



PLANNING AND PARKS DEPARTMENT

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OZAUKEE COUNTY AWARDED \$4.7 MILLION IN RECOVERY ACT FUNDING

Port Washington, WI (July 1, 2009) – The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced yesterday that Ozaukee County has been awarded \$4.7 million in Recovery Act funding for its “Fish Passage in the Milwaukee River Watershed” (FPMRW) project. The FPMRW project involves modifying or removing stream obstructions and barriers to link naturally occurring high quality habitats in the Milwaukee River Watershed. The project’s goal is to directly connect and allow fish to swim between 119,000 acres and 158 stream miles of the Milwaukee River Watershed, the Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern, and Lake Michigan.

“Today’s announcement is a major step in our efforts to work with our partners to reconnect excellent habitat that exists throughout Ozaukee County and surrounding counties,” said Andrew Struck, director of the Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department. “This funding award will allow us to accomplish a project that has been in the works for years and is an integral part of our Multi-jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan for Ozaukee County: 2035. It will provide very positive results for our residents and the ecosystem.”

"Those results include an improved fishery, enhancing habitat for several threatened and endangered species, economic gains through increased tourism, and enhanced opportunities for area residents to enjoy our natural resources", Struck said.

The County collaborated with area municipalities and with Bonestroo/Northern Environmental, a local engineering, planning, and environmental science firm, to write the grant application. The money is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and is administered by NOAA. The project requires no local match and brings \$4.7 million to the area without competing for funding with other local projects.

Yesterday's announcement included 50 grant awards totaling \$167 million. Ozaukee County was the only applicant in Wisconsin to receive a grant and one of just three applicants to receive a grant for the Great Lakes region. According to a press release from NOAA (http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2009/20090630_restoration.html), the organization received 814 applications for the grant award.

Barriers such as dams and culverts can prevent fish and aquatic organisms from accessing critical habitats. Recent natural resources management trends support removing artificial barriers to create passable streams for fish and other animals. This, in effect, revitalizes fisheries and improves recreational opportunities.

To take advantage of the high-quality habitat that exists in Ozaukee County, the County hopes to modify or remove nearly 100 barriers that were identified in a study funded by the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program and conducted by Bonestroo/Northern Environmental (then Northern Environmental) in 2006.

Major components of the project include modifications to the Bridge Street Dam in Grafton, the Mequon-Thiensville Dam in Thiensville, and the Lime Kiln Dam in Grafton. In addition, the County will work with area municipalities and landowners to modify or replace culverts, and to remove smaller man-made barriers including rock piles, debris jams, and railroad ballast deposits. Some of these projects will be conducted by a paid

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conservation corps, and the project is expected to continue after the grant funding with the help of volunteers.

“This funding not only benefits the fish, but also puts us ahead of the curve on culvert replacements that would have been required eventually,” said Bob Dreblow, Ozaukee County director of public works. “Now, we can make those improvements without the use of local taxpayer money.”

In the grant application, Ozaukee County laid out plans to remove the Lime Kiln Dam. The Bridge Street and Mequon-Thiensville Dams will remain, and fish passage facilities will be constructed at these two dams. The project partners also plan to minimize alterations to the reservoirs upstream from the Bridge Street and Mequon-Thiensville Dams.

“As we planned these projects and applied for the grant, we considered what would benefit our residents,” said Darrell Hofland, Village Administrator for the Village of Grafton. “Consistent with the Village’s “Quality Life. Naturally.” brand, the construction of a fish passage at the Bridge Street Dam will eliminate the existing barrier to enhance the fish habitat.”

Creation of the fish passage at the Mequon-Thiensville Dam will also address some deficiencies that currently exist on the structure. The grant is bolstering this project, which is currently underway.

“Construction of the fish passage at the Mequon-Thiensville Dam will provide numerous benefits to the area,” said Mayor Christine Nuernberg, City of Mequon. “Not only will the project allow greatly improved fish access to the 700-acre dam impoundment area, which is a critical environmental aquatic habitat, but will also have numerous other positive impacts for the communities.”

Dale Buser, hydrologist at Bonestroo/Northern Environmental, has been involved with the project since the beginning. Buser recalls seeing northern pike spawn near his uncle's farm in Ozaukee County when he was a child. The habitat they used has since become disconnected from the watershed because of several barriers. Now, 40 years later, he has been instrumental in the FPMRW project, which could allow that to happen once again.

"When we started to lay the groundwork for this project, we didn't expect that we could complete it so soon. We prioritized the barriers to remove the worst ones first. The rest were placed on a long-term schedule, and that depended on funding and resource availability," Buser said. "With this grant, we can push the project schedule ahead. I'm excited that I'll be able to see this project, a long-time goal, happen. It's honestly a dream come true."

Andy Holschbach, director of the Land and Water Management Department, noted, "This project and the removal of these barriers will also assist in improving the water quality in the local streams and throughout the Milwaukee River Watershed. It will be an important next step in our continuing efforts to improve water quality in Ozaukee County."

Buser said that this project allows the County to repair the streams that have become increasingly disconnected over 150 years. The funding provides a mechanism to reverse those changes much more quickly – which he attributes to the teamwork that has occurred between the grant application partners and local municipalities.

"This award would not have been possible without the support of the state and federal agencies involved, and the communities here in Ozaukee County," he said, "along with overwhelming support from the public."

Struck echoed Buser's comment on the necessity to work with the various agencies, local municipalities, organizations and the public to make this project a success.

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“It’s so rewarding to live and work here in Ozaukee County,” Struck said, “where a group of people – nonprofit organizations, environmental firms, cities, townships, and villages – can work together seamlessly to make this happen.”

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