



The Municipal Blue Star Program: Inspiring Resiliency in New Jersey Municipalities through Sustainable Actions

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Importance

In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, coastal and inland New Jersey communities learned first-hand the importance of shoreline and infrastructure resiliency. State agencies, universities, non-profit organizations, and local governments have all turned their focus toward initiatives that protect citizens and resources vulnerable to the effects of climate change. By leveraging existing programs addressing water quality and connecting with resiliency initiatives, these programs have become more valuable to regions affected by climate change. Municipalities are uniquely positioned to promote resiliency through several channels, including adopting ordinances and resolutions, undertaking green initiatives, and developing citizen outreach and engagement programs. As interest in resilience grows at the local level, an opportunity has arisen to capitalize on this momentum with the promotion of municipal sustainability projects in the process.

To promote resiliency and water quality improvements at the local level, New Jersey-based non-profit organization Clean Ocean Action developed the Municipal Blue Star Program, an action-oriented certification program for municipalities that builds on the successful implementation of the “Sustainable Jersey” point-based certification program. The Municipal Blue Star Program operates within the well-known framework of Sustainable Jersey by steering sustainability-minded municipalities toward completion of actions focused specifically on improving water quality and resiliency.



Above: The iconic Jersey Shore. Photo courtesy of Ryan Struck Photography.
Below: Nature's inspiration for the Blue Star logo. Photo courtesy of Joe Reynolds.



Introduction

Clean Ocean Action (COA) is an environmental non-profit that has worked for the last 30 years to improve the water quality of the marine waters off the New Jersey/New York coast using research, public education, and citizen action. COA has partnered with Sustainable Jersey to create the Municipal Blue Star Program, which encourages municipalities to take initiatives that will enhance community resiliency and water quality both locally and downstream. Sustainable Jersey is an action and point-based certification program for municipalities in New Jersey that want to take steps to sustain their quality of life over the long term. Sustainable Jersey is entering its sixth year and over 400 municipalities have registered in the program. The Blue Star Program aims to inspire towns to achieve Sustainable Jersey certification and reap its benefits, while at the same time supporting and promoting watershed-wide water quality improvements. Through the Blue Star Program, municipalities will become leaders in environmental stewardship and help ensure the resiliency and vitality of a clean coastal ecosystem and economy.

Program Objectives

- Provide municipalities with information and resources that incentivize actions that improve water quality and resiliency
- Administer the program within the framework of the well-known and respected Sustainable Jersey program
- Engage on an ongoing basis with municipal officials to provide support and encourage partnerships

Certification Process

1. Follow the application requirements for Sustainable Jersey certification or re-certification.
2. Ensure that 50% of points are from COA's list of Municipal Blue Star actions and that one COA-required action has been completed.
3. Submit documentation to Sustainable Jersey to receive certification.
4. Submit application for Municipal Blue Star certification to COA.
5. Award presentation hosted by COA and ongoing access to resources and information.

The COA-required actions include:

- Climate Adaptation: Flooding Risk
- Innovative Water Quality Project
- Model Stormwater Control Ordinance
- Plastic Bag Ban or Fee
- Stormwater Utility Support Resolution

Program Implementation

Clean Ocean Action launched the Blue Star Program during the summer months of 2014. The COA team met with environmental commissions and planning boards at both the municipal and county levels, as well as with Sustainable Jersey-sanctioned municipal “Green Teams” to build support for the Blue Star Program. Using the insight garnered from the Green Teams, COA adapted the Blue Star Program to better meet the needs of municipalities and overcome current challenges (i.e., reducing paperwork burdens).

The Blue Star Program launch culminated with a half-day conference held on September 18, 2014 at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. COA invited municipal leaders and experts from the northeast region to showcase successful programs and innovative projects that improve community resiliency and local water quality and inspire participation in the program.



Above: Expert panelists discuss COA-required actions at the Blue Star launch conference.
Below: Environmental Canine Services, Inc. demonstrate their innovative canine pollution source tracking services.

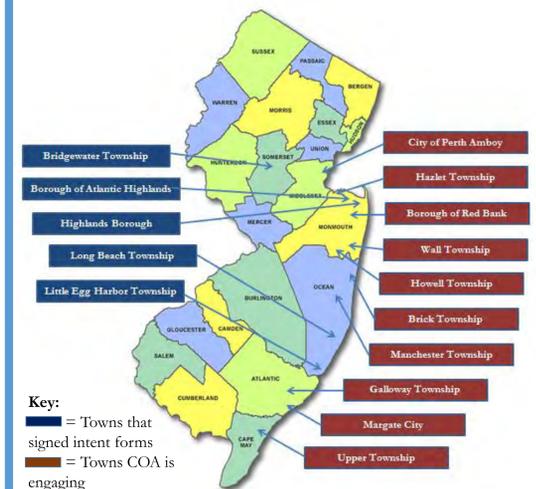


Program Benefits

- Improve and protect the economic and environmental future of the community
- Reduce costs through green initiatives, while increasing municipal funds through enforcement
- Promote healthy waters, resilient communities, and environmentally sound practices
- Showcase communities as statewide role models through COA media spotlights
- Increase community pride and participation

Current Status

- Engaging with municipalities that have signed program intent forms
- Continuing to meet with interested municipalities
- Partnering with watershed organizations, non-profits, and government officials
- Creating a network of municipal ambassadors for the program
- Expanding into inland communities



Partnership Highlight

Understanding the importance of watershed-wide participation, COA will be expanding into the Raritan Watershed through a partnership with the Bridgewater Township Environmental Commission and the Raritan Headwaters Association. The three groups will promote the Raritan Headwaters Association riverbank cleanup on Saturday, April 18, 2015 as a way to connect with and involve municipalities throughout the watershed. The goal is to get 13 of the 39 municipalities participating in the cleanup to sign Municipal Blue Star Program intent forms.

Acknowledgements

The Municipal Blue Star Program was made possible by funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and collaborative support from Sustainable Jersey.



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