



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NY/NJ BAYKEEPER RECEIVES FUNDING TO CONDUCT PLASTIC
POLLUTION RESEARCH AND OUTREACH ALONG LOWER PASSAIC
RIVER**

NY/NJ Baykeeper has been awarded Urban Waters Funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency Region 2 (USEPA) to further microplastic research, advocacy, and community outreach to prevent plastics from entering local waterways and contaminating the food chain.

EPA Region 2 Urban Waters funding will specifically fund NY/NJ Baykeeper's activities to identify, reduce, and prevent plastic pollution, such as bottles, bags, styrofoam cups and straws, transported via stormwater from reaching the lower Passaic River and Newark Bay Complex. Project partners include the Ironbound Community Corporation and Rutgers University. Funding will be used to gather baseline data describing plastic types and densities in the Passaic River, educate and train Newark student interns on sampling and analysis methodology, developing engaging videos and a social media campaign for public outreach, and hosting shoreline cleanups. The partners will identify the sources of plastic pollution and encourage the adoption of sustainable, plastic-free behavior.

NY/NJ Baykeeper collects samples using a net called a "manta trawl." The net is designed to collect all floating material in its path. The plastic within the samples will be counted and categorized by size and type and analyzed for any contaminants attached and within the plastic. The research, conducted by Rutgers University,

also includes determining whether the plastics and associated contaminants have developmental impacts on fish larvae.

“This project will allow us to connect the dots for the first time to better understand what contaminants are absorbed by microplastics and how the plastic impacts the development of fish and broader implications to the ecosystem. With the help of the community, we hope that residents will be empowered by the research results and adopt reusable habits,” said **Sandra Meola, Communications and Outreach Associate, NY/NJ Baykeeper.**

The community outreach component of the project will be in collaboration with Ironbound Community Corporation. Outreach will boost upstream and downstream Passaic River community understanding of microplastics and stormwater runoff and focus on actions individuals and businesses can take to reduce plastic consumption and prevent pollution.

“For the community, we are hoping that the data collected will strengthen the need to address plastic pollution along the Passaic River, which often times ends in the Ironbound,” **Molly Greenberg, Environmental Justice Policy Manager, Ironbound Community Corporation.** “We are excited about the collaboration between East Side High School and Rutgers University. Students will not only participate in the project but really drive the advocacy work.”

According to NY/NJ Baykeeper’s [NY-NJ Harbor Estuary plastic report](#), at least 165 million plastic particles are floating in Harbor waters at any given time. The most abundant type of plastic found in samples is polystyrene, commonly called Styrofoam. Plastic pollution is derived from litter, stormwater runoff, and improper waste management. Once plastic enters a local waterway it can never biodegrade. Instead it just breaks down into smaller pieces, becoming microplastic, mistaken by fish for food. Eighty-five percent of the plastic within NY/NJ Baykeeper’s samples were microplastic, smaller than 5mm. The microbeads in personal care products such as toothpaste and scrubs are also considered microplastic.

“This project is very important because scientists have not quantified the amount of microplastic pollution currently affecting New Jersey’s local waterways. Water treatment plants were not designed to remove these particles, and so to eliminate them from our surface waters we must determine the extent and sources of this pollution,” said **Dr. Beth Ravit, Co-Director of Rutgers University Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability.**

About NY/NJ Baykeeper

NY/NJ Baykeeper is the citizen advocate of the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary. Since 1989, we’ve worked to protect, preserve, and restore the environment of the most urban estuary on Earth – benefiting its natural and human communities. Through our Estuary-wide programs we seek to end pollution, improve public access, conserve and

restore public lands, restore aquatic habitats, encourage appropriate and discourage inappropriate development, carry out public education, and work with federal and NY/NJ state regulators and citizen groups as partners in planning for a sustainable future for the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary watershed.

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Protecting, preserving, and restoring the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary since 1989.
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