

ENVIRONMENT

Michigan DNR gives \$1.7M in grants for state fish, aquatic systems



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Fish sticks, also known as shoreline woody habitat structures, will be among several conservation projects on Michigan lakes and streams funded by \$1.7 million in grants.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is awarding the fisheries habitat grants for projects that will rehabilitate and protect valuable fish habitats that provide the foundation for Michigan's world-class fisheries, state officials said.

The funds are matched by more than \$3.2 million in partner contributions. The total conservation value is about \$5 million, the DNR said.

Five of the projects are DNR Priority Habitat Conservation Projects.

The group of projects "is a proactive effort by DNR Fisheries to encourage projects that address priorities for sustaining healthy habitats, fisheries and aquatic communities," according to the website.

The efforts aided by the grants also boost fish populations "and make outdoor areas safer for residents," Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said in a statement Friday.

"It is gratifying to see such collaboration and creativity being put forth to make a real difference to the natural resources that are central to our state's appeal as an outdoor recreation destination and a big part of what makes Michigan, Michigan."

The grant program funds fish habitat conservation, dam removal and repair, resource assessment studies and access to recreational opportunities such as fishing.

The DNR said funding from fishing license sales, state general funds and a settlement with Consumers Energy are distributed through three grant areas: aquatic habitat conservation;

dam management and aquatic habitat; and recreation in the Au Sable, Manistee and Muskegon river watersheds.

Joe Nohner, a resource analyst with the DNR Fisheries Division, said the projects aim to protect and rehabilitate aquatic habitats across the state. They can also boost public safety through dam removals, the department said.

"These projects are critical to strengthening and maintaining populations of fishes and other aquatic species," Nohner said. "They will improve fish migration in over 230 miles of Michigan streams and boost public safety through the removal or replacement of three dams and six culverts."

The work also includes a project to install shoreline woody habitat structures, which state officials said has become more popular in improving fish habitats.

"These structures, often called fish sticks, are approximately 30-foot trees placed along the shoreline and nearshore zones of the lakes to provide habitat for fishes, turtles, birds and other aquatic life," Nohner said.

The pieces are slated to receive permits and be installed in a lake that was a sand pit to improve fishing in the DNR's Crystal Waters State Game Area in southeast Michigan.

Projects funded by the grant program include:

Conservation Resource Alliance – Baldwin River Dam removal final design and permitting phase project (Lake County), \$115,000

Conservation Resource Alliance – Restoring and reconnecting Cedar Run Creek (Leelanau County), \$200,000.

DNR Fisheries Division – Crystal Waters State Game Area reservoirs habitat improvement (Monroe County), \$43,600

Friends of the Rouge – Lower Rouge River culvert inventory to improve fish passage (Wayne County), \$67,800.

Great Lakes Fishery Commission – Sucker River culvert replacement and seasonal sea lamprey barrier construction (Alger County), \$150,000 conditional commitment

Huron Pines – Replace Sparr Road/Black River culvert to enhance fish passage and river function (Otsego County), \$162,000

Michigamme River Basin Water Resources Improvement Tax Increment Finance Authority – Republic Dam removal and Rock Arch Rapids construction (Marquette

Michigan Trout Unlimited – Aquatic organisms passage restoration at the Grayling Fish Hatchery (Crawford County), \$400,000

Ottawa County – Ottawa Sands Lake nearshore habitat enhancements, \$142,800

Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council – Restoring aquatic connectivity on Stover Creek: Dam removal (Charlevoix County), \$189,572

University of Michigan-Flint – Fish passage at a Flint River Dam removal using rock ramps (Genesee County), \$60,800