

Restoration master plans build on community clean ups

Restoration along Ruddiman Creek and Muskegon Lake in Muskegon, Michigan is kicking into high gear. With an ecological master plan and \$10 million in funding to get the ball rolling, local stakeholder efforts may erase years of accumulated industrial waste, create healthy habitat for wildlife and increase opportunities for public access and recreation.

Several other Great Lakes Areas of Concern (as designated by the U.S. EPA) are following a similar path, including Hog Island and Newton Creek in Wisconsin. Through Great Lakes Legacy Act funding, contaminated sediment has been removed from these sites, leaving lakes, rivers and shorelines ripe for follow-up restoration.

“These shorelines still suffer from habitat loss and degraded wildlife populations,” said Susan Boehme, IISG coastal sediment specialist.

The first step in the process is developing a plan. With support and expertise from the U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Office and Biohabitats, an ecological design firm, stakeholders in these regions developed ecological master plans with specific goals that came about through public discussion.

“In Muskegon, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant provided support in publicizing local meetings and helping to bring some critical local landowners to the table,” said Kathy Evans, a program manager with the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), who is closely involved with restoration efforts.

“Often one-on-one conversations are very effective in getting to the bottom of any concerns.”

“Through public participation in the planning process, the goals become more universally accepted,” said Evans. “The public is more willing to see the process go to the next level, and in some cases, land owners are inspired to restore their own property.”

The Muskegon Ecological Master Plan provides “a suite of restoration actions and management recommendations for the restoration of fish, wildlife, benthos and wetland habitats; and human uses in the project area.” The work plan schedules restoration efforts over the course of a decade and involves many partners and stakeholders, including local volunteers.

Right off the bat, the master plan has provided a helpful blueprint for securing funding for restoration efforts along Muskegon waterways. The Great Lakes Commission, in partnership with WMSRDC, has received a \$10 million grant from NOAA through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to restore 10,000 feet of shoreline that has been buried in several decades of broken concrete, foundry slag, sheet metal and other materials. This project will kick off in the spring with the money scheduled to be spent by the end of the year.

“We are planning to have shovels in the ground as soon as weather permits,” said Evans. “Lake Muskegon is a magnificent freshwater lake so this is a great opportunity for the community and the Great Lakes region.”



Courtesy of Kathy Evans