Wisconsin Point Dune Restoration Begins this Summer

After a few years of planning and engineering, the restoration work on Wisconsin Point is scheduled to begin in 2017. Multiple partners including the City of Superior, Wis. Coastal Management Program, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Wis. DNR, and other local stakeholders have worked to prioritize this restoration project with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. This restoration will contribute toward the removal of the loss of fish and wildlife habitat beneficial use impairment in the St. Louis River Area of Concern.

Wisconsin Point is a three-mile-long natural sand spit in Superior, Wis., that divides Allouez Bay from Lake Superior. Together, Wisconsin Point and Minnesota Point form one of the longest freshwater barrier beaches in the world.

Project work will be conducted on land owned by the City of Superior. This area provides important habitat for many species of fish, wildlife, and rare plants and is a significant migratory bird stopover area. The point is also an important historical site with great cultural significance. It was once home to an Ojibwe Village and burial site.

This unique recreational area attracts many visitors year-round. Fishing, hiking, birding, swimming, boating and nature viewing are some of the most common activities on the point and in Allouez Bay.

The City of Superior has completed the engineering phase of the dune restoration project. The project includes restoration of the sensitive dune habitat and preservation of historical sites while providing improved public access points and adding restroom and trash facilities. Parking areas will be consolidated from 20 turnouts to approximately five parking areas, and the dunes will be restored and re-vegetated in the areas that are eliminated. Americans with Disabilities Act compliant boardwalks will be installed over the dunes for beach access to protect the sensitive ecosystem. The five improved access points will increase the overall number of parking spots on the point and use low impact development techniques to reduce storm water runoff. A living shoreline design technique will be implemented along Allouez Bay to stabilize and restore the eroding shoreline along Wisconsin Point Road.

The project outcomes include:

* 48,000 square feet of restored sand dune habitat.
* 40,000 square feet of restored shoreline wetland.
* 85 acres of restored pine barren forest dune habitat.
* 150 acres of reconnected sensitive wildlife habitat.
* 3,600 linear feet of restored and stabilized shoreline.

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St. Louis River Alliance Connects People to the River

A regional non-profit born out of the federal Clean Water Act turns 22 this year; and the impact they have had, along with community, state, and federal partners is something to celebrate. Propelled by its members and partners, the St. Louis River Alliance is working to restore, protect, and enhance the St. Louis River and Area of Concern in the Estuary.

When the alliance was first founded in 1996, its main purpose was to assist the Minnesota and Wisconsin agencies as they tackled the historic degradation of the St. Louis River Estuary at the head of Lake Superior.

From the industrial boom of the mid 1800s to the late 1900s, the estuary received waste from harbor industries and residents. Many sites within the AOC contain legacy pollutants from historical contamination with harmful chemicals and toxic waste products. In 1987 the lower 39 miles of the St. Louis River and the estuary were listed by the EPA as the largest AOC in the Great Lakes.

SLRA provides citizens’ input into the process of creating the AOC Remedial Action Plan along with state and federal agencies. SLRA’s role in the Remedial Action Plan is to ensure its success by providing a connection between community members and the project coordinators, working on habitat restorations, and encouraging the public to get involved in stewardship and volunteerism.

Over the last 22 years, the SLRA and partners have been successful in completing restorations that have improved the quality of life and economic returns for the entire region. Excitement and momentum is translating into a rise in eco-tourism on the river, new business start-ups, and community revitalization.

SLRA holds several annual events to connect people to the St. Louis River, including: Fall train rides along the river, Vista Star boat rides, canoe trips, Spring litter clean-ups, Winter outings to ski or snowshoe on the river, and other community-based events to inspire stewards and advance restoration efforts.

Currently, SLRA is working on two aquatic invasive species control projects; habitat restoration, education, and monitoring for the Piping Plover; as well as their annual events.

With funds from Wis. DNR, the SLRA will also run a photo contest starting June 1, 2017 for amateur photographers. hold a public event to highlight new AOC projects, and plant wild rice in the estuary.

With their 2017 Photo Contest, themed Seasons of the St. Louis River, SLRA is looking for striking digital images that highlight the diverse flora, wildlife, and recreational activities that connect people to the river. Lucky winners will win great prizes and have their photos featured in publications. See the winning photos from SLRA’s last photo contest at this link.

To learn more about this year’s photo contest and how to participate visit SLRA’s website (stlouisriver.org), or go to their Facebook page.

SLRA welcomes new members, provides ongoing volunteer opportunities, and continues to work with partners to restore the river. To learn more about the many ways to get involved or to submit a photo to the photo contest, visit the SLRA website or contact Kris Eilers, SLRA Executive Director: 218-733-9520 \ kris@stlouisriver.org.

- By Kris Eilers

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A public input process was used to finalize the design. Shoreline stabilization work will begin in May and restoration of the dunes will take place in 2017 and 2018 after tribal consultation and permitting is completed.

To learn more, visit the City of Superior Wisconsin Point Restoration Project website.

- By Matt Steiger