



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Matt Doss, Great Lakes Commission
Phone: 734-971-9135 (work); 734-474-1985 (cell)
E-mail: mdoss@glc.org
Contact: Sean Day, West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission
Phone: 231-722-7878 ext. 22 (work); 231-557-6787 (cell)

\$10 million stimulus grant awarded to Great Lakes Commission for Muskegon Lake restoration project

Ann Arbor, Mich. – Federal stimulus dollars totaling \$10 million have been awarded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) for a major wetland and wildlife habitat restoration project on Muskegon Lake, Michigan, along the east shoreline of Lake Michigan.

Partnering with the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), the GLC will coordinate the restoration of some 10,000 feet of shoreline “hardened” over several decades by broken concrete, foundry slag, sheet metal and other materials. The project will also remove more than 180,000 tons of degraded lake fill to improve aquatic habitat for fish and other species.

As with all programs receiving stimulus funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the project also includes a job creation commitment: it is projected to generate almost 40,000 labor hours to support 125 jobs, largely in engineering and construction. More than \$20 million will be contributed by local sources through in-kind services, donations of land, and conservation easements.

“This project is a great example of how federal dollars can be leveraged to carry out twin goals of restoring a valuable piece of the Great Lakes ecosystem and bringing jobs to the west Michigan economy,” said Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, chair of the Great Lakes Commission.

Additional economic goals of the project include increased property values and improved public access to the lake to generate more recreation and tourism opportunities.

Michigan Lt. Gov. John Cherry, immediate past chair of the Great Lakes Commission, said: “One of the objectives of the Green Jobs for Blue Waters economic policy we are promoting for the State of Michigan is to create jobs and protect our waterways and ecosystems. The Muskegon Lake project ideally fulfills this dual goal by creating or retaining some 125 jobs while restoring critical coastal wetland habitat.”

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Great Lakes Commission

Gov. Patrick Quinn (IL), Chair; Tim A. Eder, Executive Director
Eisenhower Corporate Park • 2805 S. Industrial Hwy. Suite 100 • Ann Arbor, Michigan • 48104-6791
734-971-9135 • Fax: 734-971-9150 • Web: www.glc.org
Illinois • Indiana • Michigan • Minnesota • New York • Ohio • Ontario • Pennsylvania • Québec • Wisconsin

“Commercial and industrial waste in Muskegon Lake has harmed the fish and wildlife in and around the lake and prevented public access to the lake and, as a result, has caused problems for local homeowners, businesses, and tourism,” said Senator Carl Levin, D-Mich. “This funding to clean up the lake is wonderful news. The money will help to restore the shoreline, habitat and wildlife, and the project will create jobs in the community.”

“I am so pleased that this recovery funding will help rehabilitate the Muskegon Lake shoreline, lake bottom, and wetlands, all of which will help preserve this valuable resource,” said Senator Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich. “By restoring the lake’s ecosystem, we will also create good-paying engineering and construction jobs and promote tourism in our state.”

“The Great Lakes and surrounding bodies of water such as Muskegon Lake contribute greatly to our economy, culture and ability to attract tourism,” said U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Holland. “Such a significant investment in their rehabilitation will result in significant dividends for the future of the region.”

Muskegon Lake is part of the Great Lakes coastal wetlands ecosystem and provides more food and habitat for wildlife than just about any other Great Lakes ecosystem. Due to filling, development and pollution, Great Lakes wetlands are one of two ecosystems listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Midwest Region as “Imperiled Ecosystems.” The restoration project, to be supported by ARRA funds, builds on more than a decade of research, assessments, planning and design work, as well as large-scale remediation and pollution control efforts on Muskegon Lake. The lake is identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as one of 43 Areas of Concern in the Great Lakes for its legacy of toxic contaminants.

“The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission and the city of Muskegon are very excited about receiving this grant,” said WMSRDC Executive Director Sandeep (Sean) Dey. “We hope to accomplish quite a bit of the work that property owners on Muskegon Lake have wanted to do for years. We look forward to working with them, the Great Lakes Commission and NOAA on this project.”

In addition to the environmental benefits, the project will provide a sorely needed economic boost to the Muskegon County economy. 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. The Muskegon Lake project will bolster this important, long-term component of the local economy, in addition to creating jobs.

Grand Valley State University’s Annis Water Resources Institute – located on Muskegon Lake – has estimated the value of the project’s environmental benefits at \$65,000 to \$200,000, with a particular benefit to local tourism. Recreational fishing on Muskegon Lake contributed \$1.2 million to the local economy in 2008 – a figure that is likely to grow as a result of the project.

“Healthy wetlands on west Michigan’s coast are critically important to our tourism economy and to the overall health of the lake,” said Great Lakes Commissioner State Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck. “By restoring wetlands, we are making an investment in a precious water resource, and an equally significant

investment in west Michigan's economic future.”

“I want to thank the many organizations, staff and local volunteers that have worked on restoring Muskegon Lake over these many years,” said State Rep. Doug Bennett, D-Muskegon. “I especially appreciate the efforts of the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission and the Great Lakes Commission, which have pursued these grants and gotten the work done. Without their hard work, this investment in Muskegon Lake would not be possible.”

Design and engineering work for the project is expected to begin in July, with on-the-ground work on some sites beginning in September. The remaining work will be completed in 2010.

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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.