Incorporating Environmental Justice Considerations into Rhode Island TMDL Development

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
EPA Region 1 New England
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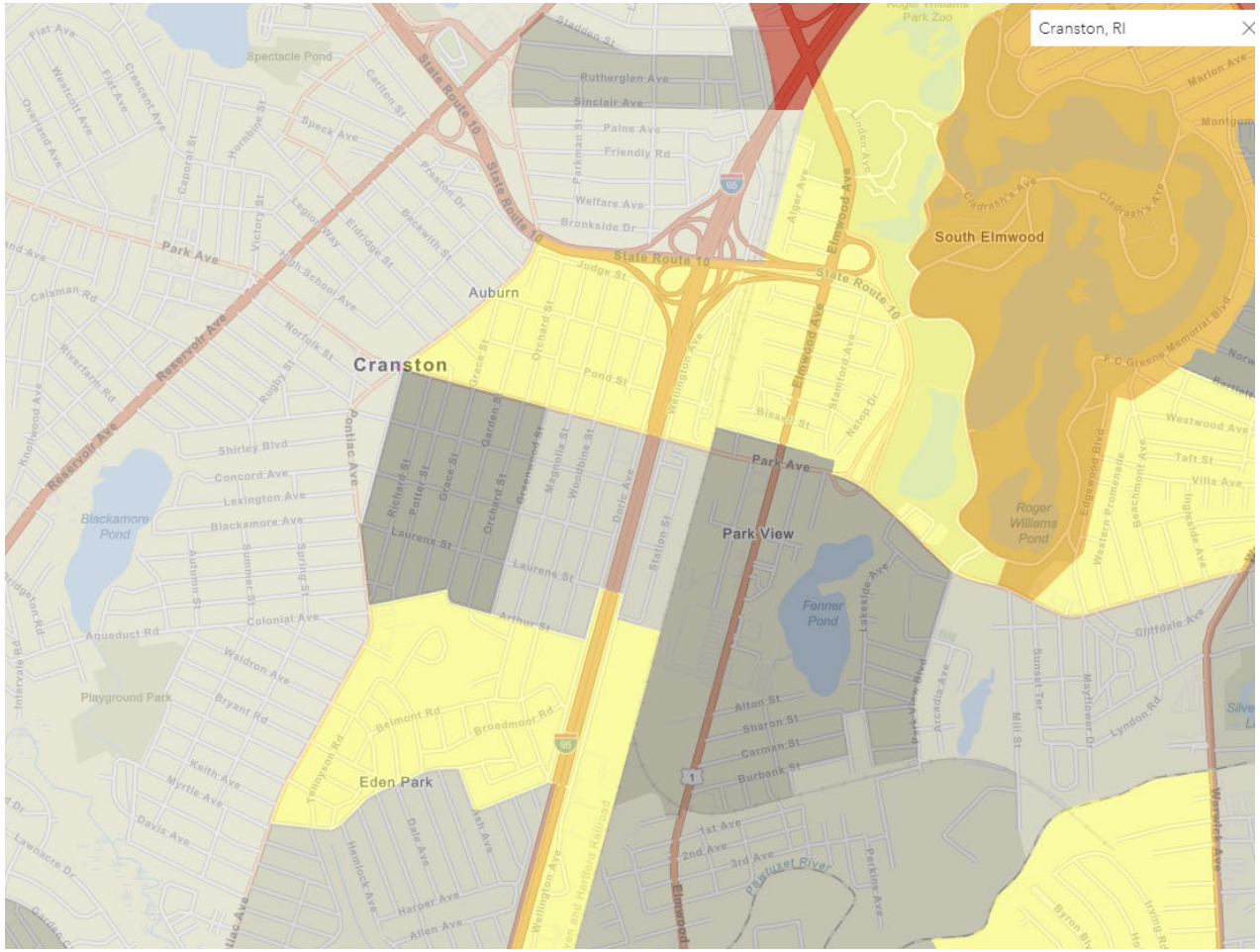
Significant factors in Region 1’s decision

- Application for TMDL Dedicated Funds to EPA HQ Watershed Branch
  - R1 TMDL program used funds to hire a contractor
  - Contractors didn't have EJ capabilities written in scope of work
- Involvement of R1’s front office EJ outreach team
  - The outreach team had EJ coordinators for each state in place
  - EJ office involvement included translation services
- Designation by RIDEM of the project as an agency priority
  - Included involvement of RIDEM’s EJ coordinator
- Selection of the impaired water(s) for TMDL development in relation to EJ communities

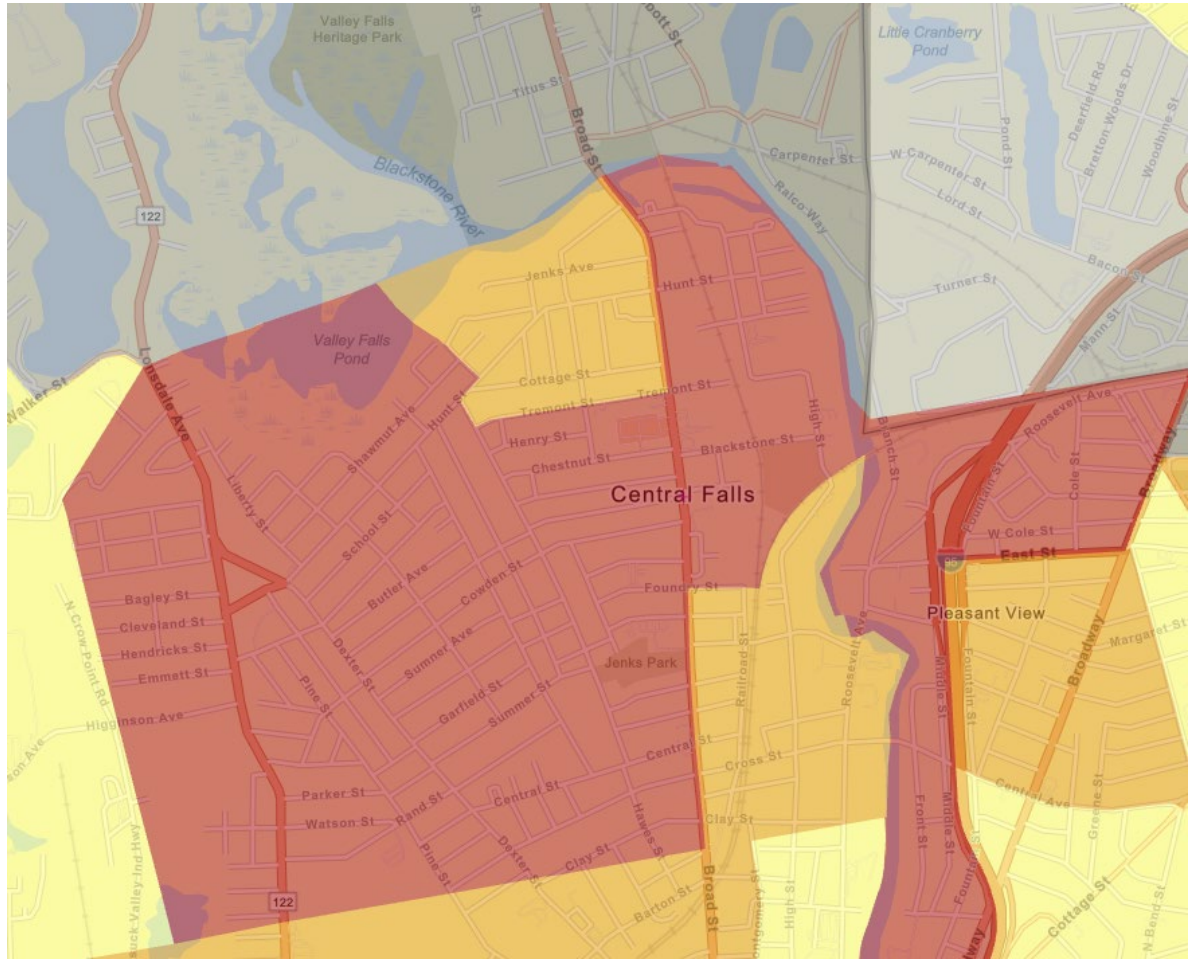
Selection Process: Evaluating Waterbody Options

95 - 100 percentile
90 - 95 percentile
80 - 90 percentile
70 - 80 percentile
60 - 70 percentile
50 - 60 percentile
Less than 50 percentile
Data not available

RIDEM's First Choice: Fenner and Blackamore Ponds



RIDEM's Second Choice: Valley Falls Ponds

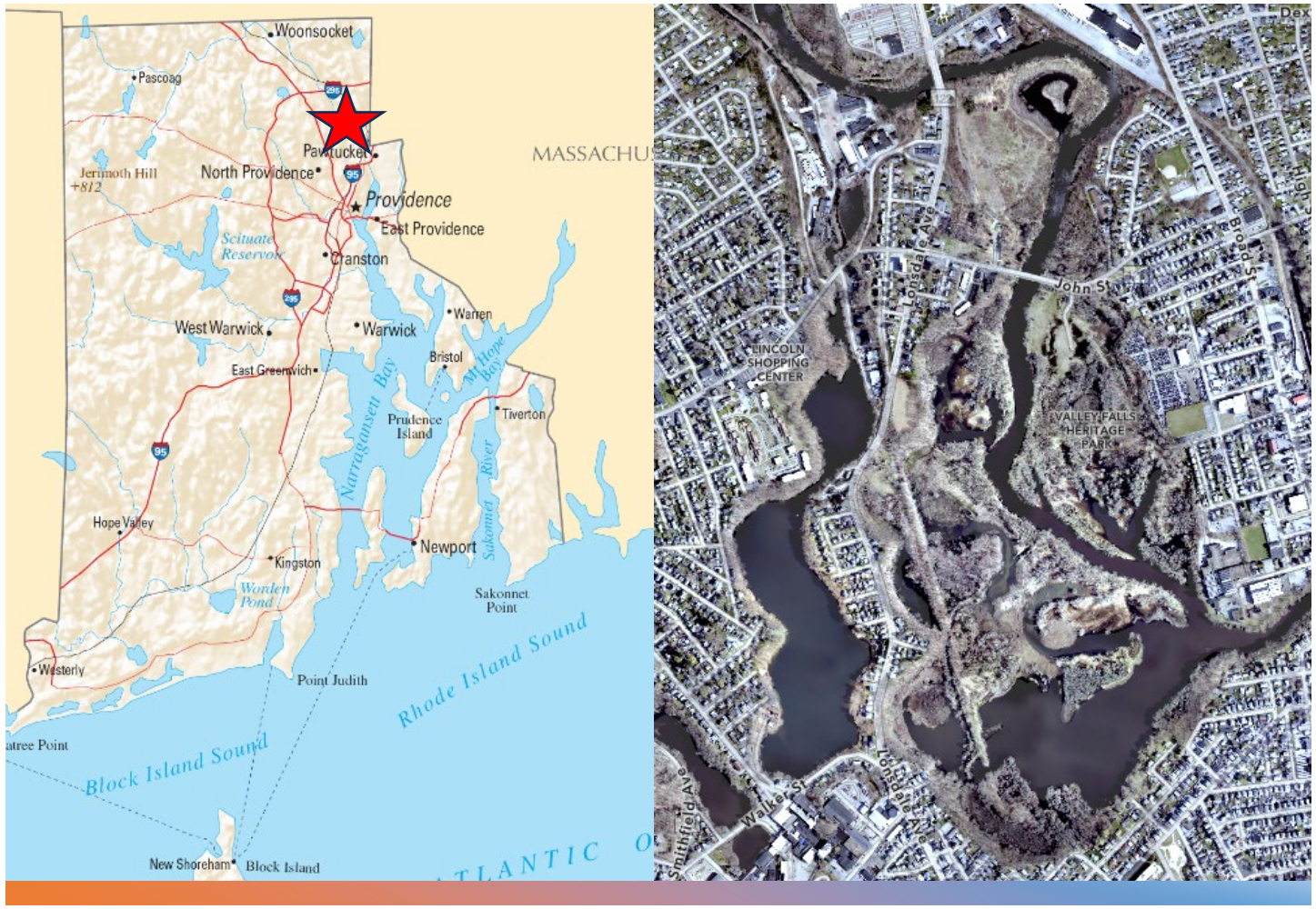


Benefits that followed

- Olivia was the designated RI and Central Falls EJ coordinator already
- She had been working in the city and building contacts in the EJ community before the project began
- RIDEM was able to provide its staff & equipment for the actual sampling
  - Contract only had to provide for lab analysis, saving resources
- RIDEM had applied to EPA for lab assistance for use of level loggers
  - Water Division project priority elevated RI's request to priority status for lab
  - The project got level loggers and lab assistance in using them

Valley Falls Pond

- Located in Central Falls, Rhode Island
  - 38 acres, shallow (typically <2ft)
  - Directly connected to Blackstone River
  - Highly impervious watershed but northern shore undeveloped and owned by State
  - CSO Discharge



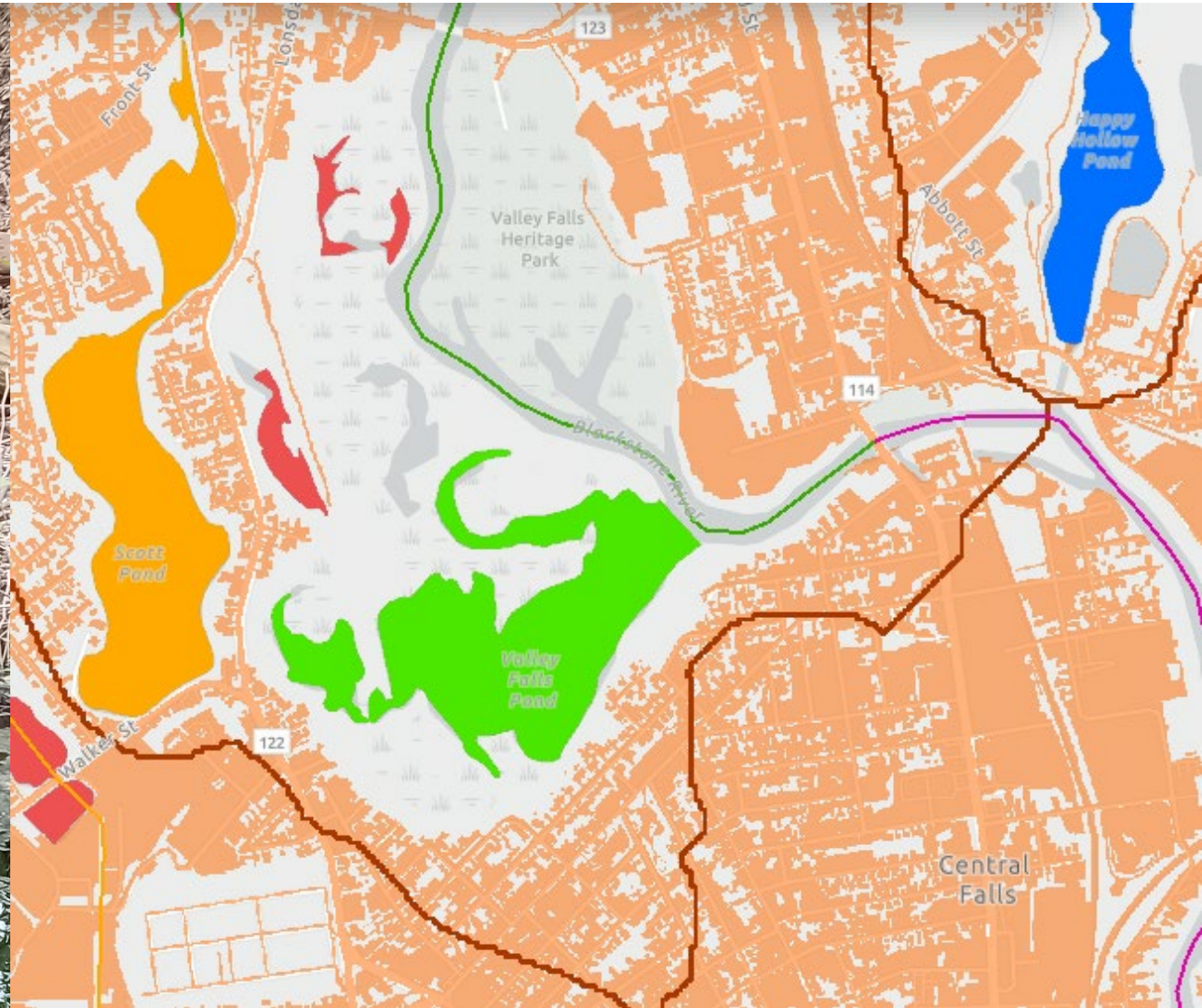

Happy Hollow Pond
Valley Falls Heritage Park
Blackstone River
114
Scott Pond
Valley Falls Pond
122
126
Blackstone River

Valley Falls Pond

- Impaired for Total Phosphorus, Dissolved Oxygen, Lead, and Fecal coliform since 1998
- Impaired for Non-native aquatic plants since 2016
  - Dense infestation of water chestnut


Blackstone River
Notre Da
American Auto Glass Company
Hooker St
Shawmut Ave
Shawmut Ave
Lake St
Fernandes Wel
Temple Pl
Cottage St
LG
Sue's Salon

Sources


123
Front St
Valley Falls Heritage Park
Abbott St
Happy Hollow Pond
114
Blackstone River
Scott Pond
Valley Falls Pond
122
Walker St
Central Falls

Valley Falls Pond Studies

- Various water quality data and evaluations
  - Data
    - Small amount of lake water chemistry data available
      - 2000 – 2002, 2004 – 2006
    - Supplemented by data collection this summer
      - Water chemistry by RIDEM
      - Water level equipment and field support from EPA Chelmsford
  - Studies
    - Louis Berger contracted studies 2013; 2009; 2008; 2004
    - ESS contracted VFP Lake Management Plan
  - Current
    - Development of model for TMDLs for all impairments

Valley Falls Pond August 10, 2004

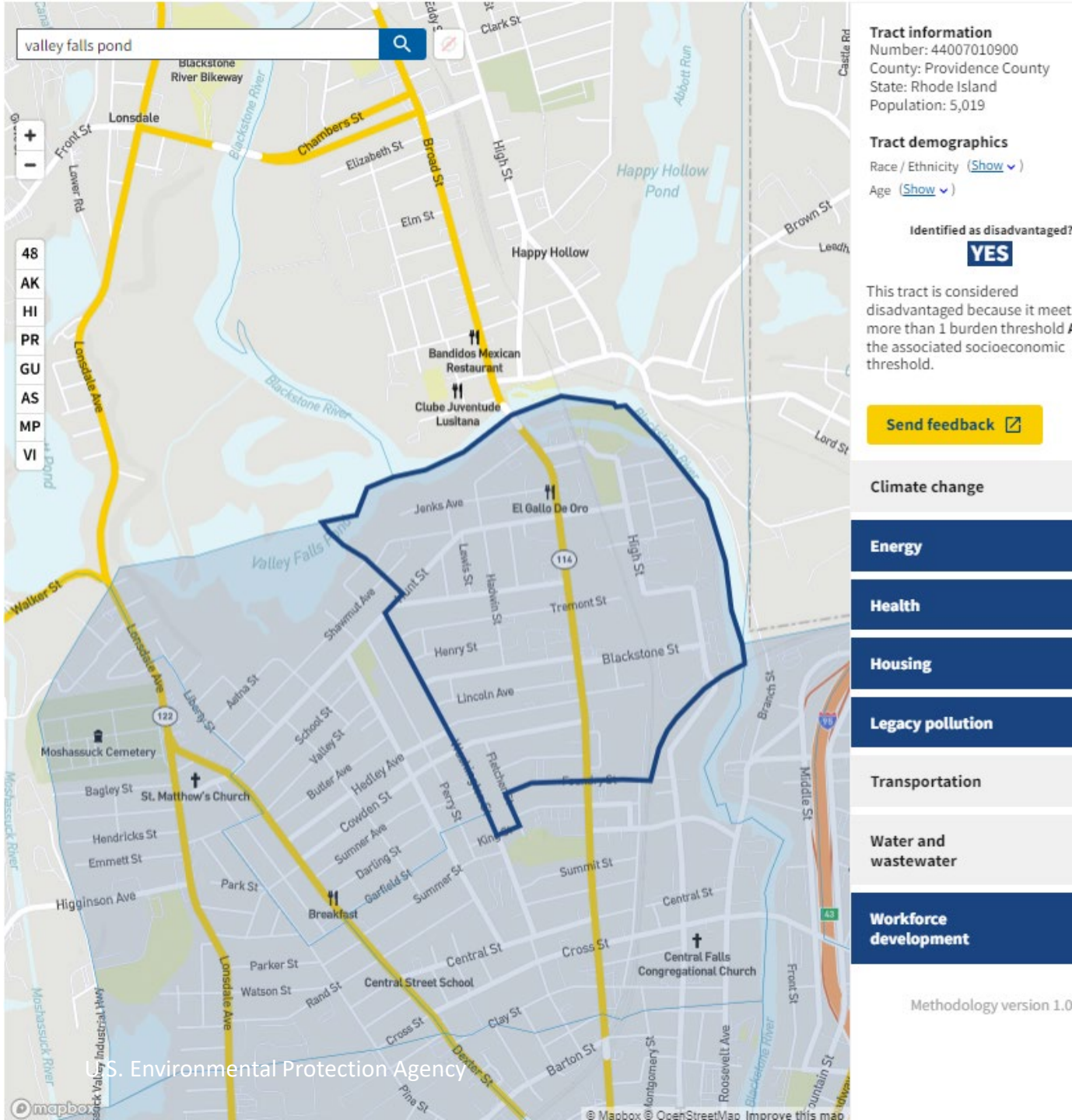
EPA Region 1's Environmental Justice Program

- Building a new team with priority geographic focus areas in New England, under the Environmental Justice, Community Health and Environmental Review Division
- Multimedia program, multidisciplinary team:
  - Ambient and Indoor Air Quality, Surface Water Quality, Drinking Water Quality, Toxic Substances, Pesticides, Children's Environmental Health, Open/Green Space, Climate Change, and more.
- Environmental Justice Specialists & Coordinator
  - Serve as project officers for specific programs, support community engagement
  - Serve as a resource liaison to bring services to overburdened and underserved communities
  - Provide programmatic support and assistance to improve environment and public health in communities.

Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)

CEJST flags for Central Falls:

- Energy
- Health
- Housing
- Legacy Pollution
- Workforce Development

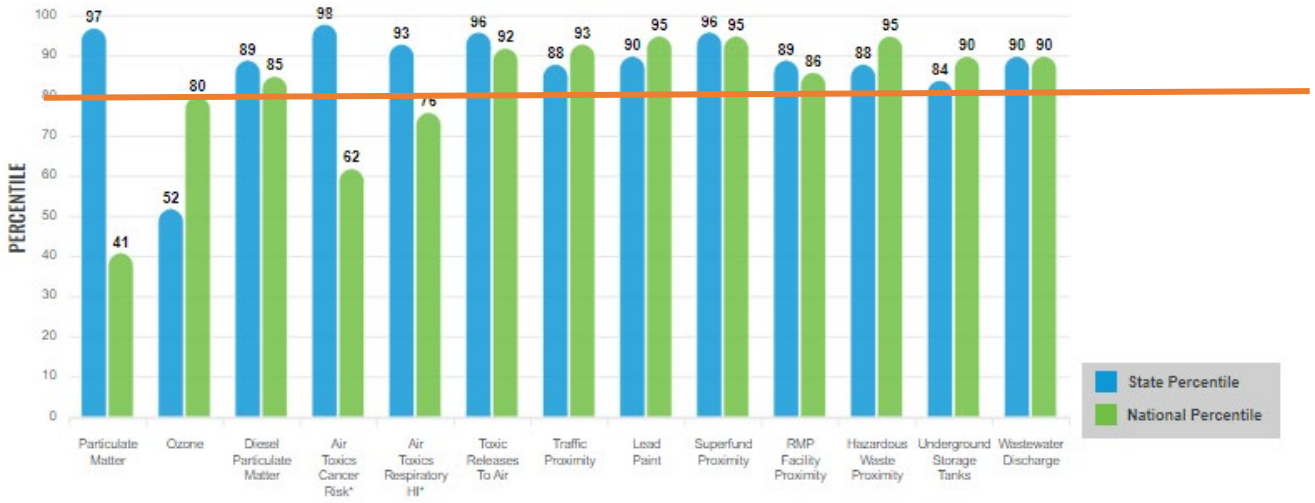


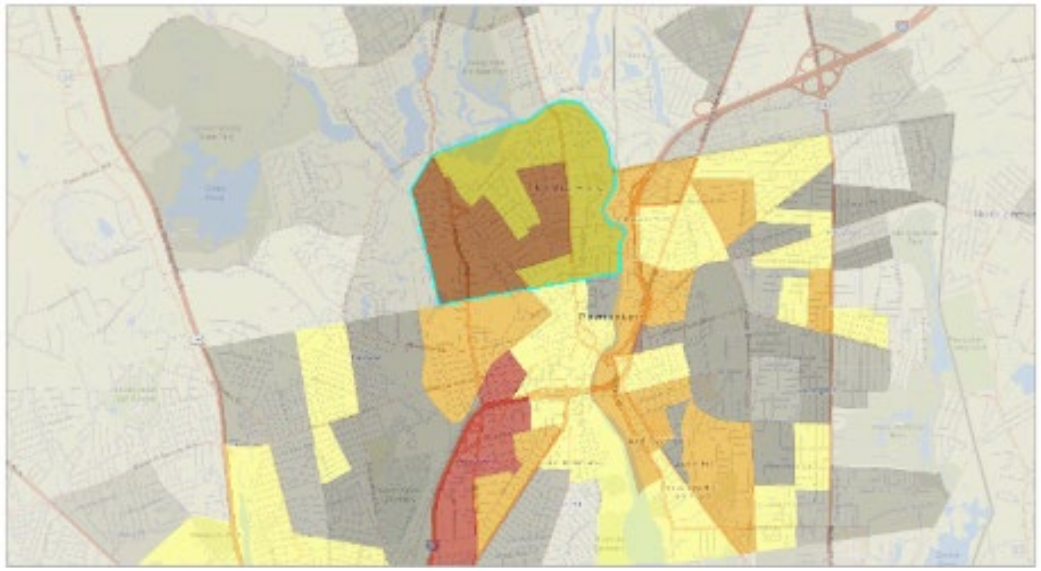
EJ Screen

EJ INDEXES

The EJ indexes help users screen for potential EJ concerns. To do this, the EJ index combines data on low income and people of color populations with a single environmental indicator.

EJ INDEXES FOR THE SELECTED LOCATION





LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME

LANGUAGE	PERCENT
English	33%
Spanish	59%
French, Haitian, or Cajun	2%
Russian, Polish, or Other Slavic	1%
Other Indo-European	5%
Total Non-English	67%

Our Approach:

- Travel to RI to meet in person
- Identify local leaders and build relationships
- Listen to community concerns
- Explain the TMDL process in a way that is easily understood by all audiences

Outreach and Partners

Community Based Organizations:

- Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
- Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
- New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission
- Salts Pond Coalition
- Progreso Latino
- Blackstone River Coalition
- Save The Bay

Local Government Partners:

- City of Central Falls

State Government Partners:

- Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

Materials Developed

POLLUTION REDUCTION PLAN

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) are developing a plan to measure and reduce pollution in Valley Falls Pond in Central Falls, Rhode Island.

EPA and RIDEM will visit Valley Falls Pond repeatedly between May and October 2024. A sampling team will collect and measure pollutants in the pond. The team will access the pond in either a boat or by foot along the shore.

After completing water sampling, environmental and public health standards will be set and a pollution reduction plan will be created for the pond. The purpose of the pollution reduction plan is to inform residents about the importance of water quality, reduce pollutants and increase safe access and recreation in the area.

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

For more information contact Olivia Lopez at 617-918-1407
or visit www.epa.gov/tmdl/impaired-waters-and-tmdls-new-england-region-1

La Agencia de Protección Ambiental de Estados Unidos (EPA) y El Departamento de Gestión Ambiental de Rhode Island (RIDEM) elaborarán un plan para medir y reducir la contaminación del estanque de Valley Falls, en Central Falls (Rhode Island).

EPA y RIDEM visitarán Valley Falls Pond en repetidas ocasiones entre mayo y octubre de 2024. Un equipo de muestreo recolectará y medirá los contaminantes del estanque. El equipo accederá al estanque en un bote o a pie por la orilla.

Una vez finalizado el muestreo del agua, se establecerán normas ambientales y de salud pública y se creará un plan de reducción de la contaminación para el estanque. El objetivo del plan de reducción de la contaminación es informar a los residentes de la importancia de la calidad del agua, reducir los contaminantes y aumentar el acceso y el esparcimiento seguros en la zona.

Lessons Learned So Far

- Information is shared early, often, and effectively
- Plug into existing and trusted networks
- Listen to community needs and explore connections with other EPA programs where possible
- Be willing to make changes and adapt approaches

Next Steps: