

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: February 18, 2022

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

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: Bender Boat Launch Conditions

File Type: Informational Report

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**REQUEST**

Informational report on conditions at Bender Park Boat Launch.

**BACKGROUND**

Bender Park is located at 4503 E. Ryan Road in Oak Creek, WI. Since the opening of Bender Park in 1999, sediment transport and the resulting accumulation of sediment in the small boat harbor entrance has become and continues to be a maintenance issue for the Milwaukee County Parks Department. In the past, the County has mechanically removed sediment from the entrance to allow continued access and egress for recreational boating.

In 2007, the County dredged approximately 1450 cubic yards to achieve a navigable harbor entrance. Four years later in 2011, 7750 cubic yards were dredged. Dredging activities also removed approximately 3,000 cubic yards of material in 2013 for approximately \$150k. Dredging activities have been conducted by mechanical means as required under permit with the WDNR. Currently hydraulic dredging is not an option for carrying out sediment removal in this location.

These past dredging activities have not provided a long-term solution for the Bender Park Boat Launch as transport of sediment continues to be a routine issue. Bender Park harbor has again become inundated with sediment to the point where many boats can no longer safely access the harbor or boat launch. A 2007 study by consulting firm and original site designer JJR evaluated alternatives to help alleviate the need for frequent, long-term maintenance dredging. Alternatives ranged from extensions of the existing coastal structure to create pockets for sediment trapping, to large-scale reconstruction of the main breakwater and south jetty to push the mouth of the harbor into deeper water. Budget requests for a multimillion-dollar redesign of Bender Launch to a more sustainable solution based on those alternatives were submitted for capital funding in 2019 and 2020 but were not funded.

At this time, the amount of sediment accumulation to remove from the launch site is unknown.

An initial step in restoring the harbor to greater navigability would be to perform a bathymetric survey (thought to be roughly \$25k) of the site to evaluate current conditions, design a solution that could include dredging, and submit for permits. For reference, the last dredging permit issued by WDNR was for the work performed in 2013 and has since expired. A new permit submittal package will be required for any dredging/intrusive work to the Bender Boat Launch harbor. The scope of work from the last dredging effort included the following tasks:

- *Bathymetric survey of the dredge site prior to the removal of dredge materials.*
- *Survey of the disposal site prior to starting dredging operations.*
- *Installation of a turbidity barrier around the area actively being dredged to prevent spreading of disturbed sediment. We anticipate the barrier to span from the south end of the breakwater to the shore. Contractor will maintain, and upon completion remove the turbidity barrier*
- *Dewatering Plan and a Dredging Project Implementation plan to the Department.*
- *Mechanical excavation and transporting in watertight haul trucks up to 3,000 CY of dredge materials to the disposal site.*
- *Bathymetric survey of the dredge site after removal of dredge materials.*
- *Rough grading of the dredge materials at disposal site after materials have consolidated.*
- *Seeding of the disposal area with native plant materials as specified by the owner. ]*

The Bender launch facility is 23 years old and has required dredging at a rate that far exceeds any other boat launch facility owned and operated by Milwaukee County. While recent high-water levels in Lake Michigan have had damaging impacts to other portions of shoreline in Milwaukee County, the Bender launch temporarily benefitted from additional water depth at the harbor. Current receding trends in lake levels mean the County once again must address the launch depths while balancing systemwide deferred maintenance needs and prioritizing equity-based decision-making.

#### **FISCAL EFFECT**

Dredging is not bond-eligible work and would therefore increase operating expenditures if pursued in 2022 out of existing funds.

#### **TERMS**

None

#### **VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

None

**PREPARED BY:**

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**APPROVED BY:**

Guy Smith, Parks Executive Director



cc: David Crowley, County Executive  
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