

FAQS ABOUT NIAGARA RIVER RESTORATION WORK

What exactly is taking place?

There are four State Park projects on and around Grand Island that are currently being designed. The goal of these projects is to protect and restore the environmental damage that has occurred over the years that has been caused by both human and natural forces.

There are three projects within the boundaries of Buckhorn Island State Park that include: a portion of Burnt Ship Creek located on the south side of the I-190 near the north Grand Island Bridge; approximately 8,700 feet of shoreline located on the north shore of the Park; and Grass Island, which is located approximately 550 feet off the north shore of the Park in the Niagara River. A fourth project, East River Marsh, is located along the northeastern boundary of the Beaver Island State Park.

Each project is unique and includes the installation of natural habitat features such as rock reefs, submerged logs and other natural habitat features that provide fish spawning habitat for species like northern pike and muskellunge. These projects will also increase the riverine and coastal wetlands by restoring submerged aquatic and emergent vegetation areas.

How long will it take?

The first of the project construction is expected to start in the fall of 2018 at the East River Marsh Area at Beaver Island State Park. Construction of the three other projects will commence between the spring and fall of 2019 and will continue for approximately six months. Some minor, such as plantings, may extend into the 2020 summer season to be able to give plants a longer growing season than plant in the fall.

Who is working on this project?

New York State Parks is implementing these projects, in partnership with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and has hired Ecology and Environment Engineering P.C. to design the restoration projects. C&S Engineers will responsible for oversight of the construction contractor.

Why is it important to restore the natural habitat of the Niagara River?

Natural habitat, like wetlands, forests, and the river are important for the fish, mammals, birds, and other wildlife who live in them. These are the same animals that we enjoy watching, listening to and fishing for.

What is an Area of Concern?

In 1987, the Niagara River was identified as a Great Lakes Area of Concern (AOC). The United States-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement defines Area of Concern (AOC) as “geographic areas that fail to meet the general or specific objectives of the agreement where such failure has caused or is likely to cause impairment of beneficial use (BUIs) of the area’s ability to support aquatic life.”

Currently the Niagara River has the following Beneficial Use Impairments (BUI):

- Restrictions on fish and wildlife consumption;
- Fish tumors or other deformities;
- Degradation of benthos;
- Degradation of fish and wildlife populations;
- Bird or animal deformities or reproductive problems;
- Restriction on dredging activities; and
- Loss of fish and wildlife habitat.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) was established in 2010 to address environmental issues in identified AOCs in the United States and Canada (GLRI 2014). The GLRI Action Plan II will fund projects from 2015 through 2019. The GLRI Action Plan II priorities focus on measurable project activities directly related to correcting Great Lakes BUIs, including combating AIS and restoring wetland and aquatic habitats.

The projects being completed would support the BUI delisting process within the Niagara River AOC, specifically as it relates to the loss of fish and wildlife habitat BUI. Planning and design for aquatic habitat restoration of these projects integrate existing data and research programs involved in the restoration of aquatic habitats.

How much will this work cost and who is paying for it?

The NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation has received grant funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative for just over \$11 million. That will cover the design and the construction of these four projects.

Will there be any limitations to access?

During the construction of these projects, access to these areas will be limited for the safety of the public.