

Case Study

Phoenix Park: Using Clean Water State Revolving Fund Dollars to Create a Park with Green Stormwater Infrastructure in Camden, New Jersey

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Summary of Project

Phoenix Park, a remediated Brownfield, is now a public riverfront park with green stormwater infrastructure in Camden, NJ. This remediation and park development project was funded in large part by the New Jersey Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF).

Project Partners and Roles

- Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA): County wastewater utility and main project lead
- Heart of Camden: Nonprofit community group serving Camden's Waterfront South neighborhood
- Camden County Department of Parks: Provided Camden County Open Space Fund grant
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and New Jersey Infrastructure Bank: The Infrastructure Bank and NJDEP work together to administer the CWSRF in New Jersey. NJDEP is a state agency for environmental protection, while the Infrastructure Bank is an independent state financing authority. For this project, these entities provided SRF funding to CCMUA
- New Jersey Infrastructure Bank: independent State Financing Authority.
- Camden Collaborative Initiative: Partnership between EPA Region 2, NJDEP, and community environmental nonprofits
- Rutgers Agricultural Cooperative Extension: Designed the park for CCMUA
- New Jersey Tree Foundation: Identified native trees that would capture the most stormwater
- New Jersey Conservation Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land: Conservation NGOs that secured funding for non-construction park costs

Background on SRF Use in New Jersey

New Jersey administers its Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) through the New Jersey Infrastructure Bank, which is an independent state financing authority. The New Jersey Infrastructure Bank and the New Jersey Department of Environmental

Protection (NJDEP) work together to administer the CWSRF. Initially focused on gray infrastructure and Brownfield remediation, the state updated their Intended Use Plan to include green infrastructure after the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority constructed rain gardens at their own expense in 2013 to manage stormwater. NJDEP was impressed by the social benefits of the rain gardens, in addition to the volume of stormwater captured, and expanded their eligibility as a result. New Jersey was one of the first states to use CWSRF to fund green infrastructure projects.

Today, CWSRF loans are available to publicly owned treatment works, private entities, and private universities for green infrastructure projects that address stormwater control. New Jersey's [stormwater regulations](#) require green infrastructure on [major developments](#) that increase impervious surfaces by 0.25 acres or more (eligibility details are outlined on the state's [website](#)).

Description of Property

Phoenix Park sits on a five-acre parcel along the Delaware River. It is next to a utility wastewater treatment facility and 100 yards from the Waterfront South neighborhood, a neighborhood with little existing green space. The site was a former American Minerals Factory (AMF), which was owned by the American Minerals company at the outset of this project. Impervious surfaces and contaminated soil caused pollution and radioactive minerals to run off into the Delaware River during rain events. In the city of Camden, heavy rains regularly overwhelm the city's combined sewer overflow (CSO) system. Creating Phoenix Park added green space that retains stormwater and mitigates pollution from this area. Phoenix Park captures stormwater on-site, preventing approximately five million gallons from entering the CSO system each year.

Above: A map of Phoenix Park and the walkway around the treatment plant and other greenspace.

Description of Project and Project Timeline

Using Camden County Open Space Fund money and a CWSRF loan, the utility acquired the former factory, demolished the buildings, remediated the contaminated land, and built Phoenix Park, a riverfront park for the community. To qualify for the CWSRF loan, the utility cleaned up site contamination, removed impervious surfaces, and created a green space which increased stormwater infiltration. These changes



improved the river's water quality by eliminating contaminated runoff. The narrative that follows describes how this park came to be.

The Waterfront South community in Camden had long sought waterfront access and more green space, a need identified by groups like the Heart of Camden, the Camden Collaborative Initiative, and CCMUA. In 2015, a community leader found out the land housing the former factory was for sale and informed the utility director. The utility partnered with the City of Camden to apply for the Camden County Open Space Fund, which funded purchase of the property and demolition of abandoned buildings. The site had significant contamination and the utility did not want to purchase the land prior to knowing it could be cleaned up, so the deed transfer occurred after remediation. CCMUA, the utility, negotiated this arrangement with the American Minerals company prior to any action happening in the ground.

While demolishing structures, the utility applied for a CWSRF loan to fund park construction, and the loan was awarded in 2016. To qualify for the loan, the utility

remediated the contaminated dirt, removed impervious surfaces, and created a green space which increased stormwater infiltration into the soil and eliminated contaminated runoff into the river. NJDEP allows green infrastructure projects principal forgiveness up to \$1 million, which Phoenix Park qualified for.

Today, a walkway connects the park to another five-acre park previously built by the utility. A riverfront walkway loops around both parks and the treatment plant, featuring a fishing pier. Together, the two parks, walkway, and pier total 15 acres of recreational space.

Many partners were involved in this project: Rutgers and the New Jersey Tree Foundation designed the park; a private landowner donated an easement to create a walkway between Phoenix Park and a nearby utility-built park. CCMUA partnered with conservation non-profits like The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation to add community amenities to the Park.

The full project was completed in early 2018. This project was named as one of the ten best uses of SRF funds in the country by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Funding Sources

Phoenix Park construction was funded by two sources: a \$700,000 Camden County Open Space Fund Grant and a \$1.8 million CWSRF loan. Additional funding was provided by conservation non-profits for park additions like signage, benches, and the community programming.

SRF Loan Amount	Principal Forgiveness	Final Loan Payback Amount	Payback Period	Percent Interest
\$1.8 million	50%	\$900,000 from CCMUA	20 years	1%

Challenges

This project encountered a few challenges:

- Site remediation: this site was highly contaminated. The utility negotiated an agreement with the American Minerals company to do remediation work prior to purchasing the property, as the utility did not want to be liable for a property with untreated radioactive soil.
- Negotiating across multiple parties: To gain access to the park, CCMUA had to negotiate with a private landowner for a walkway easement and New Jersey Transit to build a pedestrian crossing across the railroad as part of the walkway.
- Funding eligibility: Typically, municipalities are the only eligible applicants for the Camden County Open Space Fund Grant. Camden County allowed the utility to apply for the Open Space grant as a partner with Camden City.

Lessons Learned – “Ingredients for Success”

Other states are encouraged to imitate New Jersey’s use of SRFs to fund green stormwater infrastructure. This project was enabled by key individual and organizational champions across state and municipal government and strong partnerships:

- Andy Kricun, the Executive Director and Chief Engineer of the CCMUA, was a strong champion and ‘quarterback’ for this project. Kricun championed green infrastructure as a nature-based solution and community benefit and was the catalyst for starting the Camden Collaborative Initiative, as well as the Phoenix Park project.
- The Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority was a strong local champion for this project. CCMUA is an anchor institution for the Camden community and committed to improving the quality of life for their constituents. They were heavily involved in the Camden Collaborative Initiative and pushed the project through multiple barriers to provide the Waterfront South neighborhood with needed green space
- The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection served as a proactive and innovative administrator of CWSRF funds. They allowed the use of the CWSRF for green infrastructure projects, which allowed Phoenix Park to access these funds.
- Strong cross-sector organizations. Groups like the Camden Collaborative Initiative played an important role in bringing partners together. The Camden Collaborative Initiative was started by CCMUA in 2013 and now brings together over 60 environmental nonprofits and federal agencies (i.e. EPA). Communities across New Jersey have since developed similar initiatives inspired by CCI’s efforts

Further Resources

- [Phoenix Park Award](#)
- [EPIC report on NJ water investments](#)
- [Mainstreaming Green Infrastructure](#)
- [Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority Green Infrastructure Projects](#)
- [EPA Recognition of Camden](#)