



June Board Cycle

Milwaukee County Parks

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Date: May 21, 2021
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: **Area of Concern (AOC) Update (INFO)**

Issue

Milwaukee County Parks has been an active member of the Area of Concern partnership working to address impairments and delist the AOC. As projects are nearing implementation phases a brief background and status and report has been provided to the County.

Background

In 1987 the Milwaukee Estuary was designated as an Area of Concern (AOC) under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada – a “hotspot” of pollution and environmental degradation issues on the Great Lakes. The presence of impairments in the AOC mean that our communities can’t safely use their waterways for eating, drinking, swimming, fishing, and more.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) launched in 2010 as a non-regulatory program that provides funding to address goals and objectives in the Great Lakes Water Quality Act – **it served as a catalyst to jump start removing impairments within the AOCs**. The EPA provides direct funding to states through Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) for implementing the AOC program. The state then distributes those funds to local groups to implement the AOC program. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is tasked with implementing the AOC in Wisconsin. In performance of that role, the DNR and Parks have worked together in this way to fund many projects which area designed and coordinated by Parks staff, including the South Shore Park Water Quality Improvement Study, the Kletzsch Park Dam Fish Passage Project, and the Little Menomonee River Corridor Habitat Restoration.

There are also projects which take place on or adjacent to Parks property, which are led by partners the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD). An example would be the current transition of the Kletzsch Park Fish Passage Project, where MMSD is taking over as project lead. This partnership is an opportunity to leverage MMSD’s statutory



powers, which would allow installation of the fish passage on the East bank, if modelling and design allow. MMSD and the County possess complimentary expertise and a partnership will provide better results than could be achieved by MMSD or the County acting separately. MCP coordinates on all phases of these projects providing final approvals

In addition, since the early 1990's MCP has held an important advisory role in the AOC partnership. Natural Areas, Planning, and Parks Leadership teams are contributing members of the various work groups that have been developing plans and identifying actions needed help delist the Area of Concern, as well the development of AOC Communications and Outreach and Equity Initiatives.

There are three general categories of AOC work which also define how MCP contributes as a partner:

- **Habitat and Populations Projects:** These are projects designed address impairments related to loss of fish and wildlife habitat and populations of desired species throughout the AOC. They aim to create and reestablish habitat with the characteristics necessary to support native fish and wildlife populations and help restore the environmental conditions to support healthy, self-sustaining communities of those species. Projects include habitat restoration, wetland enhancement, and fish passage projects. As the primary landowner of sites that meet habitat criteria in the AOC, most Parks contributing projects fall into this category. These projects are funded through GLRI and include a habitat assessment phase conducted by Natural Resources, followed by design and implementation by a contractor. Current Parks led projects include Currie Park Fish Passage Improvements, Enhancements to Milwaukee River Greenway Parks, and Little Menomonee River Corridor Restoration. In addition, there are several MMSD led projects which will also take place in or adjacent to Parks property. These include Estabrook Falls and Fish Passage Improvements, Kletzsch Park Fish Passage Project and Fisheries Improvements to Lincoln Park Oxbow.
- **Beach Projects:** DNR is still working with EPA to refine a management action list to address impairments related to beach closing and recreational restoration. However, one of the only major projects identified is the South Shore Beach project. The South Shore Beach ranks amongst the worst beaches in the nation in recreational water quality. WDNR, working with Parks, received Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funding in late 2017 to develop design alternatives to address water quality and beach closure issues at South Shore Beach. Concept designs for several alternatives were developed and after input from stakeholders and the design team, a preferred design was selected. Design plans and specifications were completed in December of 2019. The project is currently on hold. WDNR and Milwaukee County Parks will seek funding for implementing the selected alternative at South Shore Beach.
- **Sediment Projects:** On January 28th, 2020 MCP further formalized our partnership through the signing of the Great Lakes Legacy Act Project Agreement (GLLA) for the Milwaukee River Downstream. Uniting partners from federal, state, and local government, along with non-profits and community organizations, this project seeks to clean up the Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern, moving into the feasibility study and design phase for sediment remediation work. As a "non-fiscal" partner Parks contributions are advisory. Work will primarily take place in-river – as such there are only a few County properties adjacent to remediation sites which may



be required for access. We help improve efficiencies by expediting the processing of ROEs, waiving fees, and coordinating with GLLA project contractors for access and uses of facilities like Estabrook Garage to temporarily store equipment. Floodplains of some parks (Milwaukee River Greenway) along the reaches of the Milwaukee River may require remediation, however each of these sites is also part of separate Parks AOC Habitat/Populations project.

As noted, Parks has played an important role in the AOC Communications and Outreach team's development of communications materials and planning. In 2020 DNR hired communication consultant Creative Marketing Resources to help provide a unified message that speaks to the diverse range of projects and stakeholders within the Milwaukee Estuary AOC's communities. This has led to the evolution of the AOC partnership into the newly branded: Waterway Restoration Partnership (WRP). Parks is a proud member of the WRP, a robust group of long-standing, trusted partners in the community who have been working together for years to improve water quality in the area. Along with this re-branding comes a vigorous communications and outreach plan which includes a website that will detail our AOC projects, as well newsletters and social media outreach, and coordinating in conducting AOC-wide public meetings.

In addition to the WRP website, Planning is also finalizing a web app based upon the Capital Planning Projects GIS web app to improve County-wide awareness of AOC projects and improve planning efforts. It will include information and funding data for current and pending AOC projects as well as completed projects that may be subject to deed restriction.

Recommendation

No action necessary, as this report is informational in nature.

Prepared By: Natalie Dutack, AOC Program Supervisor, Milwaukee County Parks

Approved By: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks *Guy Smith*

Attachments

- A1 - AOC Boundary Map

Copy

- David Crowley, County Executive
- Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
- Sheldon Wasserman, Parks, Energy & Environment Chair, Supervisor District 3
- Steven Shea, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Vice-Chair, Supervisor District 8



- Felesia Martin, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 7
- Sylvia Ortiz-Velez, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 12
- Liz Sumner, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 1
- Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board
- Aaron Herzberg, 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
- Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
- Emily Peterson, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller
- Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB

