

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: November 14, 2025

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director for Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: KK River Flood Management Project in Wilson Park

File Type: Action Report

REQUEST

Authorization to enter into an Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement (ICA) with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) for a flood mitigation project within Wilson Park.

POLICY

None

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

BACKGROUND

The Kinnickinnic River Watershed covers 25 square miles, much of which travels through Milwaukee County parkland. Nearly 50 percent of the surfaces within this watershed are impervious, such as streets, parking lots, and building rooftops, which prevents rain and melting snow from naturally being absorbed back into the soil. During storm events, water flows quickly off these surfaces and overwhelms the river, which drastically increases the risk of flooding. MMSD has the responsibility to address flood management and to make improvements to stormwater infrastructure in the region.

The image below shows the Kinnickinnic River watershed at the 100-year flood limits which demonstrates the risk of flooding during a 100-year storm event. MMSD designs flood management projects to this 100-year storm standard, which means that there is a 1% chance of these storms happening in any given year.

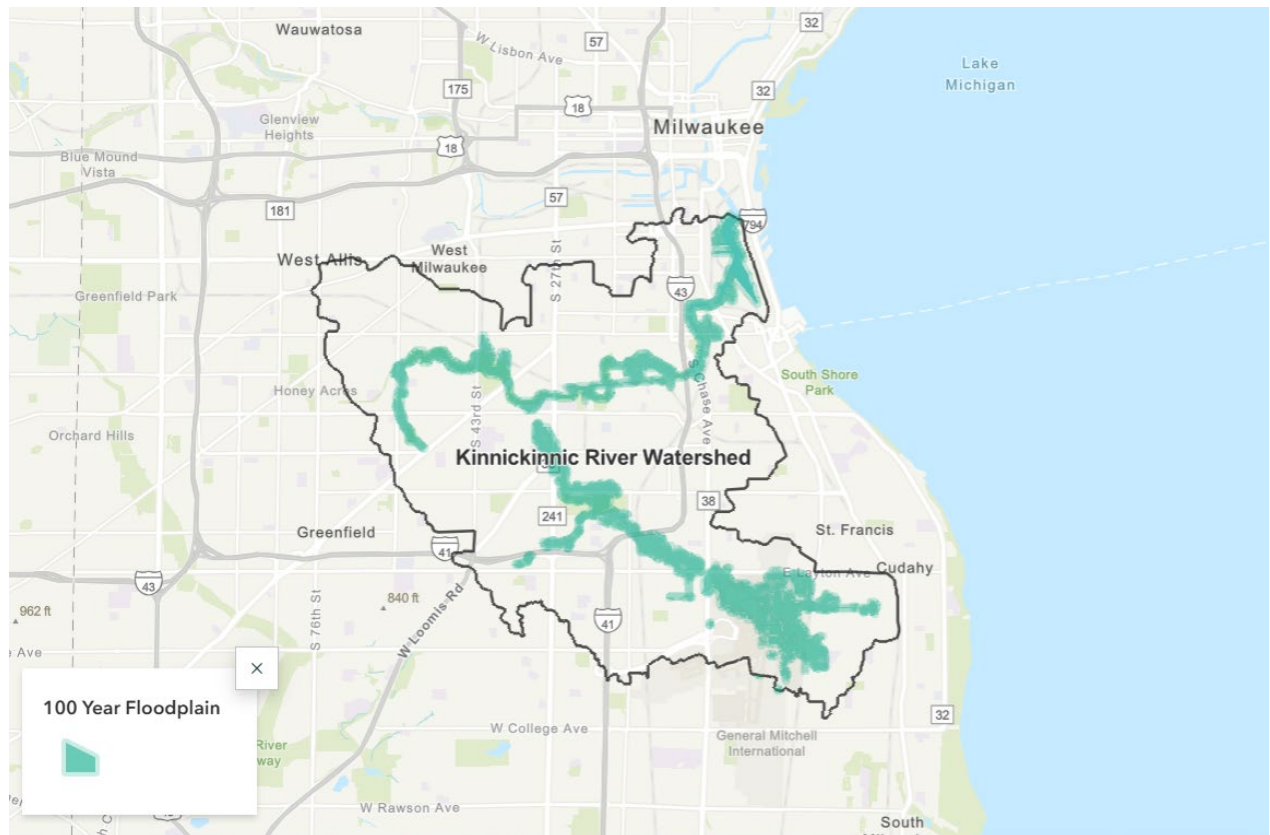


Image above: Kinnickinnic River Watershed, 100 Year Floodplain

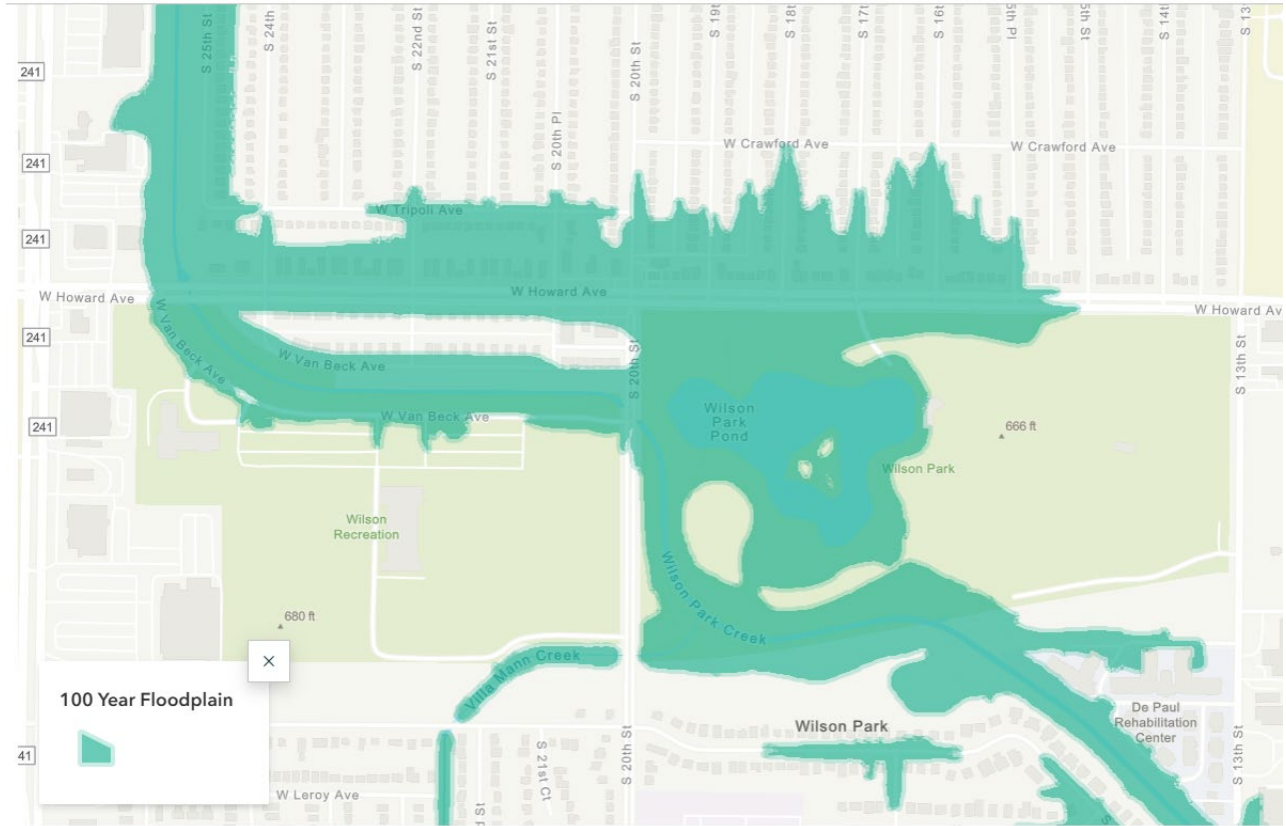


Image above: Wilson Park within the Kinnickinnic River Watershed



Image above: Wilson Park Creek before naturalization



Image above: Kinnickinnic River in Pulaski Milwaukee Park after removal of concrete channel

There are more than 660 homes and businesses currently located within the 100-year floodplain, all of which are at a high risk of flooding. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) has created the Kinnickinnic River Waterway Flood Management Plan which seeks to address this issue. The watershed management plan includes several approaches to reducing flood risk, one that impacts parkland is increasing the flood storage capacity of lagoons and improvements to waterways in Pulaski-Milwaukee, Jackson, and Wilson Park. Other work that impacts parks includes the removal of concrete channels in the Kinnickinnic River and various creeks that are part of the watershed. These projects slow down the flow of stormwater and runoff and have the additional benefit of re-naturalization and beautification of these river corridors and lagoons. Milwaukee County Parks has a productive history of working with MMSD on the Jackson Park and Pulaski-Milwaukee projects to create park improvements. Milwaukee County Parks and MMSD are seeking to continue collaboration in Wilson Park.

MMSD is able to fund the replacement of park assets and other infrastructure that are displaced by flood management projects. Park infrastructure that is impacted by the project has been and will be replaced at no cost to Milwaukee County. This means that Milwaukee County can address deferred maintenance and the need to improve recreational amenities used by the community through partnerships like this.

From 2021-2024 Milwaukee County Parks commissioned two reports from the Wisconsin Policy Forum that focused on identifying creative solutions to support the long-term fiscal sustainability of the Parks system. This project culminated in the report

“Natural Partners: How Local Collaboration Could Help Fix the Milwaukee County Parks” which was presented to the County Board in File [#24-324](#). Among other ideas, that report recommends the following -

“MMSD has jurisdiction over several rivers and a number of tributaries in Milwaukee County and they run through or along more than 40 county parks and parkways... This overlap in territory and responsibility – coupled with strong similarities in the environmental missions of both agencies – provides a substantial opportunity for collaboration between the parks and MMSD.

... Our analysis suggests the county and MMSD could consider similar projects in other county properties such as Wilson and McCarty parks.”

This File seeks approval to enter into an Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement (ICA) with MMSD. The ICA describes the project and collaboration between Milwaukee County Parks and MMSD which includes the following -

- The Parties will engage in a Comprehensive Planning process for Wilson Park. This process will produce a plan that identifies all flood storage and flood mitigation work needed within the KK River corridor with a particular focus on impacts to parkland, infrastructure, natural areas, and recreational assets.
- The plan will be informed by public engagement, managed in collaboration between County Parks and MMSD.
- MMSD will pay for the replacement of all impacted parkland and assets within the flood management project.
- Once planning is complete MMSD will manage the construction of improvements within Wilson Park. During the construction period, which could last up to 6 years, MMSD will maintain the parkland within the impacted areas.
- Access to the Wilson Ice Arena and Wilson Park Senior Center will be maintained throughout the construction process.
- Any impacts to trees will be mitigated by MMSD making a contribution to the tree fund.
- County Parks will grant easements for long-term maintenance of flood management areas to MMSD and allow construction through the Right of Entry permit process.
- Concurrent to this project, MMSD agrees to provide an extra level of support for debris removal from waterways with a cap of the fiscal impact of this at \$250,000 a year to MMSD. This assistance supplements Parks’ staffing and equipment shortages limiting our ability to self-perform large debris removal from waterways.

Related File No's:	16-535, 24-324
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government – the comprehensive plan for Wilson Park will be informed by public engagement
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities – flood risk disproportionately impacts high equity need areas of the County, reducing flood risk for these 600+ homes and businesses supports their economic resiliency
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability – MMSD will pay for the replacement of park assets that are impacted by the flood management project, in many cases these may help the County defer operational or capital expenses in future years due to the age and condition of these assets
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

FISCAL EFFECT

None

TERMS

- ICA term would begin upon approval of both the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors and MMSD’s governing commission

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

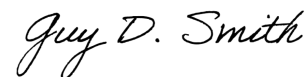
None

PREPARED BY:

Jim Tarantino, Deputy Director, Milwaukee County Parks

APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Resolution

Fiscal Note

Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement

CC: David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Sheldon Wasserman, Committee on Parks & Culture Chairperson
Steve Taylor, Committee on Parks & Culture Vice Chairperson
Priscilla Coggs-Jones, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Jack Eckblad, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Felesia Martin, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Juan Miguel Martinez, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Anne O'Connor, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services
Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS
Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS
Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office
Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office
Allyson R. Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB
Sandy Saltzstein, Research and Policy Analyst