



MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Mayors Green the Urban Landscape *Local Action drives nearshore protection across the Basin*

Mayors of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative from the United States and Canada have committed to actions that will protect and restore the largest body of surface freshwater in the world by greening the urban landscape within their cities. The mayors passed a resolution at their recent Board of Directors meeting calling for continued action to green their cities to protect and restore the Lakes and River, particularly through urban habitat restoration. Local governments invest more than \$1.5 billion annually in efforts to green the urban landscape, including greenspace protection, beach and shoreline work, brownfields cleanup, and Smart Growth planning and implementation.

Local Green Urban Restoration Projects Resulting in Environmental, Economic, and Quality of Life Benefits

Local government around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence are investing in green urban restoration projects to protect, restore and promote the Lakes and River and realizing multiple returns on these investments. Here is just a snapshot of some of these projects and their benefits from a sampling of Cities Initiative member cities:

Grand Rapids' Grand River Restoration Project

As part of the *Green Grand Rapids* process the City of Grand Rapids is considering restoring rapids to a portion of the Grand River and creating a river rapids run for canoes and kayaks. The effort would rely on funding from local, federal, state and private sources. Engineering and environmental studies were initiated in September 2011 and focus group meetings have been held to get feedback from a diverse group of river users, including fishermen, boaters, business owners, and environmental organizations. Restoring rapids to a portion of the Grand River and creating a whitewater park is expected to increase recreational activities on and around the river, not just limited to canoeing and kayaking, as well as strengthen peoples' connection to the river, help increase fish habitat by providing more spawning areas, and provide opportunities for local businesses around the Grand River.

Milwaukee's Menomonee Valley Industrial Center and Community Park

The City of Milwaukee is finalizing redevelopment and revitalization of an old industrial corridor in the heart of the city along the Menomonee River, now known as the Menomonee Valley Industrial Center and Community Park. The \$54 million project, of which Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District are investing more than \$24 million, with additional contributions from federal and state governments as well

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as local partners, incorporates a revived business park that will create over 1,000 jobs by 2012. The site cleanup addressed more than 125 years of manufacturing sector degraded soil and groundwater, as well as more than 120,000 cubic yards of asbestos containing materials. Of the 60 acres of publicly-owned greenspace, 10 acres are dedicated to a stormwater treatment park, an area that also includes walking paths, overlooks, and interpretive signage explaining the role of wetlands and the impact of stormwater. The remaining acreage is dedicated to the Hank Aaron State Trail, which winds through the site following the course of the Menomonee River.

Racine's North Beach

The remediation, redesign and restoration of Racine's North Beach has resulted in significant economic, environmental and quality of life benefits for the City and its residents. Started in 2000, the work has been paid for through a variety of funding streams, including tax levy dollars, state loan programs, federal, state, local and foundation grants. To help improve beach health and water quality, dunes have been added to mitigate stormwater runoff from paved surfaces. With this and other beach improvements, a beach that was once plagued with advisories and closures has been brought back to life. There has not been a beach closure since July 2007. The City nets more than \$2 million per year just from overnight stays associated with two large triathlons (Ironman Racine 70.3 and AFLAC Irongirl Racine) now hosted by the City and run at the beach. Additionally, Parents Magazine voted Racine Wisconsin's North Beach as one of the top ten best beaches for families in 2011.

St. Catharines' Walker's Creek Rehabilitation Project

To control bank erosion, reduce flooding, and improve natural features, the City of St. Catharines completed the rehabilitation of Walker's Creek, an urban creek that flows through the city and into Lake Ontario. The restoration approach used a 'natural channel design' which incorporates more ecological benefits and natural channel functions and processes. Funded through the property tax levy, the restoration has also helped protect municipal infrastructure within the creek valley, provide better pedestrian crossing of the creek (there are extensive trails/paths running along the creek), and improve ecological functions of the creek (in 2010 trout were seen in the creek).

Thunder Bay's Mission Island Marsh Conservation Area

Mission Island Marsh Conservation Area is a success story demonstrating an example of green urban restoration and re-use of a closed landfill site. Maintained and managed by the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority on land leased from the City of Thunder Bay, the site was a landfill that was closed in 1965 and capped. Restoration included naturalizing portions of the McKellar River shoreline and improving habitat for fish spawning and waterfowl nesting. Mission Island Marsh Conservation Area, which also contains the Mission Island Provincially Significant Wetland, a coastal wetland approximately 30 hectares in size, is visited by approximately 400,000 people each year. Popular activities include environmental education, bird watching, walking the trails, and wind surfing. Mission Island

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Marsh continues to demonstrate that natural green space and habitat can co-exist with existing industry, commercial and residential development; the island is also the location of Ontario Power Generation's Coal Plant and underground coal conveyor, residential dwellings, a scrap metal dealer, a public boat launch and the Thunder Bay Yacht Club private marina.

Quebec City's St. Charles River Revitalization

The revitalization of the St. Charles River in Quebec City is a prime example of intergovernmental cooperation to transform derelict lands into a vibrant neighborhood and to renew fish habitat. The St. Charles River estuary and surroundings have been an important part of Quebec City's history. Recognized for its beauty by French explorer Jacques Cartier, it served as a naval port in the 1800s and industrial lands in the 1900s. By the end of the 20th century, however, the lands had become derelict, home to abandoned industrial buildings, while the waters had become polluted with sewage overflow. In 1996, the City of Quebec, in partnership with the Canadian and Quebec Governments and the Fondation de la Faune de Quebec, dedicated itself to cleaning up the river and restoring its shoreline. A total of \$150 million was invested in the project, to demolish eight kilometers of concrete wall, naturalize the shoreline, build a multi-use shoreline trail, and construct fourteen large underground tanks to retain sewage overflow during periods of intense rainfall. The revitalization of the St. Charles River has transformed what was once considered uninhabitable lands into a vibrant neighborhood with new housing and pedestrian walkways, and has brought life back to the river, with new aquatic vegetation, spawning areas and ponds to attract species such as pike and tilefish.

Windsor's Shoreline Restoration Project

Construction of the Windsor Riverfront Retention Treatment Basin Facility presented the City of Windsor with an opportunity to improve a segment of its Detroit River shoreline. Building on the experience amassed during other recent shoreline protection projects along its cherished Central Riverfront Park, the City chose to substantially re-sculpt the shoreline in a manner that created an attractive landscape while greatly enhancing fish habitat. A more dynamic shoreline treatment consisting of gently sloping weathered stone was constructed between two promontories, serving as the main focal points of the shoreline. The total project budget was \$1.5 million and based on the quality of environmental enhancements that were designed into the project, the Essex Region Conservation Authority was able to procure approximately \$250,000 of funding assistance through various departments of the Federal and Provincial governments.