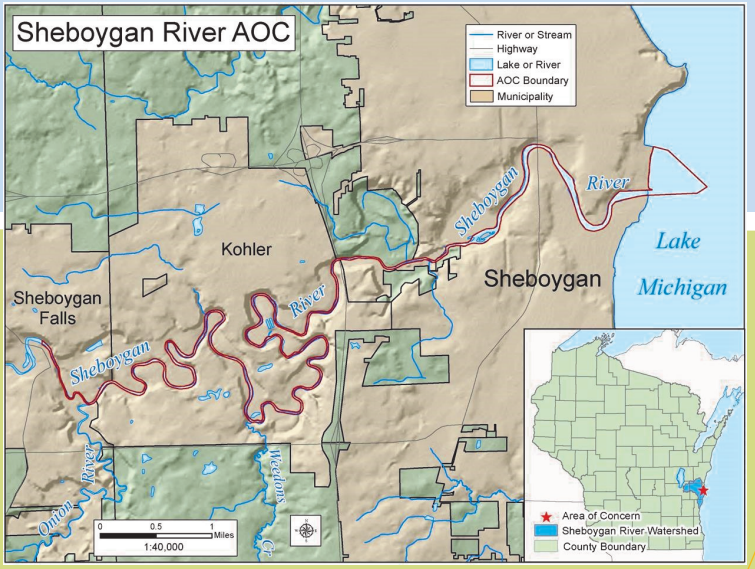
The Sheboygan River
Great Lakes Area of Concern



The Sheboygan River AOC includes the lower 14 miles of river from the Sheboygan Falls dam to the Sheboygan Harbor.

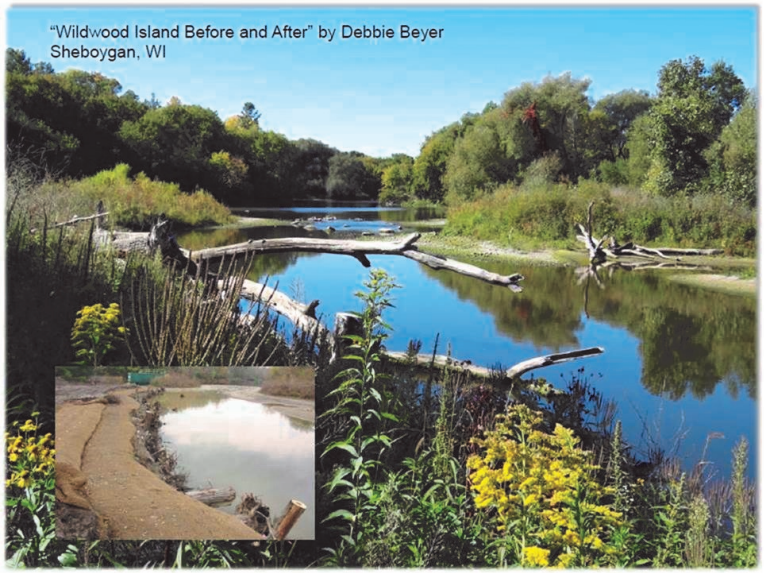
Great Lakes rivers and harbors that have been most severely affected by pollution and habitat loss are considered "Areas of Concern," or AOCs. Designated in 1987 as part of an international agreement between the U.S. and Canada known as the *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement,* these sites need special attention. This fact sheet highlights some of the progress that partners in Wisconsin have made toward removing the Sheboygan River from the list of AOCs.

With abundant water, rich soils, and a history as an important shipping port, Sheboygan developed prosperous manufacturing and agricultural industries. Pollution from these industries contributed to the river's degradation and designation as an Area of Concern. Contaminated sediments resulted in fish and waterfowl that are not safe to eat and impaired use of harbors due to dredging restrictions. Pollution was also suspected of contributing to the degradation of wildlife, fish, benthos (bottom-dwelling critters) and plankton populations. High levels of nutrients have caused nuisance algal blooms. Sedimentation and habitat loss were also issues in the AOC.

Many partners worked to clean up contaminated sediments, control runoff pollution, and protect and restore habitat. Current efforts are focused on monitoring to determine if AOC-specific cleanup and restoration goals have been met.

AOC Accomplishments

As a priority AOC targeted for short-term delisting by U.S. EPA, federal, state, and local partners secured approximately $85 million to fund projects that will move us down our pathway to delisting the AOC. By the end of 2012, we implemented all the necessary "on the ground" projects in the Sheboygan River AOC.


"Wildwood Island Before and After" by Debbie Beyer
Sheboygan, WI

Through four dredging projects, over 400,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment were removed from the river. These included two Superfund projects, a Great Lakes Legacy Act dredging project and a navigational dredging project designed by the Army Corps of Engineers. All of these actions targeted the "Restrictions on Dredging" beneficial use impairment (BUI). This impairment is the first one to be considered for removal for this AOC. The proposal to remove this BUI is currently in the review process.

Approximately $5.7 million has been invested in habitat projects. In addition, about $800,000 of funding was directed to assessment work to address several BUIs. Habitat management will be completed in 2015 and monitoring efforts are underway to address how these efforts will impact fish and wildlife within the AOC. Together these projects aimed to address BUI removal needs for 6 of the 9 BUIs in the Sheboygan River.

Highlights from the Sheboygan River Area of Concern

UW-Extension

Sheboygan River Dredging Projects

Through the Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) project, approximately 160,000 cubic yards of PCB- and PAH-contaminated sediment was removed from the lower river (Kiwanis Park to the 8th Street Bridge). Through the Sheboygan Harbor Improvement Project, approximately 170,000 cubic yards of non-hazardous sediment was removed from the river starting at the 8th Street Bridge down river to the mouth, resulting in a 10 to 16 foot-deep navigational channel. The project improved navigability and enhanced shipping and boating opportunities. Wisconsin DNR is working with U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office to document the bathymetry of the river bottom following dredging, and to document areas with residual contamination (some contamination was left behind to maintain the integrity of existing shoreline protection structures; in other areas the contamination levels were too low to effectively dredge and were covered with clean sand).

UW-Extension

Habitat Restoration

A total of seven habitat restoration projects were completed to address the Loss of Fish and Wildlife and Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations BUIs. Approximately $5.7 million was invested. Projects included Kiwanis Park Shoreline Restoration, Taylor Drive & Indiana Avenue Area Wetland Restoration, Wildwood Island Area Restoration, shoreline stabilization, in-stream habitat improvements, targeted invasive species control, and conservation planning. These projects will improve and re-establish habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species. Maintenance activities, such as managing invasive species, are underway to ensure the successful establishment of the habitat projects.

UW-Extension

Education and Outreach

Sheboygan River Expeditions (various canoe and kayak trips along the Sheboygan River AOC) were open to the community for a hands-on learning experience and were hosted in partnership with YMCA Camp Y-Koda. UW-Extension also offers the opportunity to learn more about wildlife of the AOC through on-going bird and native plant walks. In addition, the public can participate in citizen science monitoring efforts such as invasive species removal, bat monitoring, bird and bird nest monitoring, and frog and toad surveys.

WISCONSIN DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

For more information, contact:
Camille Bruhn, Sheboygan River AOC Coordinator,
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Plymouth, WI.
Phone: (920) 893-8527 E-mail: Camille.Bruhn@wisconsin.gov

Visit us on the web!
http://dnr.wi.gov
Search "Sheboygan River AOC"