

Onondaga Lake NRD Settlement Restoration Projects

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Background/Objectives. In 2017, as part of a Natural Resource Damages (NRD) settlement, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&W) and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), working in cooperation with Honeywell and Onondaga County, a series of 19 restoration projects was announced that will improve and conserve habitat in and around Onondaga Lake and significantly increase recreational opportunities for the community. The settlement resulted from a multiyear process that quickly reached resolution after the focus shifted from damages determination to selection of projects that, if implemented, would adequately compensate the public and environment for past injury.

Approach/ Activities. Unlike most NRD settlements, Honeywell will implement (construct), monitor, and maintain the projects except for a select set of recreation projects for which Onondaga County will have maintenance responsibility. Nine habitat improvements projects will benefit a wide variety of species and will include installation of habitat structures in Onondaga Lake, enhancements to wetlands, forested floodplains and upland habitats, creation of native grassland habitats, and control of invasive species. Also under this program over 1,000 acres of habitat will be preserved, some portions of which are known to contain rare, threatened or endangered species. Ten projects will improve community recreation by increasing angler access along the lake's shoreline and tributaries, create a 1,000+ acre natural recreation area that will be open to the public for outdoor recreational and educational uses, and expansion the local recreational trail system. The trail expansion includes making a critical 3-mile connection between the Erie Canalway Trail and a trail system surrounding Onondaga Lake. Once complete, these two sections of trail will become part of the Empire State Trail, a 750-mile route that will be the longest multi-use state trail in the nation upon its completion.

Results/Lessons Learned. This presentation focuses on the restoration projects, the benefits they will provide to the community and environment, as well as how a project-focused process positively influenced discussions between the Trustees and principal parties, leading to greater alignment on restoration objectives, and a more cooperative settlement process.