

Little Rapids Restoration Engineering Design Project

NOAA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
May 2012



LITTLE RAPIDS RESTORATION PROJECT

ST. MARYS RIVER | SAULT STE. MARIE, MI

Background

The St. Marys River is a globally unique river that forms the binational connecting channel between Lake Superior and Lake Huron, two of the largest freshwater systems in the world, with shared jurisdiction between the Canadian Province of Ontario and the State of Michigan. Both communities have a strong tourism-based economy that is centered on sport fishing and other recreational activities tied to the St. Marys River. Despite its popularity for recreation, the entire reach of the St. Marys River is designated as one of Michigan's 14 Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOCs) due to pollution and habitat alteration. The river is listed for 10 of the 14 Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) evaluated under the AOC program, including Fish and Wildlife Populations and Habitat.

Rapids habitat on the St. Marys River has been impacted by various forms of development, including dredging, filling and diversion, and urban development. At Little Rapids, construction of a causeway from the Sugar Island Ferry dock at Island No. 1 to Sugar Island restricted and greatly reduced the flow of water needed to maintain the rapids. The loss of rapids significantly impacted the fisheries community; however, with proper engineering and design, this site can be restored to provide foraging, spawning, and nursery habitat for a wide variety of sport fish as well as other aquatic organisms. Restoring the Little Rapids stretch of the St. Marys River has been identified as a key project for addressing fish and wildlife impairments and is an important step toward delisting the river as an AOC.

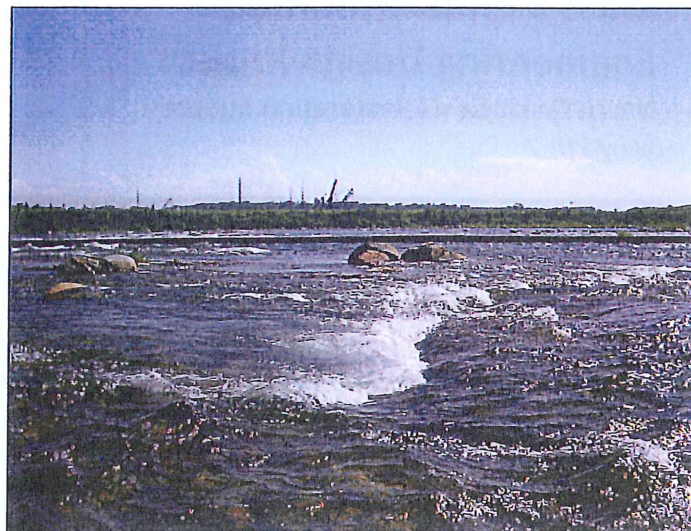


Little Rapids Restoration Engineering and Design Project

Through a \$347,568 grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Eastern U.P. Regional Planning and Development Commission (EUP) is leading a multi-agency, interdisciplinary team to develop the engineering designs to restore the Little Rapids area. This first phase of the project builds on previous investments by numerous agencies and nongovernmental partners, and identifies the pre-construction tasks necessary to bring the Little Rapids project to "shovel-ready" status for implementation by 2013, if funding becomes available.

Restoration Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of the Little Rapids Habitat Restoration Project is to develop the engineering designs necessary to modify the Sugar Island causeway to restore flow to 45-50 acres of rapids that previously existed. This will provide critical habitat to a variety of aquatic species, and ultimately help achieve the removal of the St. Marys River impairments related to fish and wildlife populations and habitat. Previous feasibility studies, hydraulic flow modeling, engineering designs, and environmental assessments coupled with ongoing stakeholder relations will bring this project to shovel-ready status, positioning it for implementation funding in 2013.



Funding for the project is being provided by NOAA through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), a five-year, \$2.2 billion program to implement a comprehensive restoration strategy for the Great Lakes. The Initiative represents the largest investment in the Great Lakes in more than two decades.

Partners:

Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning and Development Commission
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Chippewa County Road Commission
Lake Superior State University - Aquatic Research Lab
Great Lakes Commission
Michigan Department of Environmental Quality - Office of the Great Lakes
St. Marys River Binational Public Advisory Council
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority
St. Marys River Fisheries Task Group
National Wildlife Federation

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