

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: June 24, 2026

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

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director for Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: McKinley Beach and Bender Boat Launch Water Depths

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

Informational report sharing data related to water depths at both McKinley Beach and Bender Boat Launch.

POLICY

Per 2024 Budget Amendment 11, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture shall develop a schedule for regular monitoring of the sand and silt at the Bender Park and McKinley Beach Boat Launches and provide an annual report on their condition to the County Board each July.

Specific Adopted Budget:	2025 Budget, as approved in 2024
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	11

BACKGROUND

Parks reconstructed McKinley Beach in 2023-24, and design plans called for shallow water between the breakwaters for a protected wading beach. Bathymetric surveys were conducted in both May of 2025 and late April of 2026, each finding that some sediment loss has been experienced since construction, as well as fluctuations in water elevations of Lake Michigan over time. Between 2025 and 2026, sediment loss at the beach was found to match uniformly with sediment loss in the vicinity of the project area, including measurements several hundred feet past the project zone. The sediment loss in the McKinley Beach area of the Milwaukee Coastline has been approximately 1' since 2025. Fortunately, design plans for the beach anticipated periodic sand loss and planned for storage and capture of sand on the higher west side of the beach. Parks will be engaging with contractors to spread stockpiled sand from the dry beach into the wading beach this summer, in alignment with design plans and open project permits which are still active.

Depth of the boat launch at Bender Park was found to be as shallow as 1' during the initial surveying completed for the Bender Dredging project, WP0778. After receiving 2024 capital funding as well as supplemental funding through the 2026 budget process,

work was carried out via mechanical dredging to achieve a launch depth of 5' for the reopening of the site on May 19, 2026. The boat launch is now in active use, and Parks plans to pursue a long-term design correction at the site, with a goal of reducing both dredging need and frequency.

Related File No's:	21-97, 21-227, 22-761, 23-308 ; 22-40 , 22-391 , 15-772 , 15-771 , 23-789 ; 20-413 ; 24-778 ; 25-453 ; 25-561
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ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

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

3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability

FISCAL EFFECT

McKinley survey completed out of Department Operating funds, Bender design completed out of capital project WP0778, from the 2024 capital budget.

TERMS

NA

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Sarah Toomsen, PLA, LEED AP, Director of Planning, Milwaukee County Parks
Chris Kubacki, PE, Planning Manager, Milwaukee County Parks

PREPARED BY:

Sarah Toomsen, Director of Planning, Milwaukee County Parks

APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks 

ATTACHMENTS:

NA

CC:

David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Sheldon Wasserman, Committee on Parks & Culture Chairperson
Anne O'Connor, 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
Steve Taylor, 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
Nick Sinram, 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