africatown Collaborative (Crisis, AGDC, MOC, Clotilda Descendants, Yarmouth, Union Baptist, First Baptist)

Vibrant Africatown Community
North Port St Joe, Florida

- Lack of reinvestment after industries closed
- Brownfields, blight, decay, economic and environmental issues
- Lingering concerns regarding air, soil, and water contamination
North Port St Joe Collaborative

- Florida Brownfields Association - Environmental Justice and Public Health Committee
- EPA Region 4 Environmental Justice Program
- EPA Region 4 Water Division and Brownfields Program
- University of West Florida
- University of South Florida
- University of Memphis
- Cardno
- Gulf County Health Department
- FDEP Brownfields and EJ Programs
- Florida A & M University
- University of Florida
- ReGenesis Institute
Best Service-Learning Project

- Dr. Kwame Owusu-Daaku of the University of West Florida and 24 students
  - Conducted research and engaged with community members
  - Developing a Community Environmental Injustice Profile
    - Community Snapshot, Community History, Environmental Injustices, Public Health, Redress Actions, and a Project Area Coalition Profile
  - Results will be used to help secure funds to address issues
Greening Gullah/Geechee Communities: Advancing Community Resiliency through a Living Landscape
Climate Adaption, Flood Mitigation, Sea-level Rise, Green Infrastructure, Water Quality

A collaborative comprised of the Gullah/Geechee Nation community, Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank, Beaufort County, EPA Office of Community Revitalization-Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program Region 4 Water Division; Land, Chemicals and Redevelopment Division; Office of the Regional Administrator – College/Underserved Community Partnership Program, The College of Charleston, University of South Carolina Beaufort, University of Minnesota

Community-Driven, Cross Programmatic, Local Government, Academia, Public, Private Partnership Collaboration

Community Star Award Ceremony for Queen Quet, Chiefess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation EPA and SC DEHC February 22, 2022
Greening Gullah Geechee

WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Traditional drainage is designed to move water off the site as quickly as possible. While this sounds like a good idea, it can actually cause flooding because our traditional systems get backed up, like highways during rush hour. Green infrastructure strategies slow the water down—which reduces flooding—and clean the water using plants and other filtration media.

Once in the green infrastructure system, the water either infiltrates into the ground, evaporates, or is slowly released back into the traditional drainage system after the threat of a flood is over. Green infrastructure is an approach to water management that protects, restores, or mimics the natural water cycle by soaking up and storing water.

KEEPING OUR WATER CLEAN

Green infrastructure improves water quality by removing contaminants from the water before it reaches rivers and inlets. It can even help keep trash like paper cups out of our waterways. Soil and plants help capture and remove pollutants from stormwater in a variety of ways, including absorption and filtration.

Wildlife, like fish, that depend on clean, abundant water resources cannot thrive in contaminated water bodies. Green infrastructure keeps our waterways clean and supports a healthier more vibrant fishing industry.
Salt marshes are coastal wetlands that are flooded and drained by salt water brought in by the tides. These intertidal habitats are essential for healthy fisheries, coastlines, and communities—and they are an integral part of our economy and culture. They provide essential food, refuge, or nursery habitat for more than 75 percent of fisheries species, including shrimp, blue crab, and many finfish. Salt marshes also protect shorelines from erosion by buffering wave action and trapping sediments. They reduce flooding by slowing and absorbing rainwater and protect water quality by filtering runoff, and by metabolizing excess nutrients.
DITCHES THAT CLEAN THE WATER

The ditches along the side of the roads—also called bioswales when designed to clean water—are filled with plants that clean the water as it moves through the system. They slow the flow of water in some rain events to reduce flooding downstream. They create habitat for birds, butterflies, and local wildlife. Bioswales are beneficial for the environment because they reduce the amount of pollutants from cars (oil, gas, dirt) and runoff from agriculture or lawns (fertilizers, pesticides, or silt) keeping our waterways clean.

A well-designed bioswale will both move water when needed and slow water when that is appropriate. In some bioswale systems with a small amount of water, the plants slow the water flow during a light rain, but are pushed down during heavy rains to let the water flow. Larger bioswales have check dams that slow the water during light rains, but are not as tall as the sides of the ditch to let water flow when needed.

In both cases, large pieces of trash are collected before they enter the marsh, and microscopic pollutants are captured by the plants and degraded biologically.
Recap Opportunities for CWA 303(d) Program Activities

- Utilizing EJSCREEN
- Working with other programs to apply tools that will help to identify and target focus areas-communities, waterbodies, unassessed waters, etc.
- Participating in community listening sessions
- Providing resources to states and tribes
- Promoting citizen science-Sanitary survey app training
- Working collaboratively with outside entities and stakeholders to maximize data accessibility, information sharing, and resources
- Coordinating across programs and divisions, other governmental departments and agencies, and nongovernmental entities to identify and achieve shared goals
Questions?