

# Messaging: Nature as infrastructure



## Background:

From floodplains to riparian buffers and rain gardens, green or natural infrastructure can [help to slow climate change by sinking carbon](#) while protecting communities from its effects by cooling and cleaning the air, and slowing and spreading water. But, despite its multiple benefits and [cost-effectiveness](#), natural infrastructure has [traditionally been underfunded](#). That is starting to shift as more communities are finding their storm drains, sewer systems and levees swamped by extreme weather, but [just 10% of Clean Water State Revolving Fund dollars](#) are required to go to “green” projects, so it’s important we continue to make the case for investment in nature-based solutions.

## Message Building Blocks

The most effective messages tap into closely held concerns, speak to a current problem our audiences are experiencing, and then offer a solution and/or a call to action. For more on this formula, check out [this great guide](#) by The Opportunity Agenda.

- Values: Home and family, public and environmental health, care for nature
- Problem: Traditional infrastructure designed to control water is failing in the face of climate-driven extreme weather
- Solution: Projects that work with nature to reduce flooding and replenish water supplies, while cooling and cleaning the air
- Action: Invest in nature-based solutions such as forests, floodplains, wetlands, rain gardens, green streets, and more

## Overarching advice

[Water Hub polling](#) shows that the term “nature-based solutions” resonates more with voters than “green” or “natural infrastructure.” But we advise against relying on these umbrella terms to describe this solution set. Instead, we recommend using simple language to paint a picture of the projects themselves: green alleys, rain gardens, streamside wetlands, etc. Then emphasize the way these green spaces address community concerns. While the primary practitioner goal (and funding mechanism) may center on water, some audiences will value co-benefits more. So, when talking about an urban greening plan, you may want to focus on the shade and cooling it will provide, or the new spaces it will create for people to gather outdoors with friends and family. Some green stormwater installations also help to slow traffic, making neighborhoods

safer for walking and biking. When describing conservation and restoration projects outside of cities, we recommend describing their role in mitigating drought/flooding/pollution as well as benefits for fish and wildlife and recreation. For examples of how to do this, read on!

## Sample Talking Points: Urban GSI

*These are intended as a starting point: we encourage you to localize and adapt for your audience!*

- Everyone deserves to live in a neighborhood that is vibrant and healthy. Parks, gardens and greenways are an essential part of that.
- These shared spaces provide a place for people to gather, exercise, and unwind.
- Studies show that access to nearby nature makes us [healthier and happier](#).
- But right now, low-wealth communities of color have [fewer trees](#) and [less park space](#) than wealthier areas, in part because of [racist banking and development practices](#) like redlining.
- This isn't just a quality of life concern—it is a public health and safety problem:
  - Trees and other greenery can literally save lives by shading and cooling neighborhoods as temperatures rise.
  - Plants and soil soak up rain and runoff, [reducing flooding](#) and [sewer overflows](#), and helping to [replenish underground aquifers](#).
  - Green spaces also help to [slow climate change](#) by making neighborhoods more walkable and bikeable and [absorbing carbon](#) before it reaches the atmosphere.
- As climate change brings more extreme weather, communities around the country are turning to green or nature-based projects to help them prepare for heatwaves, hurricanes, and other disasters.
- These efforts are getting a big boost from federal funding.
- Together, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act include billions of dollars that communities can tap to plant trees and build rain gardens, parks and greenways.
- The Justice 40 initiative directs government groups to ensure 40% of these funds reach previously disinvested neighborhoods at high risk for climate disasters.
- In many places, local residents are already working on greening plans that make their neighborhoods safer and more livable.
- New parks, community gardens, food forests, and other multi-use spaces will help communities prepare for a climate-changed future.
- On busy streets, planters and roundabouts can slow traffic, making it safer for people to walk and bike there.
- Building and maintaining public greenspaces can help put residents to work, bringing jobs and economic opportunities to previously disinvested areas.
- To ensure communities remain safe as the weather gets wilder, green infrastructure should be paired with traditional flood defense and smart urban planning.

## Sample Talking Points: River restoration

*These are intended as a starting point: we encourage you to localize and adapt for your audience!*

- Rivers are life-giving. They provide a home for fish and wildlife, carry water to communities for drinking and farming, and nurture forests, meadows and more.
- But, for decades, large stretches of our nation's rivers have been dammed, dredged or walled in, making them less resilient to both droughts and flooding.
- Superstorms are increasingly overwhelming levees and dikes designed to control water.
- Rising temperatures are driving up water demand at the same time they are reducing flows, drying some rivers before they reach their deltas, and leaving others too shallow and warm to support fish like salmon.
- Increasingly, communities are recognizing the need to rewild rivers to bring them back to health.
- This includes giving rivers more room by restoring the floodplains that allow them to expand during periods of heavy rain and runoff.
- It also means protecting the forests that feed them, and replanting streambanks to cool and clean the water.
- And, bringing back beavers wiped out by the fur trade, or mimicking their dams with human-made log jams to slow and spread water.
- These efforts are getting a major boost from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.
- Investing in healthy rivers [creates all kinds of jobs](#), as well as supporting tourism and recreation economies.