

Wisconsin Waters Get Help From New Grants

Written by Fund for Lake Michigan, Vicki Elkin

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MILWAUKEE, WI - Continuing its vital work to protect and improve water quality, the Fund for Lake Michigan has just awarded nearly \$1.4 million in private grants aimed at improving beaches, reducing polluted runoff and restoring critical habitat in Wisconsin.

The 26 different projects receiving money stretch from Kenosha to Marinette and range from restoration of Harrington Beach State Park north of Port Washington to helping advance one of the country's largest fish passage projects on the Menominee River.

"With water problems increasingly in the news, the Fund is delivering on its promise to help protect water resources right here in Wisconsin," says Vicki Elkin, executive director of the Milwaukee-based organization.

The Fund is also backing crucial research and planning as Milwaukee builds upon its reputation as the freshwater business capital of the world.

To that end, the Fund is supporting The Water Council as it launches the Alliance for Water Stewardship's new water use standard in North America. Similar to LEED Certification for buildings, the standard requires a building or site owner to ensure sustainable water use within a facility. The standard goes beyond LEED however by requiring the building owner to understand how their operations impact the surrounding watershed.

"The new AWS standard will help every business that uses water across the Great Lakes region and throughout North America assess their water use and as a result have a dual impact of improving water stewardship and helping the bottom-line of their budget," says Dean Amhaus, president and CEO of The Water Council.

The Fund for Lake Michigan was established in 2011 by We Energies, Madison Gas & Electric and WPPI Energy to safeguard the lake and improve water quality in the region.

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To date the fund has:

- Distributed over 150 grants totaling roughly \$12 million
- Created the equivalent of 480 full-time, family-supporting jobs
- Added \$35 million to the local economy
- Raised private property values by \$45.5 million
- Leveraged another \$35 million in public and private investments in water quality

“Our partnership is providing long-term benefits in safeguarding the Lake Michigan watershed for the entire community,” said Robert Garvin, executive vice president at We Energies.

The largest grant in this round is \$190,000 to the UW-Milwaukee School of Freshwater Sciences to conduct an extensive aquatic habitat survey of the city’s harbor. The University will be working with the Department of Natural Resources, Army Corps of Engineers, Harbor District, Inc. and other stakeholders to advance harbor rehabilitation.

“The long-term goal of this study is to restore a thriving recreational fishery and vibrant wildlife population in the heart of urban Milwaukee,” says Elkin. “In the meantime, we’re sure to see immediate improvements to the Milwaukee harbor and its larger estuary as a result of this grant.”

Other projects slated for funding this year include the creation of a linear park along the recently-completed Beerline Recreational Trail. A collaboration of the Greater Milwaukee Committee and Riverworks Development Corporation, the project aims to spur economic development on the city’s north side.

The projects are fairly well distributed geographically, with the majority directly impacting the Lake Michigan coastline and near shore areas. The remaining projects are located in watersheds that feed into the lake and have been identified as priority areas for reducing pollution or improving fish and wildlife habitat.

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A full of list of grants is available at fundforlakemichigan.org

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