

Groundwork Elizabeth

February 28, 2024

***NOAA based Consortium for Climate Risk in Urban Northeast and Rutgers help Groundwork Elizabeth engage the local community and make progress to combat flooding at the Trotters Branch of the Elizabeth River.***

Elizabeth N.J. is a densely populated culturally diverse environmental justice urban community that is reeling from the effects of a hotter and wetter climate. Of the 39,000 households in the City, 78% are defined as non-white and many are low to moderate income residences with little access to natural open space. Impervious surfaces cover most of the City and facilitate flooding and related heat concerns.

The Trotters Branch tributary of the Elizabeth River is a harbinger of the health of the Elizabeth watershed. Climate heating and associated rainstorms threaten the natural spaces and surrounding community, causing harm to the native wildlife and threatening human life in these EJ neighborhoods adjacent to local waterways. Hurricane IDA demonstrated the dangers of an unchecked urban waterway, flooding the streambed and surrounding neighborhoods resulting in loss of human life.

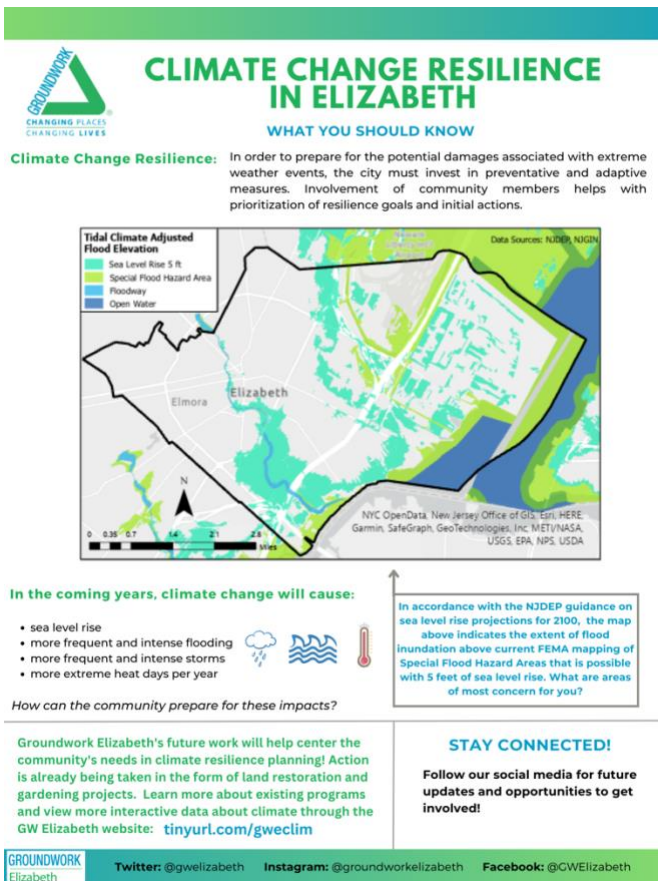
In late 2022 through the end of 2023, the Consortium for Climate Risk in Urban Northeast Initiative (CCRUN) funded nonprofit Groundwork Elizabeth to document the risks of this local coastal flooding and to take actions caused by challenges along the Union County watershed at the Trotters Branch of the Elizabeth River. The Rutgers University Climate and Energy Institute participated and oversaw the grant.

Goals for the CCRUN project would add to the overall planning that was already in works at the Trotters site. The lessons learned would then be used to focus on other sites experiencing similar dangers.



Rutgers Graduate student, Jessica Parineet from the Bloustein School for Public Policy first worked with Groundwork staff to document the watershed and associated heat challenges for the community and created an easy to read story map and separate maps which were translated into Spanish via Rutgers translation services for the City’s large Latinx population and a narrative of the dangers that Elizabeth was experiencing.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e0da751740de4dfa87035618181ed785>



**CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE IN ELIZABETH**  
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

**Climate Change Resilience:** In order to prepare for the potential damages associated with extreme weather events, the city must invest in preventative and adaptive measures. Involvement of community members helps with prioritization of resilience goals and initial actions.

**Tidal Climate Adjusted Flood Elevation**

- Sea Level Rise 5 ft
- Special Flood Hazard Area
- Floodway
- Open Water

**In the coming years, climate change will cause:**

- sea level rise
- more frequent and intense flooding
- more frequent and intense storms
- more extreme heat days per year

**How can the community prepare for these impacts?**

Groundwork Elizabeth's future work will help center the community's needs in climate resilience planning! Action is already being taken in the form of land restoration and gardening projects. Learn more about existing programs and view more interactive data about climate through the GW Elizabeth website: [tinyurl.com/gweclim](https://tinyurl.com/gweclim)

**STAY CONNECTED!**

Follow our social media for future updates and opportunities to get involved!

Twitter: @gweizabeth Instagram: @groundworkelizabeth Facebook: @CWEElizabeth

Groundwork Elizabeth had already been working at the Trotters Branch site for over 8 years, and now armed with a good story, and a community Trotters Branch action committee overseen by Groundwork, modified a workplan which could help address flooding at the local Elizabeth River Tributary. Large scale funders were lined up, including the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s IDEA and 5 Star programs, the USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service, the NJ Conservation Foundation, the NJ Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, and Phillips 66 Bayway Refinery. Over \$450,000 of support was lined up and from July through November, a task force of Groundwork youth led by Operations Director John Evangelista, worked on reducing sheet flow, firming up the streambed and streambank with large boulders and riprap, removing trees which would block water flow, and replacing invasive species with native plants.

“Our work with CCRUN will continue”, noted Executive Director Jonathan Phillips. “Our nonprofit and our many partners are fully invested in a Climate resiliency program called “Climate Safe Elizabeth. For this project at Trotters Branch, our overarching outcome is to protect the vital watershed so that it acts as an ecologically functioning waterway conserving the site for plants, animals and improving the space to help us make our most environmentally challenged neighborhoods healthier and safer for all who live here. We can’t turn back time, but we can make plans and adjustments that can protect our natural spaces for the full enjoyment of people, plants, and animals.



Through the Consortium for Climate Risk in the Urban Northeast initiative, our goals for the grant are to engage our community, pointing out the dangers of the erosion, which will help lead to restoration of specific elements of the natural functions and health of the watershed. Meetings are being planned for the community.

Our community engagement practices will also lead to increased recreation at the site, increasing environmental justice. For more information, please email: [elizabethnj@groundworkusa.org](mailto:elizabethnj@groundworkusa.org).