

The Pike River Grant-Funded Revitalization

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The Village of Mount Pleasant recently completed its decades long, multi-phase project to restore the riverine environment along the Pike River within the village limits. The project involves roughly 5.2 miles of the Pike River within a 17 square mile drainage basin. In total, roughly 450 acres of land have been purchased by and donated to the village within the river corridor.

In addition to controlling flooding, the project restored natural stream features, has enhanced the aquatic habitat within the stream and connected ponds and wetlands, improved water quality, and has helped to reverse the progressive deterioration of this urbanizing stream. Native prairie vegetation and trees have been planted and have begun to thrive throughout the project area, providing a natural preserve along the river. Completion of the project also resulted in over 120 residential homes being removed from the floodplain, eliminating the need for these residents to purchase costly flood insurance.



Phase 1 of the project. The recreational trail surrounds a large flood storage area containing a reconstructed meandering section of the river and various wetland/water quality features.

Due to the size, cost, and complexity of the project, it was divided into nine “phases,” each having specific permitting and construction requirements. Each phase consists of approximately 0.5 river miles.

A further benefit of the project included the creation and maintenance of a paved recreational trail within the river corridor. This trail runs parallel to the Pike River and provides appealing views of the adjacent restored areas. It also provides an extensive recreational network through the restored corridor and the village as a whole, as well as connectivity to other regional trails in the area. The village actively promotes the public’s use of these trails to enjoy the natural setting and to view how development and our environmental assets can co-exist side by side.

Outside Funding

The project would not have been possible without significant funding from sources outside the village. Over the life of the project, the village partnered with numerous government and nonprofit organizations to supplement funding for the various phases, while at the same time fostering community and inter-organizational involvement. Due to the multi-faceted nature of the construction, which provides not only environmental but recreational benefits as well, numerous opportunities for outside funding were at the village’s disposal.

The village actively pursued grant funding during the construction of each phase. Grants were targeted for land acquisition, corridor development, stream restoration, and other habitat improvements. The village received over \$9.5 million in local, state, and federal grants. The Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) facilitated the construction of Phases 8 and 9, to which they contributed over \$5 million.

State & Federal Partnerships

One of the project’s biggest funding partners was the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). The village was able to secure numerous grants through multiple WDNR grant programs. The most notable programs that were critical to funding the project were the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship and the Urban Nonpoint Source and Storm Water Management Grant programs.

Funding from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program totaled over \$1.14 million over the life of the project and focused on trail construction/development and land

acquisition. Stewardship Program funds require that the lands purchased remain under public ownership in perpetuity and promote passive recreational uses for the public. This has helped to ensure that the completed project will remain a vital part of the village's park system for years to come.

The Urban Nonpoint Source and Storm Water Management Grant Program contributed over \$480,000 to the project. These funds focused on features that helped reduce pollutant loading into the river, including streambank stabilization, wetland and riparian buffer creation, and water quality pond construction.



Phase 7 of the project. The recreational trail runs parallel to the newly constructed stream and ponds.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) also provided crucial funding toward the project, specifically for construction of the recreational trail. Nearly \$800,000 was awarded to the village through the WisDOT's Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality grant program. These funds were instrumental in construction of over two miles of the approximate seven miles of trail that make up the Pike River Pathway.

As the project approached its final phases, the village was contacted by the Army Corps of Engineers. A partnership was formed, and the final two phases of the project were completed in 2017 by the USACE. In addition to facilitating the design, bidding, and construction of these phases, the USACE contributed over \$5 million to its construction. The agreement between the village and the USACE requires that the village continue to monitor and maintain the restored wetland and prairie vegetation to ensure its continued stability and future success.

Corporate and Nonprofit Partnerships

Numerous other project partners provided funding that, while much smaller in scale, is just as important to the continued health and success of the corridor.

The American Transmission Company contributed \$5,000 from its Pollinator Habitat program. In 2018, the federally endangered rusty patched bumble bee was observed within the restored area. This grant supplemented additional plantings meant to act as food sources for the endangered bee, and also provided plantings meant to serve as habitat for monarch butterflies.

The Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network, a nonprofit focused on the promotion of the Pike River watershed as a whole, made several contributions to the project focused on signage and educational outreach to better inform the public as to the benefits of native prairie restoration and habitat creation. Educating the public and other potential project stakeholders has helped the community embrace the project as their own and promote buy-in to ensure its future health and stability.



Phases 8 and 9 of the project shown under construction.

Additional Partners

Other project partners included the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Fund for Lake Michigan, and the US Environmental Protection Agency. It is because of the significant financial assistance from these external partners that the village's Storm Water Drainage Utility District was able to complete such a large and lengthy project while never having to increase its user fees during construction.

The village continues to actively pursue grant funding for similar projects throughout the community related to trail/park development and stormwater management improvements. As municipal budgets continue to tighten and monies are shifted away from environmental projects and municipal park programs, it is crucial that municipalities continue to take advantage of the numerous and invaluable grant opportunities available to them. Park development and environmental stewardship are critical to the health of our communities and to the quality of life of our residents, and we need to pursue all avenues to ensure that we continue to promote and develop them.

About the Author:

Anthony (Tony) J. Beyer, P.E. is the Director of Public Works/Village Engineer for the Village of Mount Pleasant. Tony has worked for the Village of Mount Pleasant since 2007 and has over 14 years of experience working in municipal government/public works. He has held several positions within the village, including Water Systems Engineer, Utilities Manager, and now Director of Public Works/Village Engineer. Tony is a licensed Professional Engineer in the State of Wisconsin and holds a bachelor's degree in Biological Systems Engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Contact Tony at tbeyer@mtpleasantwi.gov