



## \$7.9M in federal funds awarded for Muskegon Lake cleanup

The Associated Press and 24 Hour News 8's Sara Hurwitz

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MUSKEGON, Mich. (AP/WOOD) — Officials say a \$7.9 million project to restore wetlands and fish habitat will be the last major step toward removing Muskegon Lake from a list of the Great Lakes region's most heavily polluted sites.

The lake was designated an “area of concern” because of damage from industrial discharges, shoreline alterations and filling of open water and coastal wetlands. Government agencies and private groups have worked for years to cleanse sediments and restore fish and wildlife populations.

The Great Lakes Commission said Wednesday the federal funds will help reconnect former wetlands with the Muskegon River, restoring fish passages and spawning areas.

Three dikes made of artificial fill such as broken concrete and tree stumps will be removed.

“We will remove more than 2,000 feet of a dike that artificially separates the lake from a natural flood plain wetland habitat,” Kathy Evans, the program manager for the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, explained.

She said the project will open up 53 acres of former celery farms turned marsh to the river.

“It’ll improve water quality. It’ll improve the homes for all kinds of fish and wildlife. We’ll remove invasive plants that shouldn’t be here and put in cool things like bulrushes, pickerel weed and bur-reed and the kinds of native plants that the fish and wildlife really need,” Evans said.

Project organizers say it should boost tourism and improve fishing on Muskegon Lake.

“It’s definitely going to improve stuff,” said Nick Faino, who was fishing on Muksegon Lake Wednesday. “I think there’ll always be fishermen out here. I think they’ll be catching more fish.”

Organizers expect to begin work sometime next year, but haven’t yet worked out an precise timetable.

A similar project is in the works down the road at Bear Creek, where bulldozers dug into the soil Wednesday.

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