

FLM Announces \$1.9 Million in Grants to Improve Beaches and Natural Areas

Written by Fund for Lake Michigan, Vicki Elkin

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MILWAUKEE – As both visitors and residents enjoy the Wisconsin summer, the Fund for Lake Michigan is continuing to make wide-ranging investments to improve swimming beaches, protect wildlife habitat and promote water quality.

From the restoration of Cat Island in Green Bay to the revitalization of Simmons Beach in Kenosha, the fund now counts over \$11 million in projects funded over the past four years.

The Fund announced another \$1.9 million in grants for 27 projects this summer -- including major investments along the lake shore and at popular tourist destinations.

Kohler Andrae State Park, the Ridges Sanctuary in Door County and Milwaukee's Bradford Beach are among the many sites that will benefit from the Fund's grants this year.

"When people take their family to visit a beach or hike along the shoreline the last thing they want to see is green scum," said Vicki Elkin, executive director of the Fund for Lake Michigan (FLM). "I'd like to think the fund is doing its part to help Wisconsin protect its hard-earned reputation for clean water, great parks and wonderful natural resources."

Crafted out of a legal settlement related to construction of the coal-fired Oak Creek power plant, the FLM receives a \$4 million annual contribution from plant owners including We Energies, Madison Gas and Electric, and WPPI Energy.

"We've been thrilled with the success of the fund so far and frankly humbled by the number of applications from local governments and non-profits who care deeply about the lake and appreciate the value it brings to their communities," said Elkin.

The professionally-managed fund then works to ensure those monies are invested wisely

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throughout the Lake Michigan basin, which stretches from Kenosha to the tip of Door County in Wisconsin.

“It’s no secret local communities are facing tight budgets and balancing competing demands for resources, which is why the investments made by our utility partners are so crucial,” said Elkin, who counts over 20 years in managing private sector conservation efforts.

Given the crucial connection with the many rivers and streams that flow into Lake Michigan, the fund has also been working on projects that address contaminated runoff that can foul shorelines and contribute to weed growth.

“We are particularly concerned about the health of Green Bay, which has been plagued by toxic algae blooms and is the largest contributor of phosphorus to Lake Michigan,” said Elkin. “We are also making major investments in the Milwaukee River Watershed which has become a testing ground for some of the most innovative conservation strategies and partnerships in the country.”

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Some grants already approved:

Lake Michigan Shoreline Projects (\$885,000)

- City of Cudahy Water Utility - \$25,000 to help pilot a Water Loss Audit Training Program to detect leaks and weaknesses within municipal water systems.
- City of Oak Creek - \$75,000 to help restore natural areas, create parkland and reduce runoff to Lake Michigan at Lake Vista, a 250-acre former brownfield on the shores of Lake Michigan.

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- City of Port Washington - \$75,000 to restore a small coastal wetland along the City of Port Washington's Harbor Walk and connect the walkway to the city's scenic breakwater and historic lighthouse.
- City of Racine - \$75,000 to restore Sam Myers beach including five acres of dunes and coastal wetlands just blocks from downtown Racine.
- Discovery World - \$200,000 for interactive exhibits, state-of-the-art equipment and programming at the new Fund for Lake Michigan Freshwater Sustainability Lab.
- Ducks Unlimited- \$75,000 to improve wetlands at the 570-acre Sensiba Wetland Complex along the western shores of Green Bay.
- Friends of Kohler Andrae State Park - \$90,000 to improve water quality at Kohler Andrae State Park's popular swimming beach by constructing rain gardens to capture and treat polluted runoff before it reaches the lake.
- Friends of Schlitz Audubon Nature Center - \$60,000 to develop a plan to manage stormwater, stabilize ravines and improve habitat at the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center's 185-acre site on the shores of Lake Michigan.
- Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture - \$60,000 to restore ravines and reduce runoff at the North Point Lighthouse which will further improve water quality at Bradford Beach.
- Ridges Sanctuary - \$75,000 to build rain gardens, manage stormwater and enhance educational programming at the Ridges Sanctuary in Bailey's Harbor in Door County.
- Sheboygan County - \$75,000 to begin restoration of Amsterdam Dunes, a spectacular 328-acre parcel along the shores of Lake Michigan that was recently acquired by the county.

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Milwaukee River Watershed Projects (\$500,725)

- Mequon Nature Preserve - \$49,000 to restore wetlands at the 438-acre Mequon Nature Preserve by uncapping an artesian well and capturing storm runoff from nearby agricultural land.
- Milwaukee River Keeper - \$47,400 to put Milwaukee on a “Low Salt Diet” by monitoring salt levels in area rivers and changing the practices of private salt applicators who account for more than 50% of salt pollution in the watershed.
- Milwaukee Water Commons - \$15,000 to support on-the-ground projects undertaken by neighborhood leaders through the Milwaukee Water Commons’ innovative “Water School.”
- Ozaukee Washington Land Trust - \$50,000 to restore wetlands along the Milwaukee River with a goal of reducing flooding and improving habitat.
- Reflo and Southeast Wisconsin Watersheds Trust - \$65,000 to provide low-cost design/build services to schools interested in greening their schoolyards and creating outdoor classrooms where students learn about the water cycle through rain gardens, green roofs, cisterns and other natural rainwater catchment systems.
- Riveredge Nature Center and Wisconsin DNR - \$99,325 to re-establish a breeding population of Lake Sturgeon in the Milwaukee River Watershed after a 100-year absence.
- Southeast Wisconsin Watersheds Trusts (aka Sweet Water) - \$75,000 to coordinate efforts among multiple stakeholders to restore habitat and reduce water pollution at high priority sites throughout the Milwaukee River Watershed, which spans seven counties and 83 municipalities.

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- Walnut Way Conservation Corps - \$100,000 to capture and reuse 62,500 gallons of stormwater on Walnut Way's Urban Campus - an interconnected network of repurposed vacant lots, orchards, production gardens, residential properties and commercial businesses on Milwaukee's north side.

Kinnickinnic River Watershed

- Alverno College - \$18,500 to help students and faculty of Alverno College prepare a Green Infrastructure Study for the college's 46-acre campus, which includes some of the last remaining open land within the highly developed Kinnickinnic River Watershed.
- Sixteenth Street Community Health Center - \$150,000 to engage residents and other stakeholders in the Pulaski Park Neighborhood in efforts to transform the health of the Kinnickinnic River Watershed by incorporating rain barrels, rain gardens, bioswales, porous materials and other green infrastructure on public and private property.

Menomonee River Watershed

- Village of Elm Grove - \$75,000 to begin the process of "daylighting" a 900-foot stretch of Underwood Creek which currently runs under a large parking lot in downtown Elm Grove and is entirely closed in a concrete box culvert.

Oak Creek Watershed

- City of Racine - \$107,500 to monitor water quality in the Oak Creek watershed which will be used to inform efforts to clean up Grant Park beach and to develop a comprehensive Watershed Restoration Plan for Oak Creek.

Pike River Watershed

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- Hawthorn Hollow - \$10,000 to create new wetland habitat and manage stormwater runoff into the Pike River at the Hawthorn Hollow Nature Sanctuary in Kenosha County.

Lower Fox River Watershed

- Alliance for the Great Lakes - \$75,435 to partner with the City of Appleton on strategies to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the Fox River.
- The Nature Conservancy - \$100,000 to restore 88 acres of wetlands in the Silver Creek watershed, part of a larger project by New Water in Green Bay to evaluate the most cost effective methods of reducing phosphorus in Wisconsin waterways.

Sheboygan River Watershed

- Girl Scouts of Manitou - \$15,000 to remove a dam on the Mullet River, a popular trout stream in Sheboygan County.