



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Grand River Restoration Project Sees a Boost in Federal Funding for Sea Lamprey Control

(Grand Rapids, MI) After months of collaboration, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Whitewater are excited to see more federal dollars aimed at stopping invasive sea lamprey in the Grand River.

With the signing of the recent federal spending bill, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) expects to receive a \$7 million increase in its annual budget. The increase in funding will allow the Commission to invest needed dollars into crumbling sea-lamprey control infrastructure, devote more resources to science for fishery restoration and provide \$1.8 million to help “Restore the Rapids” in Grand Rapids while ensuring sea lamprey protection is a top priority.

A critical component of the Grand River restoration project is the construction of a new sea lamprey barrier one mile upstream of the century-old Sixth Street Dam that currently serves as a barrier to invasive sea lamprey. The new barrier would deny sea lampreys access to more than 1,900 miles of new stream habitat, which could otherwise cost GLFC about \$1.2 million annually to treat with lampricides. GLFC and its partners have proposed this new barrier, which is expected to pay for itself in less than a decade.

“We are grateful to our lawmakers in Washington for their commitment to this project and our community,” Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss said. “This funding is critical as we work to restore the river, which is a part of our long-term vision that will add to the vibrancy of our city.”

“Each sea lamprey will kill up to 40 pounds of Great Lakes fish, which is why control of that destructive invader is essential to the \$7 billion fishery,” said Robert Lambe, executive secretary of the Canadian-US Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the agency responsible for sea lamprey control. “We have been proud to partner with the people of Grand Rapids to ensure sea lamprey control on the Grand River continues for decades to come. The Commission particularly thanks Senator Gary Peters for requesting funds for the Grand River lamprey barrier, Congressman Fred Upton, Senator Debbie Stabenow and Congressman Bill Huizenga for all their hard work as Great Lakes Task Force co-chairs. They are true champions for the lakes.”

“Grand Rapids Whitewater is proud of the hard work by our partners from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and the City of Grand Rapids to secure these critical funds to support sea lamprey control in the Grand River,” said Richard Bishop President & CEO of Grand Rapids Whitewater. “These additional funds will help to leverage other local, state, and private dollars to support the restoration of the Grand River for everyone and ensure protection against invasive species.”

Sea lampreys are a parasitic fish native to the Atlantic Ocean and invaded the Great Lakes in the early 20th century. Sea lamprey control depends on a selective lampricide to kill the larvae or, in large stream systems such as the Grand River and its tributaries, barriers to prevent sea lamprey access to their spawning grounds. The new sea lamprey barrier, or Adjustable Hydraulic Structure (AHS), proposed for the Grand River will be located between Ann and Leonard streets. The location of the barrier was carefully selected at the head of the historic and regionally rare limestone rapids. Removal of the existing Sixth Street Dam will reveal approximately 88 acres of the namesake rapids. Other benefits of the Grand River restoration project include water quality and habitat enhancements, reconnection of spawning habitat for key Great Lakes fish, vastly improved access and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and enhanced aesthetics and riparian functions that will attract people to a revitalized downtown. The project is being closely coordinated to align with other ongoing citywide planning efforts such as Green Grand Rapids, GR Forward and the City’s Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan.

Project partners continue to work through the complex environmental permitting process and are eager to begin work in the river as soon as possible. Once authorized to begin, construction would last four to five seasons. The first phase of work would include removing four low-head beautification dams and constructing other aquatic habitat improvements downstream of the Sixth Street Dam.

About Great Lakes Fishery Commission: The 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries, which created the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, was born from a strong need to work together across borders not only to combat sea lampreys but also to promote science and establish working relationships among the players. The commission consists of four Canadian commissioners appointed by the Privy Council and four U.S. commissioners (plus one alternate) appointed by the President. The commissioners are supported by a secretariat, located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

About Grand Rapids Whitewater: Grand Rapids Whitewater is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization comprised of individuals, rowers/paddlers, anglers and business leaders dedicated to revitalizing the Grand River and putting the namesake rapids back in the Grand for everyone’s enjoyment. For more information, visit www.grandrapidswhitewater.org.

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