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American Water Charitable Foundation Awards \$384,000 to Support Local Nature-Based Play Spaces

VOORHEES, N.J.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- The [American Water Charitable Foundation](#), a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization created by American Water, the nation's largest publicly traded water and wastewater utility company, has provided four grants to underwrite local nature-based play spaces across American Water's nationwide service areas. The grants are being administered as part of the Foundation's partnership with the [National Recreation and Park Association](#) (NRPA), for the *Building Better Communities* signature grant program. NRPA directly administers the program, with funding made possible by the American Water Charitable Foundation.

The *Building Better Communities* philanthropy initiative is designed to enhance the quality of life in the communities the company serves. The program is initially focusing on parks, as they are critical to preserving natural resources that have real economic benefits for communities. Specifically, the program concentrates on building or enhancing nature-based playgrounds and natural play spaces for children, and will connect and educate people on environmental stewardship practices related to water.

Of the 118 applications received, a total of four projects from within American Water's national service area were selected to receive grants totaling more than \$380,000. The projects were chosen based on several criteria including play value, education value, proximity to American Water's service areas, relevance of the project to the RFP project parameters, use of natural play materials, opportunities for American Water employee volunteer involvement and construction of an actual children's play area. The grant recipients are as follows:

- **The City of Belleville, Ill.** will receive \$109,000 to fund a 17,000 square-foot nature-themed play area within the 27-acre Bellevue Park. The area will tie into the lake at Bellevue Park, where the city's summer day camp will also use the area for play and outdoor education sessions on various topics such as water, water fowl, butterflies/insects, trees, plants, etc.
- **The Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority** in Scranton, Pa. will receive \$150,000 to build a trail head park and playground along the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, which is part of a 70+ mile trail system. The playground will feature elements that are ADA-compliant to be inclusive to children with disabilities as well as provide a water-learning experience to help instill a love and respect for the environment. The equipment chosen will be nature-based and environmentally friendly to enhance the landscape and the river adjacent to the project.
- **The Pleasant Valley Recreation and Park District** in Camarillo, Calif. will receive \$75,000 for the Camarillo Grove Park, an urban park and location for children to interact and learn about nature. The district is currently in the process of enhancing the only nature-based park in the area for the purpose of promoting outdoor education and environmental awareness. The funds will be used to assist in completing an outdoor interpretive nature center for school-aged children, which will be the only nature center of its kind within a 35-mile radius of this area in Ventura County.
- **The Brunswick Redevelopment and Revitalization Committee** in Brunswick, MO. will receive \$50,000 to expand the existing Brunswick Downtown Courtyard's water management area to develop natural play spaces and a venue for environmental education events. In 2012, with funding from Missouri American Water, the courtyard was built to promote water conservation via the use of rain gardens, rain barrels, downspouts and gutters. The success of the courtyard has prompted the need to enlarge the area onto an additional 6,000 square feet of land to include exploratory play features, first-hand observation/ interaction features and an educational event venue.

"Parks and public lands are integral in conserving natural resources, but it is experiences and interactions that foster a strong sense of responsibility and appreciation for nature - especially among children," said Barbara Tulipane, President and CEO of NRPA. "These projects will provide community members the opportunity to interact and learn about nature right in their own neighborhood forming an interest in the natural world that can last a lifetime."

"These four organizations were selected because they are particularly focused on fostering a greater sense of appreciation for the environment in a fun and engaging way that benefits children and families in the communities we serve," said Debra Vernon, Manager, Corporate Responsibility and President of the American Water Charitable Foundation. "The projects will not only enhance the quality of life in our communities, but they will also encourage the continued viability of and appreciation for our nation's water resources. The *Building Better Communities* program supports American Water's core values of community stewardship and environmental sustainability, and aligns with areas of importance to the company's employees, including child

welfare and education."

Annually, the program aims to support several of these types of projects through grants administered to local communities. Each nature-based play space will be developed via a community partnership dedicated to ongoing stewardship.

For more information about the *Building Better Communities* program, visit www.nrpa.org/BuildingBetterCommunities. The application period for 2015 *Building Better Communities* grants will open on October 27, 2014.

About The National Recreation and Park Association

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 46,000 recreation and park professionals and citizens, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles, conservation initiatives and equitable access to parks and public space. For more information, visit www.NRPA.org. For digital access to NRPA's flagship publication, *Parks & Recreation*, visit www.parksandrecreation.org.

About the American Water Charitable Foundation

Established in 2010 with a founding contribution from American Water, the American Water Charitable Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that provides a formal way to demonstrate the company's [ongoing commitment](#) to being a good neighbor, citizen, and contributor to the communities where American Water and its employees live, work and operate. The Foundation helps support American Water employee-identified nonprofit endeavors.

About American Water

Founded in 1886, American Water (NYSE: AWK) is the largest publicly traded U.S. water and wastewater utility company. With headquarters in Voorhees, N.J., the company employs approximately 6,600 dedicated professionals who provide drinking water, wastewater and other related services to an estimated 14 million people in more than 40 states and parts of Canada. More information can be found at www.amwater.com.

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