

Background on Muskegon Lake AOC

Muskegon Lake is a 4,150-acre inland coastal lake located on the west shoreline of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, connected to Lake Michigan by a navigation channel. Muskegon Lake was designated an Area of Concern (AOC) in 1985 due to ecological problems caused by industrial discharges, shoreline alterations and the filling of open water and coastal wetlands.

Mill debris is just one issue plaguing Muskegon Lake. Historically, almost 800 acres of open water and emergent wetlands were filled with sawmill debris, foundry sand and slag and 74 percent of the shoreline was hardened with wood pilings, sheet metal, and concrete. These impacts resulted in the loss and degradation of shallow water benthos communities, isolation and fragmentation of coastal wetlands, and the associated degradation of water quality and fish and wildlife populations.

Since 1992, community groups, governmental, and nongovernmental organizations have worked collaboratively to remediate contaminated sediments and to restore and protect fish and wildlife species and their habitats. Several large scale remediation and restoration projects (including the Muskegon Lake Restoration project funded by NOAA and the American Recovery Reinvestment Act of 2009) have been conducted at Muskegon Lake with the goal of delisting its AOC status by 2017. But there is much work to be done. There remains a need to focus on the removal of marine debris, in particular mill debris that impacts wetlands and coastal waters.