Wisconsin Lakesider

Great Lakes Area of Concern Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 1 Spring 2017

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AOC News & Events

Sturgeon Fest: Sept. 30 at Lakeshore State Park, Milwaukee

Sturgeon Fest celebrates Riveredge Nature Center's 25 year partnership with the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources to bring back lake sturgeon, a critically important species both environmentally and culturally, to the Milwaukee River, where they haven't been seen in over 125 years. Riveredge Nature Center, hundreds of volunteers, and the DNR are working to restore a breeding population of sturgeon to the Milwaukee River.

At Sturgeon Fest more than 1,200 fingerling sturgeon are released into the Milwaukee Harbor. This year's event will be the 12th batch of sturgeon released.

During this event you'll have the opportunity to sponsor and release your own fish! For a modest donation to the Return the Sturgeon Restoration Project, children, families, and adults participate in citizen science at its best by sponsoring a baby sturgeon and hand-releasing it into Lake Michigan. Sturgeon Sponsors receive a certificate, magnet, and an opportunity to register your sturgeon. All the sturgeon are tagged (similar to how pets are micro chipped). If a sturgeon is ever captured with your tag number, you'll be notified.

Sturgeon Fest activities are free and open to the public. Other activities include: a live reptile and amphibian show, children's games and crafts, kayak demonstrations, guided tours of the park's prairies, educational booths, delicious local food vendors, and more.

Lake sturgeon once numbered in the millions in Lake Michigan, with many returning to spawn in the Milwaukee River. But in modern times, populations have been decimated by overharvesting, pollution, habitat loss, and dams. The largest native fish of the Great Lakes, lake sturgeon are now threatened in 19 of the 20 states\provinces in which they're found. At the start of this project, only a few thousand remained in Lake Michigan and not a single sturgeon had been spotted in the Milwaukee River since the 1890s.

Each year ~1,500 sturgeon are raised in a streamside rearing facility on Riveredge Nature Center's grounds. There, they begin life in circulating water straight from the Milwaukee River, allowing them to imprint on the river so they will be more likely to return there when they are finally ready to spawn. This initiative is designed to last 25 years. It's enough time to stock a breeding population of over 25,000 fish and study the long term results, when breeding adults might finally return home to the river.

Volunteers are key to this project, caring for the sturgeon until they are released.

- By Susan Tesarik

Sponsor a sturgeon for $10 to support the project & hand-release one yourself.

Lower Menominee River

Vine cutting on Strawberry Island to improve habitat for colonial nesting birds, such as herons and egrets.

What's Happening?

To learn more about the Lower Menominee River AOC projects and events visit: http://dnr.wi.gov search "Menominee River AOC"

For more information
contact:
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DNR, Green Bay
920-662-5103
Laurel.Last@Wisconsin.gov

NOW AVAILABLE

2016 Remedial Action Plan Update

Island Rookery Habitat Restoration Update

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project to improve rookery habitat on Little Blueberry, Blueberry, Boom, and Strawberry Islands (see map) has made substantial progress since it began in September 2014. The focus of this three-year project is on controlling invasive plants, restoring native plant communities, and supporting colonial nesting bird populations.

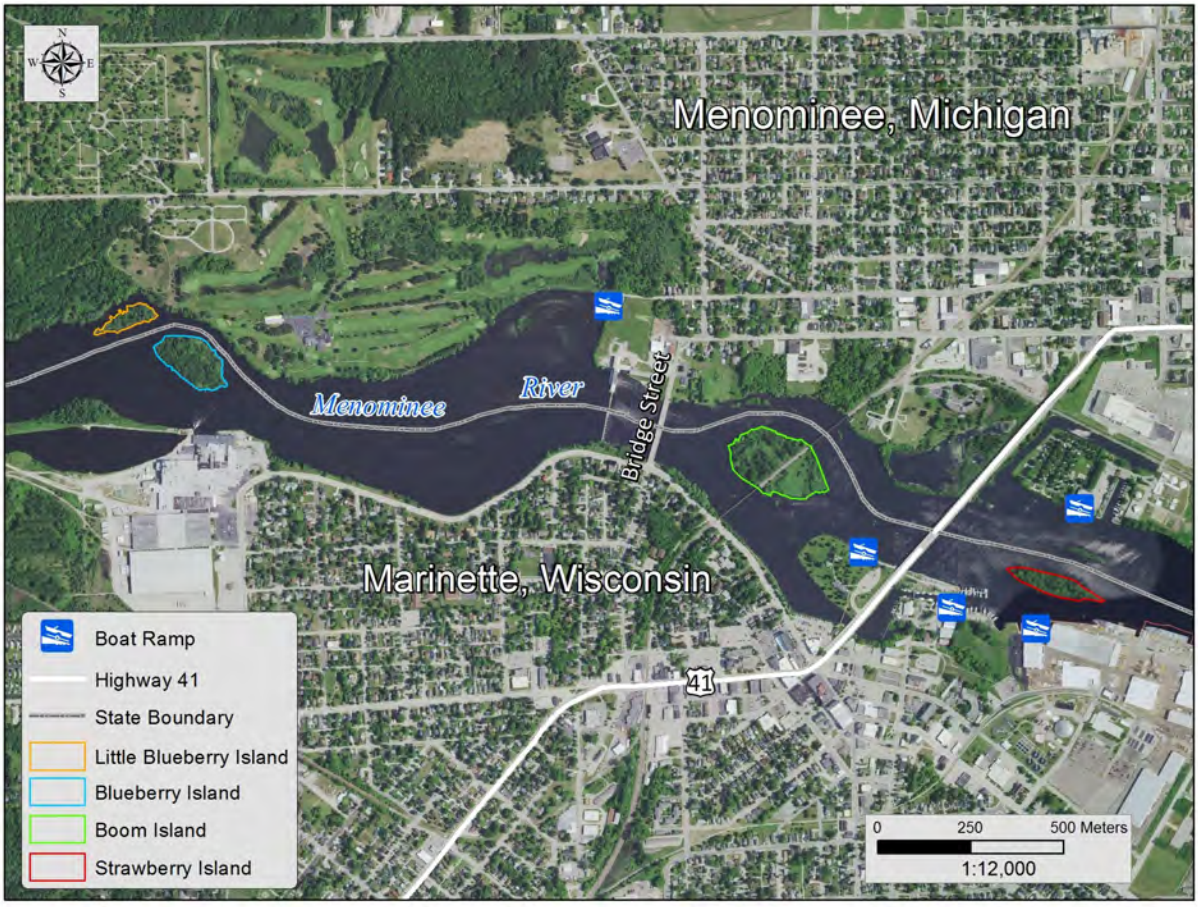
Strawberry Island is currently home to a large breeding colony of egrets and herons, while Little Blueberry Island, Blueberry Island, and Boom Island have some potential for providing rookery habitat. Invasive plant species of concern include common buckthorn, glossy buckthorn, common reed, and bush honeysuckle. Although riverbank grape is native to this region, it is also a species of concern for this project, because nesting trees on Strawberry Island have lost crowns and branches due to heavy grapevines.

Mechanical and chemical treatments of invasive plants were completed in 2015 and 2016. Woody material was cut, piled, and chipped. To avoid disturbing the nesting herons and egrets, the work on Strawberry Island was only performed while the rookery was not active.

In the fall of 2016, some initial small-scale restoration plantings were installed, including trees, shrubs, and a sedge meadow seed mix. These plantings will be monitored, and the results will inform plans for larger-scale plantings installed in spring and fall of 2017.

Monitoring has been a very important component of this project; the data collected are used to measure project progress and direct future efforts.

Bird surveys during spring migration, breeding season, and fall migration *(continued on page 7.)*



St. Louis River


Sand dunes on Wisconsin Point (Photo from NOAA)

Wisconsin Point Dune Restoration Begins this Summer

What's Happening?

To learn more about St. Louis River AOC projects and events visit http://dnr.wi.gov search "St. Louis AOC"

For more information, contact:

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Visit *St. Louis Estuary: the Stories and the Science* for history, photos and interactive maps: http://stlouisriverestuary.org

After a few years of planning and engineering, the restoration work on Wisconsin Point is scheduled to begin in 2017. Multiple partners including the City of Superior, Wis. Coastal Management Program, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Wis. DNR, and other local stakeholders have worked to prioritize this restoration project with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. This restoration will contribute toward the removal of the loss of fish and wildlife habitat beneficial use impairment in the St. Louis River Area of Concern.

Wisconsin Point is a three-mile-long natural sand spit in Superior, Wis., that divides Allouez Bay from Lake Superior. Together, Wisconsin Point and Minnesota Point form one of the longest freshwater barrier beaches in the world.

Project work will be conducted on land owned by the City of Superior. This area provides important habitat for many species of fish, wildlife, and rare plants and is a significant migratory bird stopover area. The point is also an important historical site with great cultural significance. It was once home to an Ojibwe Village and burial site.

This unique recreational area attracts many visitors year-round. Fishing, hiking, birding, swimming, boating and nature viewing are some of the most common activities on the point and in Allouez Bay.

The City of Superior has completed the engineering phase of the dune restoration project. The project includes restoration of the sensitive dune habitat and preservation of historical sites while providing improved public access points and adding restroom and trash facilities. Parking areas will be consolidated from 20 turnouts to approximately five parking areas, and the dunes will be restored and re-vegetated in the areas that are eliminated. Americans with Disabilities Act compliant boardwalks will be installed over the dunes for beach access to protect the sensitive ecosystem. The five improved access points will increase the overall number of parking spots on the point and use low impact development techniques to reduce storm water runoff. A living shoreline design technique will be implemented along Allouez Bay to stabilize and restore the eroding shoreline along Wisconsin Point Road.

The project outcomes include:

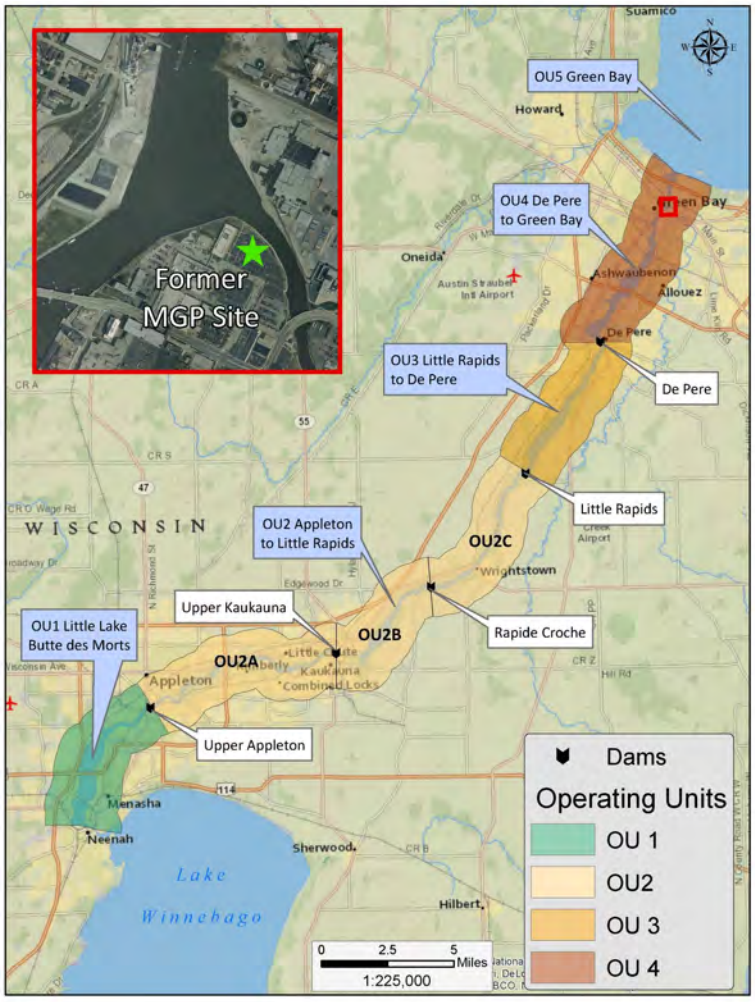
* 48,000 square feet of restored sand dune habitat.
* 40,000 square feet of restored shoreline wetland.
* 85 acres of restored pine barren forest dune habitat.
* 150 acres of reconnected sensitive wildlife habitat.
* 3,600 linear feet of restored and stabilized shoreline.

(continued on page 8.)

Wisconsin Point Overview and Parking Count (City of Superior).
See an interactive GIS map of this area at: http://stlouisriverestuary.org

Lower Green Bay & Fox River

Lower Fox River Cleanup Moving Full Speed Ahead



The map at left shows location of operable units (OUs) where contaminated sediment is being managed. This year, work will occur in OU 4, which includes a former manufactured gas plant (MGP) site.

What's Happening?

To learn more about Lower Green Bay & Fox River AOC projects and events visit http://dnr.wi.gov search "Green Bay AOC"

For more information, contact:

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Megan.Oshea@Wisconsin.gov


Cheryl Bougie

Pictured here is the hydraulic dredge that is used for removing sediment from the Fox River. The cutter head spins at the end of the arm, which pulls sediment into large pipelines that then transport the sediment to a facility offsite for processing and treatment.

The Lower Fox River Polychlorinated Biphenyls Cleanup Project, with a primary goal to protect human health, remains one of the largest PCB river cleanup projects in the world. It is also a keystone to improving the ecological health of the Lower Green Bay and Fox River Area of Concern. The project began in Operable Unit 1 (Little Lake Buttes de Morts) in 2004 and extends along 39 river miles to the bay of Green Bay in Lake Michigan. Remedial action for the project is nearing completion, as dredging and capping operations continue this year on the last stretch of the river near downtown Green Bay. We anticipate full-scale dredging and capping in 2017 and 2018, with completion of dredging targeted at the end of 2018. However, final dredging work may extend into 2019, since the final project design calls for some areas that were originally going to be capped to be dredged instead. Capping operations and demobilization should occur in 2019, followed by decades of long-term monitoring throughout the river and bay.

The PCB remediation work for this year is focused on the last four mile stretch of the river, including where the East River joins the Fox River near downtown Green Bay. Long ago, historic releases from a former manufactured gas plant site impacted sediment in the mouth of the East River. The contaminants of concern from MGP operations include petroleum-based (*continued on page 10.*)

Sheboygan River

What's Happening?

To learn more about Sheboygan River AOC projects and events visit http://dnr.wi.gov search "Sheboygan River AOC"

For more information, contact:

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Fish Tumor Assessments Underway

With help from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the many great partners dedicated to the Sheboygan River, huge strides have been made in restoring the river in the last five years. Removal of contaminated sediment and implementation of habitat restoration projects within the Sheboygan River corridor have greatly improved fish and wildlife habitat.

Assessments of fish and wildlife populations are currently in progress within the Sheboygan River Area of Concern to determine if all the restoration activities have produced the desired results.

One such assessment is a fish tumor prevalence study on white suckers (*Catostomus sp.*). Contaminants that were once widespread within the Sheboygan River are known to cause liver tumors among some resident fish species, including white suckers. White suckers were the chosen fish species because of the high likelihood of obtaining the intended sample size for the study.

Researchers from the U.S. Geological Survey and University of West Virginia were contracted to conduct the fish tumor assessment, initially in 2012, and again in 2017. The 2012 study concluded that 8.3 percent of white suckers sampled suffered from liver tumors, which fell short of the five percent target.

This spring marked five years since the last fish tumor assessment was completed; meaning it was time to assess tumor rates within the Sheboygan River AOC once again.

On March 30 and March 31, 2017 researchers from USGS and the University of West Virginia met with DNR staff at Kiwanis Park in Sheboygan to begin the two day study. The study was planned to coincide with the white sucker run in the spring, when the fish are more vulnerable to capture. Although the weather did not cooperate (with temperatures in the 30s and low 40s including rain) DNR staff were able to capture 100 white suckers each day for examination using an electrofishing boat.

The white suckers were then humanely euthanized and their livers were removed for further analysis at the National Fish Health Research Laboratory in West Virginia. Laboratory research has already begun with results available in early 2018.

It is our hope— five years after the massive restoration efforts within the Sheboygan River AOC— that tumor incidence rates will drop below five percent. If that is indeed the case, the DNR will be able to remove another one of the seven remaining impairments still associated with the Sheboygan River AOC.

- By Eric Evensen.

Researchers from USGS, University of West Virginia, and DNR harvested fish livers to be analyzed for tumors at the National Fish Health Research Laboratory in West Virginia. Results will be available in early 2018.

Harmful chemicals that were once prevalent in the Sheboygan River are known to cause liver tumors among resident fish species. White suckers were chosen to study because they are abundant and are an important food chain link to determine if these toxins are still accumulating in the ecosystem. Suckers eat insects, crustaceans, plants, smaller fish, and fish eggs; suckers are also eaten by sport fish, such as smallmouth bass.

Milwaukee Estuary

Agencies Share Sampling Results and Public Health Recommendations

To learn more about Milwaukee Estuary AOC projects and events visit http://dnr.wi.gov search "Milwaukee AOC"

For more information, contact:

Stacy Hron, Milwaukee Estuary AOC Coordinator
DNR Milwaukee
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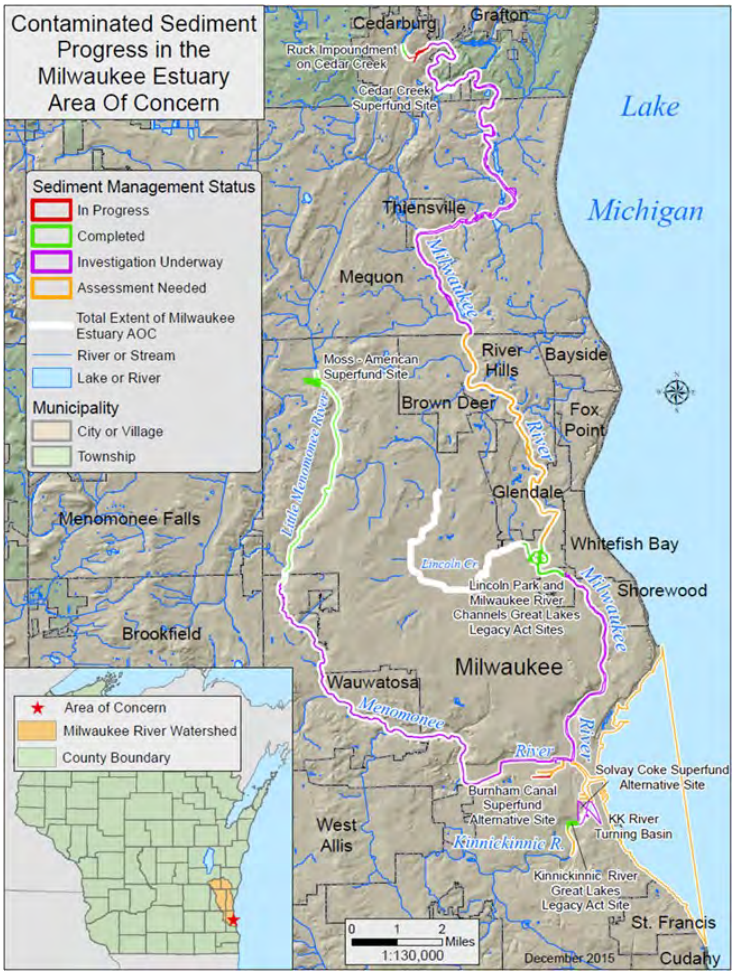
Identifying and addressing contaminated sediments is central to many of the Area of Concern impairments. DNR Office of Great Waters has been working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to systematically move through the Milwaukee Estuary AOC to sample sediments, understand where contaminants may be present, and then determine if cleanup is needed. This work is accomplished through the Great Lakes Legacy Act program and is dependent on available funding.



Following a successful project to address contaminated sediments in the Lincoln Park area, the next logical step was to examine the downstream areas of the Milwaukee River. The area between Estabrook Dam and the confluence with the Menomonee River was sampled in 2016 by an EPA contractor, looking at both the river sediments and floodplain soils.

EPA received initial results indicating the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls in the river and floodplain soils. The preliminary test results also indicate the presence of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, in the same areas PCBs were found. Although the PCB levels in the floodplain soils/sediments are higher than they should be, they are low enough that no public health threat is expected.

Preliminary data show concentrations that range from less than one part per million to 24 parts per million in surface soil samples in the floodplain area. By comparison, PCB concentrations were higher in Milwaukee River sediments upstream from the Estabrook Park Dam in the area including Lincoln Park. Concentrations there ranged from less than one part per million to greater than 100 parts per million and the area has been successfully remediated with work completed in 2015.

Since receiving these preliminary results, DNR, Wis. Dept. of Health Services, EPA and local partners have worked to share this information with the public. The floodplain areas are open to the public and contain walking trails as part of the Milwaukee River Greenway. Much of the floodplain land is owned by Milwaukee County Parks, although there are several private landowners as well. EPA, DNR and Milwaukee County Parks are notifying local property owners and stakeholders regarding the preliminary data. A public meeting was held April 18 at the Gordon Park Pavilion to share the information as well. Additional outreach is expected to include signage and other materials.

The DHS recommends avoiding exposure to PCBs when possible because PCBs can build up in the human body over time. Common sense steps include not touching soil that could contain PCBs; removing shoes upon entering the home; washing hands with soap and water and cleaning pets, bikes and tools after visiting the Milwaukee River floodplain.

Consuming fish that contain PCBs is often the primary route of exposure. Anglers are encouraged to continue following posted fish consumption advisories, which can be found by visiting dnr.wi.gov and searching "fish consumption."

Officials from federal, state and local units of government are working together to ensure public health and safety and determine appropriate next steps. DHS is working with local health organizations to provide information and help people make wise decisions that minimize exposure to PCBs and other chemicals in the sediment. EPA is working with DNR and Milwaukee County Parks to determine the appropriate next steps for the floodplains. – By Stacy Hron.

Lower Menominee's Island Rookery Habitat Restoration *(cont. from Page 2)*

have been conducted to monitor bird species diversity, abundance, and habitat use.

Rookery surveys, conducted with volunteers from the Chappee Rapids Audubon Society, have been used to monitor nesting activity on Strawberry Island. Vegetation surveys have been used to record the response of both invasive and native species to treatments and to inform future treatments.

Discussions about long-term monitoring and maintenance of the islands are currently underway. Project partners will work with local landowners to ensure that the habitat restoration is successful over the long term.

The Blueberry Islands are owned by Eagle Creek Renewable Energy, Boom Island is owned by the city of Marinette, and Strawberry Island is owned by the Bureau of Land Management.

For more information and photos of all the restoration project sites, visit the Lower Menominee Area of Concern Citizens Advisory Committee website.
- By Laurel Last

Buckthorn seedlings *(above)* on Blueberry Island before restoration, and treated area *(left)* with woody invasive plants cut and chipped. To learn more, please contact AOC Coordinator Laurel Last: 920-662-5103 \ laurel.last@wisconsin.gov.

Lower Menominee Waterfront Cleanup Event a Huge Success!

The May 6 Lower Menominee River waterfront cleanup was a huge success! The Lower Menominee River Citizens Advisory Committee hosted the event, in order to bring citizens together to pick up litter along local waterways while also informing them of progress being made in the restoration of the AOC.

Thirty-eight CAC members and other volunteers came to lend a hand, meeting at Nestegg Marine in Marinette before and after the event. Work took place at eight public access waterfront sites in Marinette and Menominee.

At least 40 bags of trash were collected, along with a tire, a complete door frame, a large sign, part of a plastic kiddie pool, and lots of Styrofoam® and plastic. We cannot even say that they picked up "everything but the kitchen sink," because they did indeed pick up an old sink!

Volunteers were provided with gloves, garbage bags, and CAC T-shirts, which were funded by a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative outreach support grant, as well as a pizza lunch, which was donated by the Marinette & Menominee Great Lakes Sport Fishermen.

Mark Erickson, Michigan CAC co-chair, provided a welcome and orientation for the volunteers, who then split up to clean up the various shoreline areas before returning to Nestegg for lunch. AOC displays and information were available for volunteers to learn more about the projects. Thanks so much to everyone who pitched in to help!

The CAC was formed in 1988 as a means of incorporating stakeholder feedback into the Remedial Action Plan documents and to serve as ambassadors on AOC issues to the Marinette and Menominee communities. CAC members help the Wisconsin DNR and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality by identifying local issues, developing local targets and goals, serving as a resource for historical information, and assisting in project implementation when possible.

The CAC holds around 10 regular meetings per year on the University of Wisconsin-Marinette campus, open to all interested parties. Meetings are advertised through the DNR Public Meetings Calendar. For more information about the CAC and how to join, contact Laurel Last 920-662-5103 \ laurel.last@wisconsin.gov.
- By Laurel Last

St. Louis River Alliance Connects People to the River

Participants of St. Louis River Alliance's Annual Canoe Trip stop on Clough Island (*top photo*). SLRA volunteers plant wild rice near Clough Island (*below*).

A regional non-profit born out of the federal Clean Water Act turns 22 this year; and the impact they have had, along with community, state, and federal partners is something to celebrate. Propelled by its members and partners, the St. Louis River Alliance is working to restore, protect, and enhance the St. Louis River and Area of Concern in the Estuary.

When the alliance was first founded in 1996, its main purpose was to assist the Minnesota and Wisconsin agencies as they tackled the historic degradation of the St. Louis River Estuary at the head of Lake Superior.

From the industrial boom of the mid 1800s to the late 1900s, the estuary received waste from harbor industries and residents. Many sites within the AOC contain legacy pollutants from historical contamination with harmful chemicals and toxic waste products. In 1987 the lower 39 miles of the St. Louis River and the estuary were listed by the EPA as the largest AOC in the Great Lakes.

SLRA provides citizens' input into the process of creating the AOC Remedial Action Plan along with state and federal agencies. SLRA's role in the Remedial Action Plan is to ensure its success by providing a connection between community members and the project coordinators, working on habitat restorations, and encouraging the public to get involved in stewardship and volunteerism.

Over the last 22 years, the SLRA and partners have been successful in completing restorations that have improved the quality of life and economic returns for the entire region. Excitement and momentum is translating into a rise in ecotourism on the river, new business start-ups, and community revitalization.

SLRA holds several annual events to connect people to the St. Louis River, including: Fall train rides along the river, *Vista Star* boat rides, canoe trips, Spring litter clean-ups, Winter outings to ski or snowshoe on the river, and other community-based events to inspire stewards and advance restoration efforts.

Currently, SLRA is working on two aquatic invasive species control projects; habitat restoration, education, and monitoring for the Piping Plover; as well as their annual events.

With funds from Wis. DNR, the SLRA will also run a photo contest starting June 1, 2017 for amateur photographers, hold a public event to highlight new AOC projects, and plant wild rice in the estuary.

With their 2017 Photo Contest, themed ***Seasons of the St. Louis River***, SLRA is looking for striking digital images that highlight the diverse flora, wildlife, and recreational activities that connect people to the river. Lucky winners will win great prizes and have their photos featured in publications. See the winning photos from SLRA's last photo contest at this link.

To learn more about this year's photo contest and how to participate visit SLRA's website (stlouisriver.org), or go to their Facebook page.

SLRA welcomes new members, provides ongoing volunteer opportunities, and continues to work with partners to restore the river. To learn more about the many ways to get involved or to submit a photo to the photo contest, visit the SLRA website or contact Kris Eilers, SLRA Executive Director: 218-733-9520 \ kris@stlouisriver.org.

- By Kris Eilers

SLRA volunteer monitors the beaches for Piping Plovers, critically endangered shorebirds (*below*).

Wisconsin Point Dune Restoration

(continued from Page 3)

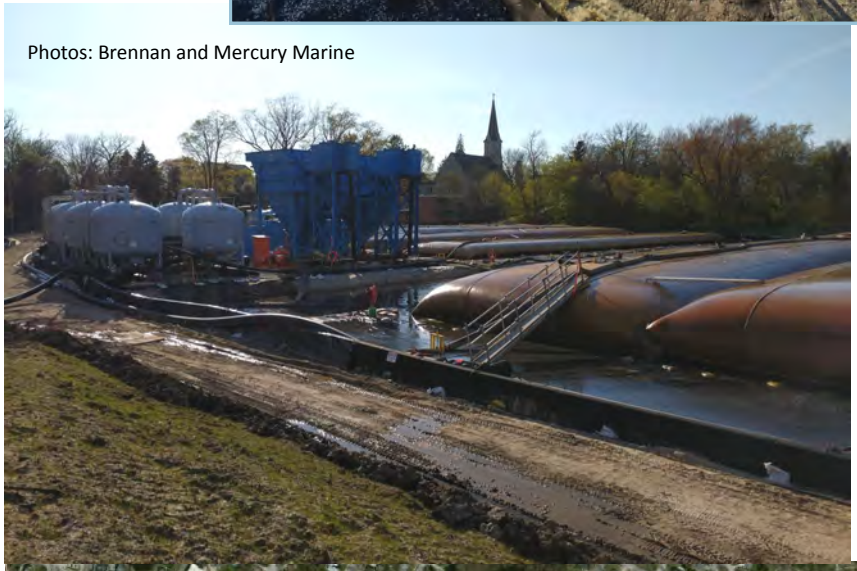
A public input process was used to finalize the design. Shoreline stabilization work will begin in May and restoration of the dunes will take place in 2017 and 2018 after tribal consultation and permitting is completed.

To learn more, visit the City of Superior Wisconsin Point Restoration Project website.

- By Matt Steiger

Cedar Creek Clean-up Continues in the Milwaukee Estuary AOC

Photos: Brennan and Mercury Marine



Arial view of the support facilities for this year's project, encompassing all of Adlai Horn Park, in the center of Cedarburg (*top photo*). Closer view (*left*) of geo-tubes and Wastewater Treatment Plant at site.

Another large-scale sediment cleanup project is underway in the Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern. Work began last Fall and has continued this Spring at the Cedar Creek Superfund Site in Cedarburg.

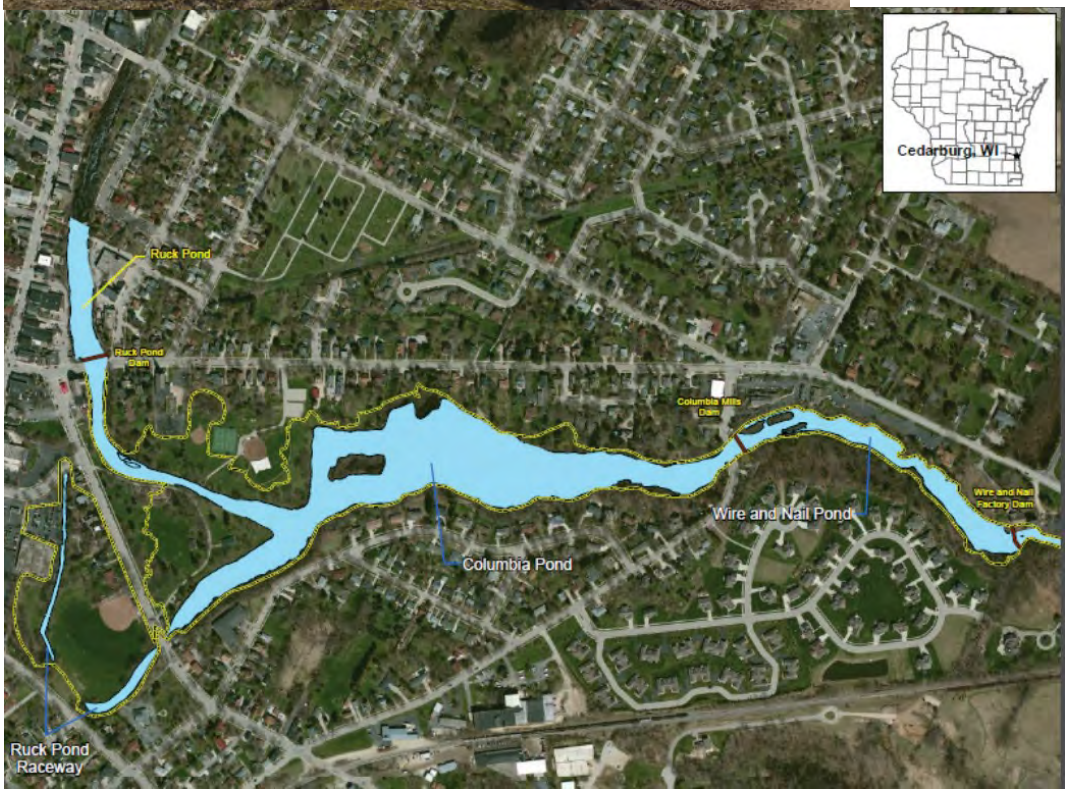
In 2016, over 8,000 cubic yards of PCB contaminated sediments and soils were removed from the Ruck Pond Raceway area (lower left corner of map). Now this year, a larger effort for the Cedar Creek PCB cleanup project is in full swing. There are two hydraulic dredges running 12 hours a day, six days per week to accomplish the work. The project will address the single largest known remaining deposit of PCBs in the Milwaukee Estuary AOC.

The DNR first found PCBs in fish in the Milwaukee River in the 1970s and in Cedar Creek in the 1980s. A responsible party search found that two industries operating in Cedarburg, Mercury Marine and Amcast, were the likely cause of the contamination. DNR performed sediment sampling in the 1980s to confirm that Cedar Creek was contaminated with PCBs.

After that, it was a long and winding path that included cleaning up the upstream-most contaminated area, Ruck Pond, in 1994. In 1996, the Hamilton Dam was in danger of failing. The DNR ordered the dam breached, and the pond dewatered. By the late 1990s, contaminated soils and some mud flats exposed by the dam removal were removed from the former Hamilton Impoundment. In the early 2000s, Mercury Marine voluntarily entered the Superfund Alternatives Program to address the remaining contamination on Cedar Creek.

Fast forward to 2017, and the current project encompasses 1.1 miles of the impounded (dammed) portions of Cedar Creek including the Ruck Pond Raceway, Columbia Pond, and Wire and Nail Ponds. The remediation is occurring on the properties of 65 landowners, all of

(continued on p. 10)



Lower Fox River Cleanup Moving Full Speed Ahead *(continued from Page 4)*

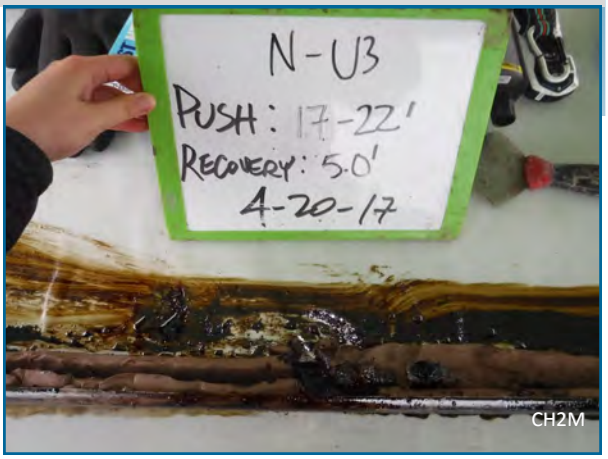
byproducts, such as non-aqueous phase liquids and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

The responsible parties for the PCB project are working collaboratively with WE Energies to remove the manufactured gas plant contaminated sediment in conjunction with PCB sediment dredging. Wisconsin DNR teams are working closely with the responsible parties and with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to conduct oversight of all cleanup operations on the Lower Fox River. The responsible parties are aiming for 2017 as the earliest they'd be able to manage some of the MGP site waste.

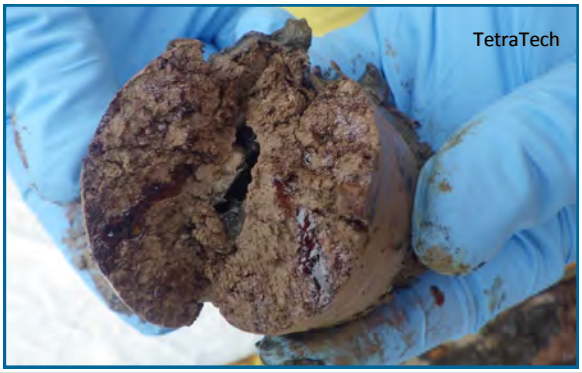
After14 years of safe and successful remediation, we look forward to another year of full-scale dredging on the river. Favorable weather conditions allowed dredging operations to start two weeks early in 2017.

The Lower Fox project team plans to remove 565,000 cubic yards this year, contributing to a total project estimate of 5.3 million cubic yards.

DNR will continue to provide updates about the project at least annually through this newsletter. We look forward to sharing the project's progress as we continue this collaborative effort to improve the health of the Lower Fox River and Green Bay.
- By Beth Olson and Megan O'Shea.



CH2M


TetraTech

The photo above is a sediment core from the former manufactured gas plant site. The tarry material is a byproduct of the coal gasification process.
The photo on the left shows a more detailed view of this substance. More information about MGPs can be found at: https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/water/mgp.htm

Cedar Creek Clean-up Continues
(continued from Page 9)

whom granted access for the work. Also, three parks in the center of Cedarburg have been utilized to various degrees since September of 2016.

Approximately 60,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment and soil (over 4,000 dump truck loads) will be removed from the river and floodplains. The dredging is expected to be complete this summer, with restoration activities continuing for several years thereafter.

While more PCBs remain in the downstream areas of the site (designated Operable Unit 2B), the work occurring right now is addressing the majority of known contaminants and will lead to lower PCB concentrations in fish.

Cedar Creek from the Ruck Impoundment down to the Milwaukee River has been under a "do not eat" advisory for fish since the 1980s. The goal is to reduce the contaminants in the food chain and to return a cleaner river to the community. - By Scott Inman, Marsha Burzynski, and Stacy Hron.


Stacy Hron

Pictured at right is the dredge, "Fox River;" one of two hydraulic dredges piping sediment slurry to the geotubes and to the wastewater treatment plant.

WISCONSIN DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Wisconsin DNR Office of Great Waters

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Learn more about Wisconsin's AOCs on our website!
www.dnr.wi.gov
Search: "AOC"