

WMSRDC Receives EDA CARES Act Non-Competitive Grant

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, as an EDA designated Economic Development District (EDD), recently received \$400,000 as part of the \$1.5 billion allocated to EDA through the CARES Act. This is a match-free, non-competitive planning grant specifically designated to EDDs to “prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus” or respond to “economic injury as a result of coronavirus.”

These funds will be utilized over the next two years to conduct a variety of regional activities that will help the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana respond to and recover from this global pandemic. Tasks include the following items:

Economic Development Disaster Recovery and Resiliency Plan: WMSRDC staff will conduct short-term and long-term economic development planning and coordination to develop an economic development disaster recovery and resiliency plan consistent with the approved CEDS maintained by the Commission. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan will focus on current needs and capacities, recovery and resiliency, regional strengths and opportunities, and economic recovery strategies. The plan will have a strong component of GIS mapping including economic assets, critical infrastructure, pandemic impact areas, and disaster vulnerabilities. Staff will work closely with the CEDS Strategy Committee, local government leaders, and county economic development organizations to develop the plan.

Technical Assistance: WMSRDC staff will provide technical assistance and capacity building for local stakeholders impacted by coronavirus through the following tasks:

- **Broadband Coordination and Facilitation** – The lack of broadband availability within the WMSRDC region has been a documented issue and a regional priority for many years. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced this issue to the forefront, highlighting the necessity of broadband availability in every corner of the region. WMSRDC staff will coordinate and facilitate broadband discussions within the region to bring together leaders from a variety of sectors including private business, economic development, local government, education (K-12 and higher education), health care, and broadband providers. Discussions will focus on the current broadband infrastructure and capacity, sector-specific needs, future needs, and implementation strategies. Communities within the region face varying degrees of broadband needs and hurdles. Therefore, WMSRDC staff will coordinate and facilitate county-level focus groups to discuss local broadband issues. In addition, a regional committee will be organized to address collective regional needs and strategies for the future.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

WMSRDC Selected for NOAA Great Lakes Regional Partnership



WMSRDC, along with the region's watershed partners, developed a set of priority fish passage and habitat restoration projects for a competitive, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Great Lakes Regional Partnership grant proposal, titled "Lake Michigan Coastal Rivers and Wetlands." The project proposes to restore 33.8 miles of fish passage, 5.64 miles of riparian corridor, 108.6 acres of coastal wetlands and 137.4 acres of wetland habitat in West Michigan. NOAA's Fisheries and Restoration Center partners with organizations on multi-year projects to restore shoreline habitat, fish passage, and wetlands. These projects also restore coastal resiliency in degraded Great Lakes ecosystems.

The WMSRDC Regional Partnership proposal is one of two new partnerships across the entire Great Lakes selected in 2020. The award covers a three year period for a total amount of \$14,123,471 in federal funds. Annual funding amounts are based on availability of funds from Congress through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and continued relevance to NOAA program objectives. The funding period for this award is October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021 and may be extended through September 30, 2023. To kick off the WMSRDC Regional Partnership during year one, engineering and design work will be performed for Little Cedar Creek, a high-quality cold water tributary to the Muskegon River (\$187,207). See article below.

Since 2010, NOAA has restored more than 4,500 acres of habitat for fish and wildlife and opened up more than 500 miles of rivers and streams to fish migration in the Great Lakes. Together, NOAA, WMSRDC and our regional watershed partners will bring years of restoration experience and planning to exciting new restoration projects. These projects will provide multiple benefits to the environment and communities by supporting valuable fisheries and coastal resources; improving the quality of our water by restoring coastal wetlands; providing recreational opportunities for public use and enjoyment; and increasing the resilience of Great Lakes communities.

Under the Regional Partnership, WMSRDC will continue to partner with NOAA and the West Michigan Watershed Partners (WMWP) to plan and prioritize projects to reconnect rivers to their floodplains, and restore and enhance river, stream, and wetland habitats in the eastern Lake Michigan watershed. The WMWP meets quarterly to share information on projects and priorities for water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. The WMWP includes watershed representatives from the Pere Marquette River, White River, Muskegon River, Little Flower Creek, Mona Lake, Muskegon Lake and other conservation groups and agencies.

Little Cedar Creek Project

When fish can't reach their habitat, they can't reproduce and maintain or grow their populations. Fish passage is important for the protection and restoration of migrating fish, and for improving in-stream, floodplain, and marsh conditions. This helps recover threatened and endangered migratory fish and the sustainability of economically important commercial and recreational fisheries. Common types of barriers to fish migration are dams and culverts. Working in partnership with the road commissions in Oceana, Newaygo and Muskegon counties, WMSRDC identified priority fish passage barriers in several West Michigan river systems. Little Cedar Creek is one such waterway that has crossings causing impacts. It is a sub-watershed tributary to Cedar Creek, a high quality trout stream. This project will produce engineered designs to restore 3.5 miles of fish passage, restore 500 ft. of in-stream fish habitat, and reconnect 12 acres of wetland habitat. WMSRDC will coordinate the project with an advisory committee comprised of NOAA technical monitors; Muskegon County Road Commission, adjacent private landowners, and the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership. WMSRDC will also carry out public outreach and education about the project and its benefits. Grand Valley State University Annis Water Research Institute will provide pre / post monitoring. The \$187,000 project is funded through the Lake Michigan Coastal Rivers and Wetlands, a new NOAA/WMSRDC Regional Partnership for Great Lakes Habitat Restoration.



Asset Management Update

Each year, WMSRDC staff, along with an employee from both the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the appropriate county road commission, collect data for fifty percent of the federal aid roads within the WMSRDC region consisting of the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. These ratings are the first step in a planning process known as Asset Management. Asset Management is based on an inventory of each local road network within each municipality and then ascertaining the correct fix or maintenance based on the road rating.

Due to restrictions as a result of COVID-19, federal aid road data collection was canceled for FY2020. MDOT made the decision on August 4, 2020 that MDOT cannot participate in data collection teams through the end of this year. A MDOT member is necessary, per Transportation Asset Management Council (TAMC) policy, for federal aid rating teams. In light of this development, the TAMC voted to allow regional planning agencies and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), like WMSRDC, to carry over the FY2020 funding into FY2021. With this approval, FY2020 funds can be used for reimbursement of expenses related to collecting federal aid road ratings until June 30, 2021. Instead of the regular fifty percent data collection on federal aid roads, WMSRDC will coordinate with agencies to ensure that one hundred percent of the data is collected in FY2021.

Unified Work Program Approved by MPO Committees

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have approved the WestPlan FY2021 Unified Work Program (UWP), which was approved by the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) committees at their April meetings. The UWP outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the designated fiscal year. Budget estimates for the UWP are provided by MDOT, and are allocated to several different program areas for the MPO.

The UWP is a federally required document, which is reviewed and approved by the MPO committees on an annual basis. Some of the key roles for the MPO that are outlined in the UWP are: the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Air Quality Planning, Performance Measure Planning, Public Involvement, Technical Assistance, and facilitating Public Meeting involvement.

West Michigan Regional Transit Systems Governance and Organizational Transition Study

The Muskegon County Board of Commissioners and Harbor Transit Multi-Modal Transit System (Harbor Transit) Board in northern Ottawa County asked WMSRDC for assistance to conduct a planning, collaboration, and consensus-building effort to determine if public transportation services in the Muskegon Urbanized Area and throughout Muskegon County, as well as the Harbor Transit service area in northern Ottawa County, can be better delivered through a different organizational or governance structure than what is currently operated in the two areas. As a result, WMSRDC applied for and has been awarded a Service Development and New Technology (SDNT) grant totaling \$150,000.

The project will be led by WMSRDC, the WestPlan MPO, and will focus on analyzing existing governance structures, identifying and exploring available models for use in the region, facilitation of local and regional discussions, consensus-building, collaboration, and development of a recommended solution, including the development of draft agreements for parties to consider.

WMSRDC staff will be integrally involved in convening partners to the discussion and work closely with the Muskegon Area Transit System (MATS) and Harbor Transit throughout the project.



CEDS Strategy Committee Update

The CEDS Strategy Committee typically convenes every few months to discuss the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document, discuss the latest economic news and events throughout the region, and network with peers. Unfortunately, the first scheduled meeting of 2020 was canceled due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in March. On July 17, 2020, WMSRDC hosted the first virtual CEDS Strategy Committee meeting. Topics of discussion revolved around the economic circumstances surrounding the pandemic, including opportunities and initiatives related to the federal CARES Act.

Although virtual meetings are certain to be a viable option for conducting business well into the future, we eagerly anticipate the eventual return to in-person meetings of the CEDS Strategy Committee. In the meantime, the next CEDS meeting will be scheduled for October and will likely be held virtually. Details of the event will be posted on WMSRDC.org as details are finalized.

Economic Technical Assistance Update

The global pandemic has disrupted many aspects of daily life. One positive disruption has been the emergence of federal assistance opportunities made available through the CARES Act. Since March, WMSRDC economic development staff has been busier than usual, working with communities and economic development partners in every county of the region in an attempt to capitalize on this opportunity. WMSRDC has facilitated connections with EDA staff to identify potential projects and refine them into competitive applications for EDA assistance. As of August, there had been one application from the region already submitted for the EDA/CARES Act program, with as many as five other projects under development.

The aforementioned application is the result of a unique partnership between the GVSU Muskegon Innovation Hub and WMSRDC to commission a study that would analyze various aspects of the entrepreneurial environment in the West Michigan lakeshore region. If funded, this study is expected to yield valuable information that will help the Muskegon Innovation Hub and other entrepreneurial support organizations better serve the needs of entrepreneurs and small start-up businesses. This study will be timely, considering that

innovation and entrepreneurship typically increase in the wake of an economic disruption.

A major component of the WMSRDC Economic Development program is to provide local communities and EDA-eligible applicants with technical assistance by providing guidance and support throughout all phases of the project development and application process. As the region's designated Economic Development District, WMSRDC should be an interested party's first call when considering an EDA program.



If interested, please contact WMSRDC, your local link to federal economic development programs!



Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve Update

Located on the northeast shore of Muskegon Lake along the Muskegon River, the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve is a natural resource asset for the Muskegon area and the region. Owned by the Muskegon Environmental Research and Education Society, it is an outdoor research and educational facility and a safe harbor for many fish and wildlife species. This private property is visited by thousands every year with free access to the public. Through the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA)/Great Lakes Commission Regional Partnership, WMSRDC was awarded funding from a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant to restore fish and wildlife habitat on the preserve.

The project started in 2019 with an engineering and design phase, invasive species removal, and unfortunately, record high water levels in Lake Michigan, Muskegon Lake, and the Muskegon River. Water levels have remained high for much of this year as well.

WMSRDC selected GEI and Taplin Enterprises for engineering and construction assistance. Large amounts of non-native, invasive plants have been removed, permits were obtained and restoration is now underway. Seven acres of habitat will be restored, advancing the delisting of Muskegon Lake as a Great Lakes Area of Concern. The project will install wetland plants, 1,975 native trees and 3,150 native shrubs. Volunteers will be sought and trained to maintain the restored resources into the future. The project will be complete in 2021.

Amoco Project Update

The Amoco fish and wildlife habitat restoration project is underway and scheduled for completion in 2021. The \$3.1 million project kicked off in August with marine habitat restoration offshore from the former Amoco Petroleum Storage Facility where Ruddiman Creek enters Muskegon Lake. Historically, the site was home to the Standard Oil Dock.

The habitat restoration project will focus on a relatively clean, well-characterized, 10-acre area located on the shoreline east of the mouth of Ruddiman Creek. The project will remove a portion of a historic, failing concrete wall that has isolated nearby wetlands, disconnecting them from Muskegon Lake and the shoreline. The project will remove 4,250 tons of unnatural fill, remove a 1,446-foot-long, 5-foot-tall concrete wall, restore 10.3 acres of wetlands and 325 linear feet of shoreline. A stretch of the Lakeshore Trail bike path will be moved landward to a restored shoreline that will be more resilient to high lake levels. Ramboll was competitively selected for engineering, design and construction oversight. Job Site Services was awarded the contract for restoration implementation. Great Lakes Dock & Materials is performing marine habitat restoration. The property is owned by the City of Muskegon. The project received funding through the NOAA/Great Lakes Commission Regional Partnership and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Lower Muskegon River Habitat Restoration Update

Habitat restoration activities began at the Lower Muskegon River site in June 2020 and is scheduled for completion in 2021. The project site is a former 53-acre celery farm that had been separated from the Muskegon River by a berm and pump system. Once restoration is complete, the berm will be removed and the restored wetlands will be reconnected with the Muskegon River. The \$3.13 million project will restore 49.1 acres of emergent wetland, soften 2,825 feet of shoreline and remove approximately 38,722 metric tons of fill.

WMSRDC competitively selected GEI for engineering, design and construction oversight. Jackson Merkey Contractors was awarded the competitive contract for restoration implementation. The project received funding through the NOAA/Great Lakes Commission Regional Partnership and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



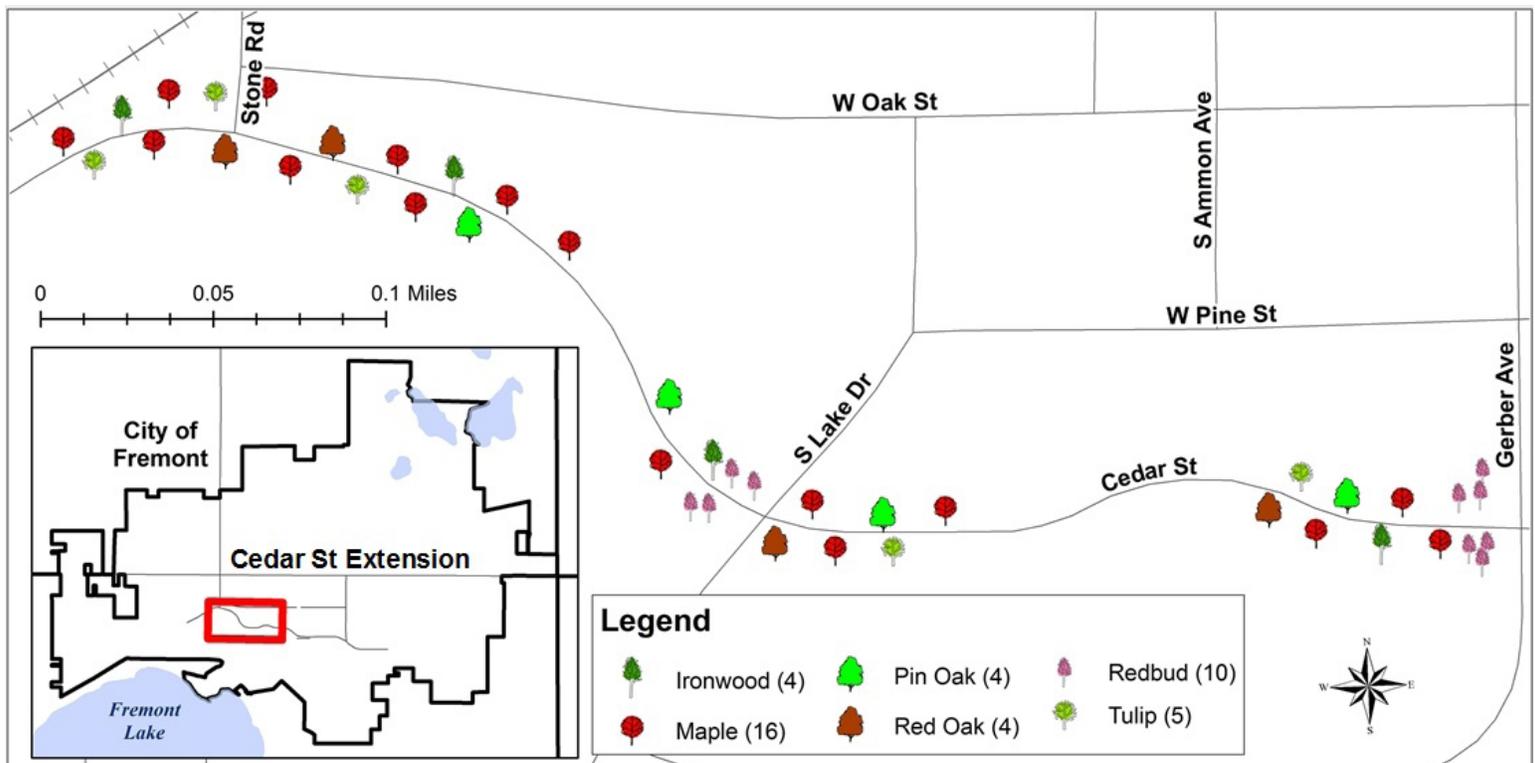
Planting Trees for a Better Environment

WMSRDC is moving forward with a United States Forest Service (USFS) grant which will fund the planting of two hundred native trees. These trees will help to reduce the harmful effects of non-point source pollution by capturing surface water runoff and nutrients from flowing into waterways within the Muskegon River watershed. Utilizing green infrastructure techniques and the planting of trees helps to minimize stormwater runoff as trees draw up, store, and filter gallons of water that would otherwise flow directly into sensitive waterways and groundwater.

One focus area for this grant is the City of Fremont where 44 trees will be added along the newly completed Cedar Street extension. See map below. This project complements the recent extension of Cedar Street into the Fremont Industrial Park. The street extension was funded by a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. As the EDA designated Economic Development District, WMSRDC works closely with EDA and local governments to bring grant dollars into the region for eligible economic development projects. So this tree planting project on the Cedar Street extension marries several program areas of WMSRDC including environmental, economic development, and GIS planning services.

Other focus areas for this grant are the City of Roosevelt Park, the City of Muskegon, and Cedar Creek and Dalton townships. This grant is provided by the USFS and is in partnership with the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly.

Planned Tree Plantings in the Cedar Street Extension in the City of Fremont, Newaygo County



Ludington Area Shoreline Study Moving Forward

Six months ago, it was expected an article such as this would be written to announce the triumphant completion of the Shoreline Land Use and Resiliency Plan (SLURP) for the Port of Ludington. Alas, the COVID-19 pandemic came about in March, and the SLURP planning process briefly grinded to a halt. So, rather than announcing a completed project, this article is to defiantly signal that this study is alive and well...just a bit delayed.

Prior to the pandemic, WMSRDC had successfully gathered two stakeholder meetings to discuss the current events relating to Ludington-area shorelines, identify community assets and hazards within the study area, and start to envision the future character of the Port of Ludington.

During the pandemic, WMSRDC staff gathered pertinent research and developed a suite of maps for the study. Now it's time to re-engage the stakeholders, engage the public, and develop a document that will include a community-supported vision for the future land use surrounding Pere Marquette Lake, as well as resources and information to facilitate shoreline recovery and resilience. The SLURP is expected to be completed in fall of this year which, given the circumstances, is better late than never!

Clean Air

This summer, WMSRDC remained a very active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC). The WMCAC is a partnership of businesses, academic institutions, government agencies, industry, and non-profit organizations in Muskegon, Ottawa, Kent, and Kalamazoo counties working together to achieve cleaner air through the educations and promotion of voluntary emission reduction activities.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person events could not take place, but staff pivoted and successfully launched enhanced radio, television, and social media campaigns to fill in some of the gaps to replace in-person events. Staff looks forward to next year when in-person events can hopefully take place again. Do your share for cleaner air!

FY 21 Work Program & Budget

The WMSRDC Board is expected to pass the FY 21 Work Program and Budget totaling \$6,833,865 at their regular meeting scheduled for September 21, 2020.

WMSRDC COVID-19 Update

The WMSRDC offices remain closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff will continue to work remotely to conduct WMSRDC business through the fall months.



- **General Technical Assistance** – The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been overwhelming to the west Michigan region. However, long term implications of the pandemic have yet to be determined as events continue to unfold. WMSRDC staff will work closely with the CEDS Committee, regional economic development leaders, and local governments to provide technical assistance throughout the region where needs and unknown impacts arise.

Organization Capacity Support for Coronavirus Response: Due to the closure of the WMSRDC offices as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff is working remotely. WMSRDC will utilize a portion of the grant to upgrade current technology utilized by the economic development staff to better serve the region while working remotely from home or in the field. WMSRDC staff also plan to utilize and increase capacity of GIS mapping and data analysis when completing the tasks outlined in the above.

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 the planning agency for the metropolitan transportation planning (MPO) program for Muskegon and northern Ottawa counties.

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Erin Kuhn, Executive Director

WMSRDC
316 Morris Ave. Suite 340 Muskegon, MI 49440
(231) 722-7878 wmsrdc.org

