



It's Award Season

NADO Award for Veterans Memorial Park

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission recently received a 2022 National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award. The honor was in the category of Environment and Sustainability for past and ongoing work at Veterans Memorial Park located in Muskegon County. The Impact Award program honors NADO members for their creative approaches to advancing regional economic development, improving quality of life, and the significant impacts on their regions as well as demonstrating the diversity of services and program delivery provided by regional development organizations across the country. WMSRDC was the only organization to receive a NADO Impact Award in the state of Michigan. The 2022 class of awardees was recognized at the NADO's Annual Training Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania held in October. WMSRDC is honored to have received this prestigious award.

In 2017, WMSRDC secured more than \$2.7 million in Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds through a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Regional Partnership to restore the environmental integrity of Veterans Memorial Park. Restoration efforts included the removal of contaminated soils, modification of the water control structure, shoreline softening,

Asset Management Award

WMSRDC Executive Director, Erin Kuhn, recently traveled to the Institute of Asset Management (IAM) North American Conference in Denver, CO to give a presentation on the work of the Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC). While there, MIC received the IAM Project Achievement Award for its efforts including the Asset Management Readiness Scale, Asset Management Champion Program, and the MIC Project Portal. Erin is a governor appointee and voting member of the Michigan Infrastructure Council and serves on several of the Council's sub-committees including the Asset Management Self-Assessment Data Committee and chairs the Asset Management Champion Program Committee.

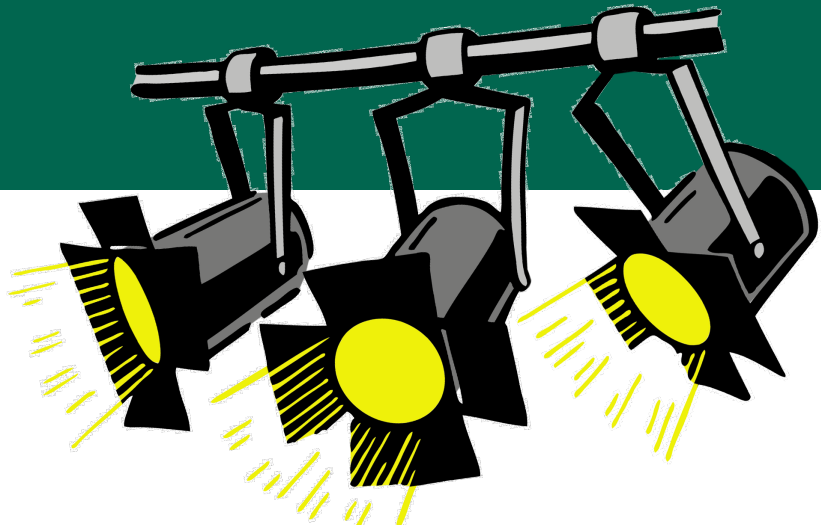
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Above left: Veterans Memorial Park after restoration efforts. Above right: Erin Kuhn, and others, accepted the Institute of Asset Management North American Conference's Project Achievement Award for the work accomplished by the Michigan Infrastructure Council including the Asset Management Champion Program.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

WMSRDC Board Update



The WMSRDC Board unanimously approved the fiscal year 2023 Work Program and Budget at its regularly scheduled meeting on September 19, 2022. The work program identifies projects and work elements for the upcoming fiscal year in each of the Commission's programs including Transportation: MPO, Regional, and Rural; Economic Development; Environmental; Local Government Services; Geographic Information Systems (GIS); and Information & Communications. Below is a list of some of the major work elements to be undertaken by the Commission in the upcoming fiscal year:

- Ongoing management of the MPO program and activities while navigating the additional responsibilities included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
- Completion of the Regional Transit Study
- Update of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Document
- Renewal of the Commission 3-year District Planning Grant
- Engineering and construction of projects under the current NOAA Regional Partnership including Little Cedar Creek, Stony Creek/Marshville Dam, and White River
- Completion of the NOAA/GLC Regional Partnership including projects at AMOCO, MERES, Lower Muskegon River, and Boys & Girls Club
- Local Government Services projects including Hazard Mitigation Plans for Lake, Mason, and Oceana Counties; Newaygo County Recreation Plan, and Oceana County Master Plan & Recreation Plan
- Cemetery Mapping projects for Free Soil Township and Riverton Township in Mason County as well as Mona View Cemetery in the City of Muskegon Heights
- Oceana County Drain District Mapping

The WMSRDC Board also unanimously approved an update to the Commission's by-laws. During the summer, administrative leadership with assistance from the WMSRDC officers, conducted a complete overhaul of the agency by-laws to better position the Commission for the future.

WMSRDC has a full schedule for fiscal year 2023. Staff is looking forward to working on these projects and serving the needs of the communities within the West Michigan region.

	FY22 BUDGET	%
Revenue		
Federal	3,285,026	85.98%
State	248,298	6.50%
Local	287,257	7.52%
Total Revenue	3,821,026	100%



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Asset Management Update

Transportation staff recently completed the process of collecting data on Federal Aid eligible roads for the annual Asset Management program. Asset management is a planning tool for public officials, planners, engineers, and others. Asset Management is based on an inventory of the Federal Aid eligible road network within the region. It provides data that will allow transportation officials to monitor, plan, and strategically improve the road network.

Each year, WMSRDC staff, along with a MDOT and a county road commission employee, collects this data for at least half of all the federal aid roads within Region 14. The data collection effort required the collection of three items: road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. The road rating assessment rates the road surface condition for a given segment on a scale of 1-10.

In addition to rating the Federal Aid roads, WMSRDC staff will also rate a municipality's local roads on occasion. During 2022, staff rated local roads for the cities of Whitehall, Montague, Grand Haven, and Roosevelt Park. Staff is in the process of rating the Newaygo County Road Commission's local roads.

Four staff members attended the fall Asset Management Conference held in Traverse City on September 28. Highlights included presentations on asset management best practices as well as discussions on using asset management for

TIP Approval and Update

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has approved the FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WestPlan). With this approval, federal and state agencies have concurred that the plan is in compliance with requirements outlined in federal transportation legislation. Throughout the process of developing the plan, commission staff worked closely with the WestPlan Technical and Policy committees, as well as state and federal partners. The WestPlan Technical and Policy committees approved the plan at their meetings in June of 2022.

The TIP is a short range planning document that covers a four-year span of project programming for the WestPlan area. The TIP includes federally funded transportation projects that will be completed in Muskegon County and Northern Ottawa County. Projects identified in the TIP are primarily road construction type projects, which are generally either reconstruction or resurface projects. There are also transit and marketing projects, as well as non-motorized and Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) projects that include signal projects, bus purchases, and trail projects. With this approval, the WestPlan TIP, along with thirteen other TIPs from MPOs will be added to the MDOT State Transportation Improvement Program. The TIP document is available on the WMSRDC website at wmsrdc.org.

WMSRDC Retirement Announcement

Air Quality Program Manager, Amy Haack, is retiring from WMSRDC in January 2023 after over 28 years of service. Amy is a longtime partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC) of which she regularly represents during interviews about Clean Air Action with local radio and television media. Over the years, Amy has overseen many technical rule changes in federal air quality regulations and has led numerous outreach and communications strategies for clean air taking the program from being unknown in its inception to currently boasting an over ninety percent awareness rate for West Michigan residents. WMSRDC wishes a happy and healthy retirement to Amy.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Broadband Update

WMSRDC continues looking for opportunities to aid local broadband improvement efforts within the region. Staff provided support for a broadband town hall meeting for Oceana County that took place on October 4. The event was hosted by The Right Place and Oceana County Economic Alliance at the MSU AgBioResearch Center in Hart.

Staff also attended a broadband panel at Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce in downtown Muskegon on October 27, which was initiated by U.S. Senator Gary Peters to bring information to local communities to keep moving connectivity forward.

WMSRDC has also put effort into organizing a regional broadband support group for local governments. The purpose is to provide a forum for sharing lessons learned at local levels to help advance the availability and use of high-speed internet throughout the region. The inaugural meeting, to be held on November 10, will feature an open discussion and networking. Subsequent meetings may involve presentations from broadband funding experts, and a potential meet-and-greet with internet service providers. WMSRDC will also use delegates to the support group as local points of contact when there is broadband-related information to be shared.

Planning Grant

In October, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) invited WMSRDC to renew its three-year partnership planning grant which is used to support regional economic development efforts and the WMSRDC economic development program. The planning grant provides WMSRDC with resources to maintain a comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) and provide technical assistance to local units of government. Maintaining a CEDS is required as an Economic Development District, a designation which enables local units of government, and other eligible entities within the region, to apply for assistance from EDA.

EDA works directly with local economic development officials to make grant investments that are well-defined, timely, and linked to a long-term, sustainable economic development strategy. EDA grants are designed to leverage existing regional assets to support the implementation of economic development strategies that advance new ideas and creative approaches to achieve economic prosperity particularly in distressed communities.

The partnership planning grant will support WMSRDC's economic development planning and technical assistance activities from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2025.

Economic Development District Evaluation

WMSRDC is scheduled to participate in an Economic Development District (EDD) evaluation in November 2022. WMSRDC maintains an EDD designation from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). The WMSRDC district includes Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties.

The EDA must evaluate each district organization at least once every three years, and the evaluation must include the participation of at least one peer reviewer. Performance evaluations are not punitive actions, but rather a means of strengthening the program. These evaluations are tools for outreach, program enhancement and communication with the District Organizations. Evaluations also are designed to identify challenges in the EDD program and aid the Chicago Regional Office in better allocating technical assistance and support to its District Organizations.



Building the Future

This past year has seen the culmination of a couple of projects on and around Muskegon Lake. These are important components of our local natural resources and their completion has provided Muskegon with a more stable and rich environment. These projects include the AMOCO bike path site along the south shore of Muskegon Lake and the 53 acre lower Muskegon River location just upstream of the causeway and Veterans Memorial Park.

WMSRDC is fortunate to have had the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) and NOAA recognize the need for and the opportunity to provide the means to restore these important local resource locations for the benefit of West Michigan communities to restore the Muskegon Lake Area of Concern (AOC) under the NOAA/GLC Great Lakes Regional Partnership and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

The bike path project provided an opportunity to restore the pathway impacted by high water when Muskegon Lake was at its highest in recent memory. The project removed a large portion of concrete wall that separated the lake from the original shoreline and moved the existing bike path shoreward improving the bike path and re-establishing lake bottom habitat as well as the lakeshore in that area.

The other project dealt with the restoration of agricultural lands on the north shore of the Muskegon River near its mouth on Muskegon Lake. The project known as LMR (Lower Muskegon River) involved restoring a 53 acre wetland to its natural functions. This involved creating a channel through the restored wetland that could remake the connection with the Muskegon River and revegetate the restored wetland with native plants. This included the removal of invasive species, the movement of fish to and from the wetland, and the regrading of the wetland to restore its natural topography.

These projects will help restore Muskegon Lake to its former place as a major resource for the people of West Michigan and a major asset into the future.



Above left: A photo taken at the AMOCO site along the bike path on the south shore of Muskegon Lake.



Above right: Opening the channel to LMR (Lower Muskegon River).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Oceana County Planning Assistance

WMSRDC has agreed to work with Oceana County to update the county's master plan and recreation plan over the following calendar year. This project kicked off during the Oceana County Planning Commission's regular meeting on October 6 with a thoughtful discussion on how best to engage the public. The resulting public engagement strategy will include a town hall-style meeting in early December, augmented with an online survey option for interested individuals that are unable to attend the meeting. In addition, an Oceana Parks Opinion survey is currently available, and may be accessed through this address <https://srvy.pro/28UG6P9>, or by scanning the adjacent QR code with a mobile phone.

SCAN THE
CODE TO TAKE
THE OCEANA
COUNTY PARKS
OPINION
SURVEY NOW.

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Newaygo County Recreation Plan Update

In August, WMSRDC kicked off an effort to assist the Newaygo County Parks and Recreation Commission with updating the Newaygo County Recreation Plan. The planning process began with an online recreation survey which was open throughout the month of September. The successful survey solicited 155 responses from both local residents and visiting park customers. The survey was immediately followed by an opportunity for public comments at the regular Parks Commission meeting on October 4.

Additional steps will be taken to help Newaygo County set recreation goals and objectives and fulfill requirements of a recreation plan set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).

The planning process is on track to be completed and submitted to the MDNR by February 1, 2023. Once approved, the plan will make Newaygo County eligible to apply for many types of recreation funding from the State of Michigan through April 2027.

Hazard Mitigation Update

WMSRDC continues working diligently to update the Hazard Mitigation plans for the counties of Lake, Mason, and Oceana. Recent highlights of this project include public meetings to gain insight into concerns of the public and stakeholders, hazard vulnerability assessment ratings and rankings, and development of seasonal peak population estimates. Over the following year, WMSRDC staff will continue working with emergency managers and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) to update each county's plan. Once completed, the plans will be sent to the Michigan State Police (MSP) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for review and approval.

Hazard mitigation is any sustainable action that reduces or eliminates long-term risk to people and property from future disasters. Mitigation planning breaks the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage. Hazard mitigation includes long-term solutions that reduce the impact of disasters in the future. Once Hazard Mitigation plans are approved by FEMA and adopted locally, communities become eligible to apply for pre-disaster and post-disaster mitigation funding.



GIS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

Mona View Cemetery Mapping Project

A project to map Mona View Cemetery in the City of Muskegon Heights will begin in 2023. Staff will process and digitize the vital cemetery records and create a map of the various sections, lots, and graves within the cemetery. WMSRDC and the City of Muskegon Heights will be seeking volunteers to help with work in the cemetery such as cleanup of headstones and grounds. Pictures will be taken of all the headstones and an online map will be created and shared with the city for maintenance and the public for easy location of grave sites.

If you would like to find out more about cemetery mapping or to volunteer for the Mona View Cemetery mapping project in 2023, contact WMSRDC's GIS planner, Jamie Way at (231) 722-7878 ext 150 or jway@wmsrdc.org.

Using GIS to Solicit Comments

Work has begun on the 2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan, which provides for a multi-jurisdictional, multi-year look at the metropolitan planning organization's (MPO) future transportation system. The plan includes the use of local, state, and federal transportation goals and objectives to guide transportation plans and projects and covers transportation for the Muskegon and northern Ottawa county area. The plan will provide for both short-term and long-term transportation plans that cross municipal boundaries and provide a transportation vision for the entire metropolitan area.

As part of this process, MPO staff solicited input from members of the MPO Technical Committee using a new online map created by WMSRDC GIS staff. The map includes roads, employers, and census data and allowed the MPO Technical Committee to access the data for review, comment on existing data, and create new comments pertaining to the scope of the plan. The map received 217 comments, a very high number of comments for such a document. Transportation staff will utilize this technology in the future to garner committee and public comments.

Tree Grant Updates

At the end of October will come the completion of the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (MRWA) Tree Plantings grant. Through this partnership grant with MRWA, the U.S. Forest Service, and WMSRDC, a total of 426 trees were planted within the Muskegon River watershed to improve water quality, mitigate storm water inundation and increase the tree canopy.

Trees were planted in several parks within the City of Muskegon, including Campbell Field, Harbour Towne Beach, Margaret Elliot Drake Park, Marsh Field, Sheldon Field, and the Carpenter Brothers lot near the Muskegon Dog Park. The MERES Nature Preserve in North Muskegon saw the planting of trees in critical wetland areas. Dalton and Cedar Creek townships also saw plantings at Beegle Field, Cedar Creek Township Hall, and Padley Park on West Twin Lake. Trees were also planted at the new Muskegon Community College F.A.R.M. site on Stebbins Rd. Finally, trees were planted in the City of Fremont in Nawaygo County along the new Cedar Street extension.

Nearing the completion of the grant, additional dollars funded the replacement of a handful of trees that did not survive the first plantings. These funds also allowed for additional tree plantings at MERES Nature Preserve, Veteran's Memorial Causeway Park, Cedar Creek Township Hall, and in the cities of Fremont and Roosevelt Park. This grant has encouraged smaller jurisdictions to begin tree plantings and start partnerships with neighboring townships while trees were provided to larger jurisdictions. All the partners assisted in planting, upkeep and watering of the new trees.

WMSRDC recently received another tree planting grant from DTE in partnership with Muskegon State Park and teachers and students at Reeths Puffer Middle School. The plantings will be completed by the Reeths Puffer students, staff, and volunteers in the spring of 2023. Fifty trees will be planted within the Muskegon State Park Campground where many large trees were lost due to high water conditions.



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installation of native plantings and trees, as well as the establishment of fish habitat and a variety of wetland areas. In addition, WMSRDC worked with Muskegon County Veteran's Affairs to digitize the location of memorial tree markers and bronze plaques that line the winding pathway throughout the park. An interactive map was developed for the public to utilize when locating a loved one's plaque or marker. The map is available online and through a QR code placed on signs located throughout the park. WMSRDC continues to maintain and update the map as new markers and plaques are installed and is also in the process of working with the City of Muskegon on the replacement of trees damaged by recent high-water levels. Moreover, staff helped organize and continually train a local volunteer group committed to the ongoing maintenance of the park.

Since construction of the environmental restoration completed in 2020, the park is once again viewed as a community asset frequently used by the community for fishing, walking, kayaking, canoeing, picnicking, and honoring veterans. The environmental benefits also led to Muskegon Lake meeting all management actions required to delist the lake as an Area of Concern (AOC).

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.

Bonnie McGlothlin, Chairperson, Councilperson, City of Muskegon Heights
Jennifer Hodges, Vice-Chairperson, Muskegon Township Supervisor
James Maike, Secretary, Newaygo County Commissioner
Ron Bacon, Mason County Commissioner
Ron Christians, Oceana County Commissioner
Kim Cyr, Muskegon County Commissioner
Rachel Gorman, Commissioner-At-Large, City of Muskegon
Wendy Gradwohl, West Shore Community College
Marcia Hovey-Wright, Muskegon County Commissioner
James Kelly, WMSRDC Appointee
Bryan Kolk, Newaygo County Commissioner
Andrea Large, WMSRDC Appointee
Roger Morgenstern, Councilperson, City of Norton Shores
Phil Morse, Oceana County Commissioner
James Rynberg, Mayor, City of Fremont
John Selmon, President, Muskegon Community College
Lewis Squires, Mason County Commissioner
Len Todd, Lake County Commissioner
Rillastine Wilkins, Muskegon County Commissioner
Kathy Winczewski, Councilperson, City of Ludington
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