

Bay-Lake

Regional Planning Commission

Improving Beaches in the Bay-Lake Region

Communities located along Lake Michigan have been concerned for the past several years about the need to close their beaches due to the high levels of E.coli. The Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission (Bay-Lake RPC) found a way to assist them by applying for and receiving funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant program. This initiative targets the most significant problems in the Great Lakes region, including Nearshore Health and Nonpoint Source Pollution, by protecting, maintaining, and restoring the chemical, biological, and physical integrity of the Great Lakes.

In May 2004, the Great Lakes were recognized as a national treasure by a Presidential Executive Order calling for the creation of a "Regional Collaboration of National Significance." In December 2005, the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration comprised of the eight Great Lakes states, along with the Great Lakes Mayors, tribes, congressional delegation, and federal agencies, announced agreement on the Great Lakes Restoration Strategy, which was developed through the efforts of 1,500 volunteers. Starting in May 2009, President Obama's budget set aside funding for the annual GLRI grant program to fund projects that target the most significant environmental problems impacting the Great Lakes' ecosystem.

The marketing and administration of the approved GLRI beach project started in 2010 and beach water sampling began in the summer of 2011. The Bay-Lake RPC partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh (UW-O) to gather the sampling data and conduct beach assessments. The sampling data and beach assessments will help to identify the sources of contamination and provide necessary information

to develop detailed beach improvement plans at nearly 20 beaches in the cities of Algoma, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Sheboygan and Two Rivers. The beach improvement plans will provide communities with effective beach redesign, restoration and management recommendations.

Being the official area-wide planning agency for northeastern Wisconsin, the Bay-Lake RPC has provided a variety of planning and administrative services to communities along the shores of Lake Michigan for the past 40 years. With nearly 400 miles of coastal shoreline in the eight county region, maintaining the health of Lake Michigan has always been an important goal of the Bay-Lake RPC. This beach project is a perfect example of the collaboration and intergovernmental cooperation that is necessary to accomplish such a large region-wide initiative.

Throughout this three-year project, meetings will be held with local officials and the public to ensure the beach improvement plans being prepared address their concerns and are consistent with the vision each community has for their beaches. The outcomes of this project will lead to real, on-the-ground, and sustainable beach improvements. In addition, communities will receive ongoing guidance and the tools necessary to achieve and maintain healthy and desirable beaches that will remain open throughout the summer to be enjoyed by residents and tourists.

The Bay-Lake RPC and UW-O will take the next step to improve beaches in the region with the submission of a second 2011 GLRI grant that will focus on funding to fully implement the beach improvement plans at a number of the beaches in the region. The GLRI action plan adopted in 2005 extends through 2014.



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