



West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

October/November 2018

Sustainable Funding for the Restoration and Protection of Rivers, Lakes, and Streams

The West Michigan Watershed Collaborative (WMWC) was initiated in 2015 with support from the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance. WMWC brought together watershed organizations to develop a sustainable funding strategy for the implementation of the region’s existing watershed plans. These plans were designed to restore and improve Michigan’s valuable water resources – rivers, lakes, wetlands and streams.

WMWC receives staff support from regional planning partners (West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, Macatawa Area Coordinating Council and Grand Valley Metropolitan Council). These partners developed the West Michigan Watersheds Summary, compiling information from the 13-county region’s watershed plans. It identified that approximately \$13.6 million annually is needed to adequately fund implementation of the plans. Although the watershed plans are approved by state and federal water resources agencies and are eligible for grant funding, annual funding requests far exceed the amount of available funds. In addition, local matching contributions are required by most state and federal grant programs. In 2016, at the request of the partners, Public Sector Consultants evaluated four potential, sustainable funding mechanisms. Each were assessed for potential revenue and other considerations. They included a voter-approved millage, flat fee assessment, watershed management districts and pay for success bonds.

From 2016 to 2018, focus groups and community conversations were held to discuss the four potential funding mechanisms and make recommendations. As a result, a Voluntary Watershed Contribution approach was recommended and regional planning and watershed partners agreed that they want to work together. It was agreed that increased collaboration will enhance decision making and improve water quality outcomes. The voluntary watershed contribution with a watershed-based decision-making structure was identified as the most feasible approach to sustainable funding. This approach will require new statewide legislation and it must be flexible enough to meet the needs of the entire state. Some key elements of the enabling legislation include the following: enable counties to collect a voluntary

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SPOTLIGHT PROJECT:

West Michigan Prosperity Alliance Project Voting Meeting

In the August/September issue of the WMSRDC newsletter, the third Call-for-Projects was announced by the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA). As a result, 13 projects from throughout the 13-county region were submitted with a total funding request of more than \$448,000.

On October 10th, the WMPA hosted its third Public Engagement and Grant Award Meeting. Approximately 85 people attended the meeting which was held at Fifth Third Ballpark. The purpose of the meeting was to listen to presentations on the top six projects and vote to prioritize those six projects.

The meeting began with a brief update on the accomplishments of the WMPA by Erin Kuhn, Executive Director of WMSRDC. Some of the accomplishments included: funding 14 projects of regional significance while engaging over 1,000 people in the process, awarding 11 mini grants for the Asset Management Pilot Project, receiving more than \$1 million in grants, and reinvesting over \$800,000 back into Region 4.

During the meeting updates were given regarding current WMPA supported projects. Staff from the Right Place discussed recent improvements to the West Michigan Dashboard and Connect Michigan gave a broadband update on the work the organization is conducting in Region 4 including the new initiation of a Vertical Asset Inventory.

Once the six project presentations were complete, attendees were able to use electronic voting equipment to prioritize the top projects. Below are the final rankings:

1. West Michigan Express Pilot Project: The West Michigan Express initiative is a collaborative effort to link the seven communities along the Chicago Drive corridor with express public transportation options beginning with bus service and leading to commuter rail for the purpose of enhancing economic growth and quality of life in the region.
2. Sustainable Watershed Funding: The purpose of this project is to generate sustainable financial resources to protect the water quality of Lake Michigan so it remains a major economic asset; to increase funding for watershed partners to implement watershed improvement projects; and to implement existing, federally improved watershed management plans.
3. West Michigan Research Network – 2020 Census: The WMRN will assist to educate and inform municipal leaders as well as historically undercounted and vulnerable populations on the importance of the upcoming 2020 Census through marketing and promotional materials.
4. Green Infrastructure Training for West Michigan: The purpose of this project is the implementation of a Green Infrastructure Certification program at Grand Rapids Community College that will focus on construction, inspection and maintenance of green infrastructure.
5. LEAD Trails Soft Implementation: The vision of this project is a trail for every season from the majestic sand dunes and light houses on Little and Big Sable Points to the immersive north woods of the Manistee National Forest. The project will assist in implementing and enhancing trail networks in Lake, Mason, Newaygo, and Oceana counties.
6. Pitch North: This project will provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs from Lake, Newaygo, and Oceana counties to participate in a pitch competition to support rural entrepreneurship and provide feedback, peer review, and validation of business ideas.

Now that these projects have been publicly prioritized, the WMPA committee will meet in November to determine funding levels for the projects. Stay tuned for more WMPA news in upcoming newsletters.

What's Coming Next

Bear Creek Watershed Nutrient Reduction Wetland Construction - The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)- National Park Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (NPS GLRI) grant and the Delta Institute are providing \$310,398 to construct a wetland in the upper reaches of Bear Creek to act as a natural filter for nutrients to improve water quality from the Twin Lake area through Bear Lake. Wetlands reduce nutrient and sediment loads which in turn reduce nuisance vegetation and increase dissolved oxygen for fish populations.

Muskegon Lake Urban Runoff Green Infrastructure Project: Funding is \$499,999 through a U.S. EPA NPS GLRI grant. The constructed wetland is designed to provide stormwater retention and prevent urban runoff discharge directly into Muskegon Lake. The design will establish greenway features along the historic route of Beidler's Creek, helping to connect an urban neighborhood to the lakefront.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has awarded \$752,646 for several strategic projects, including engineering and design at the former Amoco Tank Farm and Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve and Habitat Restoration at Heritage Landing. Habitat projects improve the resilience of the shoreline to wind and water, as well as fish and wildlife habitat in the nearshore waters and along the shoreline. When complete, these projects will add to efforts at delisting Muskegon Lake as an Area of Concern (AOC).

Restoration Projects Improve Water Resources & Yield Community Economic Benefits

Restoration was completed on three large-scale fish and wildlife habitat restoration projects in September 2018, thanks to support from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the NOAA/Great Lakes Commission Regional Partnership.

Over the past four years, scientific monitoring, engineering, design and construction were carried out. The project re-connected rivers with restored wetland floodplains, improved fish passage and water quality, restored 65 acres of wetland, and softened 7,820 feet of shoreline at three Muskegon Lake watershed locations: a former celery farm on Bear Creek and the mouth of Bear Lake; Muskegon River at Veterans Memorial Park, and the nearshore waters of Muskegon Lake's south side.

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Annis Water Resources Institute performed pre-restoration and post-restoration ecological monitoring for each project. Monitoring results show significant improvements in water quality, native fish populations, and aquatic

habitat. The projects also resulted in an increase in native plant biodiversity, improved aesthetics, and a reduction in the spread of non-native invasive plants.

Project partners included the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership, Muskegon County Veterans Advisory Council, Northside Lions, County of Muskegon, City of Muskegon, City of North Muskegon, private landowners, North Muskegon Public Schools, and many others.

A total of \$14 million dollars in Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant funds supported the monitoring, engineering and construction of the projects. A 2013 GVSU socio-economic study of a previous \$10 million dollar Muskegon Lake shoreline restoration project, showed a 7-to-1 return on the investment in economic benefits for the Muskegon area. A 2018 study by the University of Michigan shows an average of \$3.65 in community economic benefits for every dollar spent on the cleanup of contaminated sediments and the restoration of habitat across the Great Lakes Region.

Economic Development Services

WMSRDC has been involved in economic development since its debut in 1970. In fact, a majority of industrial parks within the region were developed with either direct or indirect assistance from WMSRDC, through the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

To this day, WMSRDC maintains a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which is overseen by a CEDS Strategy Committee and allows local governments within the region to access assistance from the EDA. The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development, and is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of a region.

Since 1966, EDA has made over 40 investments in the WMSRDC region, including those in industrial park and infrastructure improvements, technology centers, technical assistance, and loans. Development of the CEDS is led by WMSRDC, overseen by the CEDS Committee, and approved by the WMSRDC Board.

In addition, WMSRDC is available to provide technical assistance to local governments, both big and small. Assistance may range from federal/state liaison, to financial packaging, to grant application. Services include review and evaluation of proposed economic development projects, identifying potential federal/state funding resources, and technical assistance to communities to access those resources and implement projects.

West Michigan Regional Dashboard

A newly designed West Michigan Regional Dashboard was released in September 2018. The dashboard is an online tool that tracks the region's progress on critical economic, environmental, and social indicators. The dashboard was funded and supported by the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance through a collaboration of The Right Place and nine other regional organizations. The revised version offers expanded indicators and updated data.

The goal of the dashboard is to inform, educate, and focus regional strategies to increase West Michigan's overall health and prosperity. The original dashboard, launched in February 2017, created a common set of measurements by which to measure West Michigan's growth and prosperity. The dashboard has since received nearly 6,000 visitors from 34 countries around the world.

The updated dashboard features a more user-friendly design and the latest available data. New indicators have been added to the dashboard, and several have been removed due to data quality issues. There are now a total of 37 indicators: 17 economic, 14 social, and six environmental. The regional dashboard can be accessed online at www.wmdashboard.org.



Air Quality Transportation Projects

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has completed the FY2020-2023 Congestion Mitigation, and Air Quality (CMAQ) call for projects. The call went out in September and the final list was approved by the Policy Committee at its October meeting. CMAQ is a category of funding designated to reduce vehicle emissions in areas where air quality emissions are found to be higher than the standard that is set by the EPA.

This funding can be used for projects that will help improve air quality by reducing levels of emissions in the MPO area which includes all of Muskegon County and Northern Ottawa County. Projects in this funding category include non-motorized facilities, intersection improvements, signals, mass transit related projects, and marketing & outreach projects. Applicants are required to complete emission calculation forms that show the reduction of emissions based on the implementation of the particular project.

For the four year call, 25 local projects were selected totaling \$3,679,104 in federal funding. Projects in this call include several bus purchases, traffic signal upgrade and synchronization, intersection improvements, a new transit facility, and several outreach programs. The list of projects will be reviewed at the state and federal levels before it is officially approved and funding obligated.

Environmental Justice Training

WMSRDC staff attended a one day Environmental Justice workshop on September 25, 2018 in Lansing.

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

The interactive workshop included presentations from a wide range of perspectives with the main goal to achieve a better understanding and to learn best practices to implement environmental justice into all transportation program related projects and decisions.

Trails Panel

Brian Mulnix, Transportation Program Manager, served as a participant on a panel of regional leaders and transportation experts at the annual meeting of the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition. The meeting was held at the Fredrick Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park on September 27, 2018.

Brian represented the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and was joined by representatives from Ottawa County Planning, Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation, the Kent County Health Department, and a local business owner from Cedar Springs Brewing Company in Kent County. The panel provided an interesting perspective on the regional trail network in West Michigan from trail users to project planners, and how these different entities value and participate in enhancing the network.

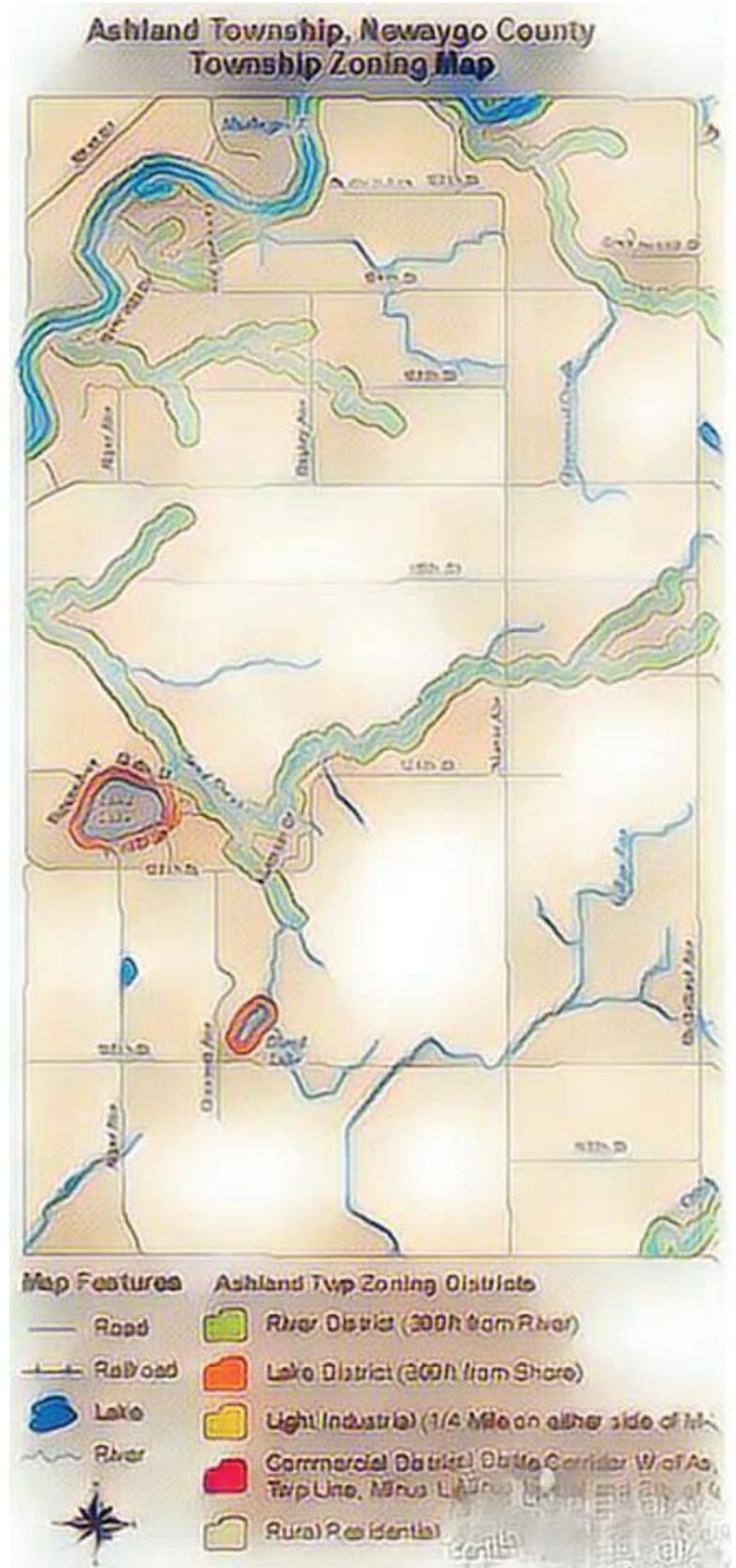
GIS Mapping Services Provided by WMSRDC

How's your local government's map data? Does your local government need help with special projects, parcel data, and/or spatial data creation?

WMSRDC can help.

Jamie Way, WMSRDC's Geographic Information System (GIS) Technician, has worked on several projects throughout the five county region and can work with your local government. Jamie has developed maps for local jurisdictions regarding cemetery mapping, local zoning and land use, transportation, central dispatch, parks, fire and rescue, and environmental projects. While GIS mapping is regularly used in recreation, master, and hazard mitigation plans, it can also be used to collect tabular data, with a spatial component, and convert it into mapping data that can be used for analysis, signage, presentations, and online maps.

Jamie has mapped 911 call and response times to better understand the need for expanded or re-evaluated 911 services. Bridge conditions and safety ratings for use by fire and rescue authorities and road commissions have been mapped. Maps have also been developed to accommodate data useful for large trucking operations. WMSRDC has also mapped wildfire occurrences and displayed them by cause, size and date. For help with your next project, contact Jamie Way at 231-722-7878 ext 15.



Redevelopment Ready Communities

Under a recent agreement with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), WMSRDC is eligible to provide technical assistance to local communities that are in the process of pursuing Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) certification.

The RRC program, offered by the MEDC, is available to communities across the state. It is a voluntary, no-cost certification program designed to promote effective redevelopment strategies through a set of best practices.

The program measures and then certifies communities that integrate transparency, predictability and efficiency into their daily development practices. The RRC certification is a formal recognition that your community has a vision for the future—and the fundamental practices in place to get there.

Information about the RRC program is available at www.miplace.org/communities/rrc/. Communities that are interested in the RRC program are encouraged to contact their local MEDC Community Assistance Team member.

For Lake, Mason, Newaygo and Oceana counties, contact Sue DeVries at 616-430-0280, or by email at devriess1@michigan.org. For Muskegon County, please contact Lindsay Viviano at 517-249-0408, or vivianol1@michigan.org.

GIS Mapping and Local Planning

In September, WMSRDC staff met with Blue Lake Township's Planning Commission to discuss their future land use map. A map of the current land use was used to look at residential, commercial and recreational areas as a guide to what the future zoning layout would look like. The majority of the properties in Blue Lake Township are either private residential or recreational areas, such as Camp Pendalouan, Owasippe Scout Reservation, and Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp just to name a few.

While securing these lands in their current use, the group tried to look ahead to future expansion and needs of the community. A few small, but growing, commercial areas were also designated as potential future land use. The notes from this meeting were entered into WMSRDC's GIS system and a new future land use map was drafted for Blue Lake's ongoing master plan update.

WMSRDC staff is also making updates to the recreation map for Golden Township in Oceana County. This map shows several parks, natural areas and a new turtle sanctuary located within the township. Golden Township will use this map as a reference as they update their five year recreation plan.

Homeland Security Update

WMSRDC staff, in coordination with the Region 6 County Emergency Managers, have completed this year's physical inventory of equipment purchased through the Homeland Security Planning Grants. Michigan State Police - Emergency Management & Homeland Security Division (MSP-EMHSD) and the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) require the physical inventory to be conducted every other year. This includes WMSRDC staff traveling to each of the 13 counties within Region 6 to conduct the inventory. Staff is wrapping up the final inventory report which is due to MSP-EMHSD by the end October 2018.

MSP-EMHSD recently announced the FY18 Homeland Security Planning Grant awards. The Region 6 grant award totals \$1,236,712 with a grant performance period running from October 1, 2018 through May 31, 2021.



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watershed contribution through property tax bills; counties work with existing regional planning organizations to pass through contributions for watershed improvements; regional planning bodies establish watershed advisory councils to guide funding allocations; regional planning bodies enter into cooperative agreements with each other to enhance coordination and fill capacity where needed; regional planning bodies, in coordination with member counties, tailor the initiative to suit their regional needs.

If you are interested in becoming involved, please contact Kathy Evans at WMSRDC, kevans@wmsrdc.org or call 231 722-7878 x 17.

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 120 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana 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. WMSRDC is also the planning agency for the metropolitan transportation planning (MPO) program for Muskegon and Northern Ottawa Counties.

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