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Muskegon Lake Habitat Restoration Recovery Act Project Moving Forward Contracts Awarded for Engineering, Design and Initial Construction

Design and construction work is being initiated on a \$30 million project to restore the shoreline along Muskegon Lake on the east shore of Lake Michigan. Spurred by a \$10 million grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Muskegon Lake Habitat Restoration Project will not only improve habitat for fish and wildlife, but also create jobs and provide a boost to the local economy.

The Great Lakes Commission received the grant earlier this year and has partnered with the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), which is responsible for local project management and administration. The project is being coordinated in collaboration with the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership, landowners, and other local partners. The project will restore 10,000 feet of shoreline “hardened” over the past century with broken concrete, foundry slag, sheet metal and other materials. The project will also remove more than 180,000 tons of degraded lake fill to restore fish and wildlife habitat and improve recreational opportunities.

In November WMSRDC awarded a \$321,000 contract to the consulting firm JFNew to provide engineering design and construction management services for six of the ten restoration sites. Staff from JFNew’s Grand Haven office will oversee construction during the largest phase of the project. Construction on the first two restoration sites will begin soon. WMSRDC recently awarded the construction contract for this work to Muskegon-based Jackson-Merkey Contractors. Construction on other sites will commence next spring, with the overall project scheduled for completion by the end of 2010.

“Michigan’s Green Jobs for Blue Waters Initiative recognizes that our environmental health is closely tied to our economic vitality,” said Lieutenant Governor John D. Cherry. “The Muskegon Lake Restoration Project will help to restore the habitat and recreational value while enhancing the community’s quality of life.”

The project will provide an immediate boost to the local economy, generating almost 40,000 labor hours to support 125 jobs, largely in engineering and construction. In the long term the project will rehabilitate fish and wildlife resources and improve recreational opportunities on Muskegon Lake. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, fishing, hunting and wildlife associated recreation generated \$4.2 billion in economic activity in Michigan in 2006.

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Great Lakes Commission

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“Progress on this large project has been much faster than we had anticipated. The community is very excited about reclaiming our lakeshore heritage,” said Sandeep Dey, WMSRDC executive director.

“The Muskegon Lake project will bolster an important component of the local economy. The Great Lakes Commission appreciates NOAA’s support for this important restoration effort and is pleased to help advance the goals of our partners in Muskegon. This is a tremendous “win” for the Great Lakes,” said Tim Eder, executive director of the Great Lakes Commission.

Muskegon Lake was designated an Area of Concern under the U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement due to historic filling of open water and wetlands, and pollution discharges that contaminated the lake bottom. The Muskegon River flows into Muskegon Lake and then through a harbor channel to Lake Michigan. The lake is part of one of the world’s largest assemblages of freshwater sand dunes. It provides habitat for fish and wildlife that reside in Lake Michigan and the Muskegon River. Sawmill, industrial and commercial demolition material has filled 798 acres of shallow water and wetlands in Muskegon Lake and approximately 74 percent of the shoreline has been hardened. This has resulted in the loss, isolation and fragmentation of shallow water and wetland habitats and their protective buffer zones, and the associated degradation of fish and wildlife populations. This loss has prevented public access to the lake’s natural resources, degraded the quality of life for residents and hampered efforts to attract tourism and businesses to the area.

The project will achieve a significant portion of the restoration targets established for Muskegon Lake. This includes 42 percent of shoreline to be softened (10,007 linear feet); 16 percent of the emergent and upland wetlands to be restored (11.6 acres); 82 percent of the open water wetlands to be restored (15.6 acres); and 19 percent of the unnatural fill material to be removed (23.6 acres). A complete factsheet on the project is available online at http://www.glc.org/announce/09/pdf/Fact_Sheet_NOAA_Muskegon_Lake_ARRA_Award_June_09_FINAL.pdf.

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Illinois Gov. Patrick Quinn, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors’ appointees, state legislators and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a “Declaration of Partnership.” The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 127 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and northern Ottawa Counties. WMSRDC is also responsible for the management and administration of the homeland security program for the counties of Clare, Ionia, Isabella, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa.