

Synopsis

- **Project Title:** Increasing Urban Shore-Based Fishing Access on the Cheboygan River
- **Grantee Organization:** Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
- **Project Team** (Please list all members of the project team who should be credited with contributions to the work, including name and institutional affiliation.)
 - Tom Eustice, City of Cheboygan
 - Bill Sanders, Sanders and Czapski Associates, PLLC
 - Keith Cheli, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
 - Tim Cwalinski, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
 - Ken Pletcher, Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee
 - Catherine Schulz, City of Cheboygan
 - Brian Marshall, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
 - Sue Bright, U.S. Army Corps of Engineer
- **Contact Person** (Please identify the person(s) who should be contacted with questions about the work, providing a name, institutional affiliation, and email address for each.)

Caroline Keson, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, caroline@watershedcouncil.org

- **Grant Amount:** \$25,000
- **Time Frame:** January 1, 2019—July 31, 2019
- **Focus Area:** Access to the Great Lakes Fishery
- **Brief Project Summary** (In 100 words or less, provide a summary of the project, including its purpose and key results.)

This project included the formation of a workgroup and public engagement to facilitate the design and engineering for seven accessible fishing piers along the Cheboygan River in downtown Cheboygan, MI. The piers will provide for accessible, safe access along an area that is hazardous to get to, difficult to fish, and eroding from foot traffic.

Project in Context

In the heart of the City of Cheboygan, the Cheboygan River runs with steelhead salmon, rainbow trout, walleye, bass, and sunfish before entering Lake Huron. The Cheboygan River and Lake Huron are considered some of the City's greatest resources. County and City recreation plans include goals to develop public access sites on the water.

The Michigan DNR reported over 7,000 angler hours and nearly 1500 charter hours out of Cheboygan in 2017. As a water recreation hub for boaters and Great Lakes fishing, Cheboygan's waters and location can attract more anglers by increasing its shore-based fishing opportunities. Unfortunately, the most desirable places to fish currently involve overcrowded spaces or hazardous steep banks. The City approached the project with the mindset that providing safe fishing access downtown on the Cheboygan River could increase the quality of life for residents, tourism, and protect the river's eroding shoreline.

Cheboygan is not like other Northern Michigan cities—while it has similar natural resources, income levels are lower, and amenities are scarce. However, the City is on the upswing—Cheboygan is working hard to improve its downtown area, parks, and infrastructure, and recently celebrated becoming a Michigan Main Street Level Select Community. The design for fishing piers will help create connectivity in Cheboygan’s river corrido. An additional recreation area for shore-based fishing will help Cheboygan overcome its many challenges.

Goals of the Effort

The key goal for the project is to design a handicapped access to a fishable part of the Cheboygan River for anglers of all ability levels. The design allows for anglers to fish the entire stretch of river without limitations, including the ability for wading anglers to traverse the steep banks safely.

Results

The project’s final product was plans and specifications for seven fishing piers and a connecting boardwalk on the east side of the Cheboygan River. During the project period, partners from the City of Cheboygan, City of Cheboygan Recreation Commission, Cheboygan Visitor’s Bureau, Cheboygan Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Army Corps, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries and Parks and Recreation, and Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee worked to drive project design and plan public engagement.

The public and workgroup helped choose the open pile platform design out of three original options: open pile, Redi-Rock wall, and rock cribs. The open pile was chosen because of its aesthetic value, smaller environmental impact on the river’s habitat, the ability of wading anglers to get on and off the platforms, cost, and safety. Many people asked for some kind of railing, to ensure that children could also fish safely. One boating angler was concerned about lighting and the platforms narrowing the river—this was addressed by using lights with low lumen output and pulling back the two northernmost piers in the narrowest part of the river.

Products and Resources

Two press releases and one advertisement in the Cheboygan Tribune were generated to promote the project and invite the public to comment sessions. Two full public comment sessions were held on preliminary conceptual ideas and near-final drawings. Materials for both public comments were publicly available on the City of Cheboygan’s website. Additionally, Watershed Council staff presented the project at the Northern Inland Lakes Advisory Committee, and Duncan-Grass Bays Watershed Plan Committee.

<https://www.cheboygannews.com/news/20190326/new-fishing-access-coming-to-downtown>

<https://www.cheboygan.org/wp-content/media/fishing-access-project.pdf>

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Background/Overview

1. Was the project completed as originally intended? If not, indicate how the final outcome(s) differed from what was anticipated. Does your experience suggest that original expectations were realistic? What factors hindered or helped progress?

The final designs differed from the proposed designs by their orientation to the riverbank, construction materials, and number of piers. Sanders and Czapski Associations suggested the design cover the entire project site to ensure that a less mobile angler could fish the same area as someone with full mobility. The designs also accommodated anglers who wade parallel to the shore. The piers are also parallel to the shore to allow anglers to wade in between or in front of piers during low water. Wading anglers can also get on the piers to cast further into the water. Original expectations of piers perpendicular to the shore were not realistic and did not consider the factors that came out during the workgroup meeting. Having multiple partners working on the project made it better and ensured that it would have a wider range of users. This design has been vetted by the workgroup and the public. It rose to the top as the best possible design to be inclusive to shore-based anglers of all abilities as well as leave room for boating anglers.

The public engagement also differed from the original proposal. The workgroup decided to replace pre-survey questions with an open house showing conceptual options. This helped the designs accommodate citizen concerns and interests from the very beginning. Also, after the workgroup's initial meeting, most correspondence was carried out through email and conference call. This helped accommodate partners' location differences (up to 6 hours apart) and schedules.

Sanders and Czapski Associates was recommended to the workgroup based on past performance with the City and Michigan Department of Natural Resources. This recommendation allowed the design to take place sooner, rather than waiting for a request for qualifications process.

Outcomes

1. What activities were pursued in relationship to intended outcomes, and to what extent did you achieve the following intended outcomes listed in your proposal? (Merge intended outcomes from proposal.)

Outcome 1: Better understanding of feasibility of shore-based fishing access.

A site survey and conversations with the US Army Corps of Engineers about navigation channels helped understand the feasibility of the fishing piers. Because of the steep slope of the river channel, permanent fishing piers are designed to be at or near the grade of the adjoining riparian area, instead of using floating removable piers that would need long ramps to get down to them. Knowing the US Army Corps of Engineers must maintain a 60 foot navigation channel in the river, piers were oriented parallel to the shoreline to decrease their extent into the river.

Outcome 2: Incorporate community fishing needs.

Community fishing needs were identified by having a Michigan DNR Fisheries Biologist, creel surveyor, and local angler on the workgroup. They were able to share with the workgroup what they knew about current fishing practices. They engaged with other local anglers on their own. The main fishing needs that were identified were: more space due to overcrowding, easier accessibility for handicapped and aging anglers who used to fish in the same space, safer access for children, lighting and pier length that did not interfere for boat-based walleye fishing. These needs were incorporated by creating a design that allows an angler to fish the entire length of the shoreline, regardless of mobility level. A railing will keep children and people in wheelchairs safe. Wayfinding lighting with low lumens and adjusting the northernmost fishing pier more landward will accommodate the concerns of boat-based walleye anglers.

2. What audience(s) were you particularly hopeful of reaching? To what extent did you reach them? Did you receive any feedback?

We were hopeful of reaching past, current, and future anglers as well as those who could see the overall benefit to Cheboygan. We received feedback that anglers who used to fish there, but couldn't any longer due to their age or mobility level, would use the new fishing piers. Current anglers said they would enjoy more space and the ability to fish alongside their children and less mobile friends. We received a letter of support from the Michigan Disability Network saying that an accessible space would be a benefit to those with decreased mobility. Volunteer groups and the Cheboygan Chamber of Commerce/Visitors' Bureau saw how the project would add value to Cheboygan and increase its notoriety as a fishing hotspot. Watershed groups were interested in the fishing piers ability to protect the shoreline from further erosion.

3. What relationships or opportunities were developed or strengthened through the work?

Relationships between all partners were strengthened. Additional relationships identified are to the Bring it Cheboygan! group who worked on an adjoining trail during the project period. Additionally, relationships formed for different priorities including stormwater and green infrastructure. The project's plan to protect water quality started conversations about wetland setback and septic ordinances as well.

4. Whether they were intended or unintended, what do you consider the most important benefits or outcomes of this access project?

The most important outcome has been the ability to design the fishing piers for the maximum use by all. We strove for it to be an inclusive design. People are excited that there could be a new project on the horizon.

Site-specific Information

For each question below be as descriptive as possible. The GLFT uses this information for internal evaluation purposes as well as directing the public to the access site (via the Pier Michigan website: www.piermichigan.org). For projects that only conducted feasibility studies or engineering and design, respond to the questions with the anticipated benefits that occur if/when construction is completed.

5. Describe the access structure (i.e., length, width, location, design, etc.).

Seven 30' x 8' open pile wood fishing piers covering a 800 foot length of Cheboygan River shoreline. The piers have stepping stones with a railing down to the unimproved shoreline and a 34" aircraft cable railing surrounding them. Simple plank benches with transfer bars at intervals. A 6' wide boardwalk connects each pier to the aggregate path, which connects to a concrete walkway and parking lot. Downtown can be accessed from the same parking lot.
6. Answer the following questions:
 - a. How do visitors access the structure (e.g., driving directions to the parking lot, how far is the structure from the parking lot, what connects the parking lot to the structure, etc.)? From M-23 in Cheboygan, MI, go southwest on S B St. on the east side of the river. Take a slight left onto Cleveland Avenue. Turn west onto E Elm St. The fishing piers can be accessed from the trail that leads south from the parking lot near the pedestrian bridge at the Cheboygan Municipal Marina Boating Access Site at the end of Elm St.
 - b. What amenities are offered at the access site (e.g., restrooms, benches, barrier-free access, handicapped parking, lighting, etc.)? Restrooms are located across the pedestrian bridge on the west side of the river at the Chamber of Commerce. Benches are located on piers and all access is barrier-free. There is handicapped parking located near the pedestrian bridge. Wayfinding lighting is present on the aggregate path connecting the fishing piers.
 - c. What educational opportunities (e.g., interpretative signs) are offered at the site, if any? Signage includes information on currents, watersheds, fishing etiquette, fish species, and invasive species.
 - d. What species of fish are commonly caught at the site? During what months of the year is fishing best for each species? Commonly caught species are steelhead salmon, rainbow trout, walleye, bass, and sunfish. The warm water from the Great Lakes Tissue Plant outfall attracts fish year round. The river also

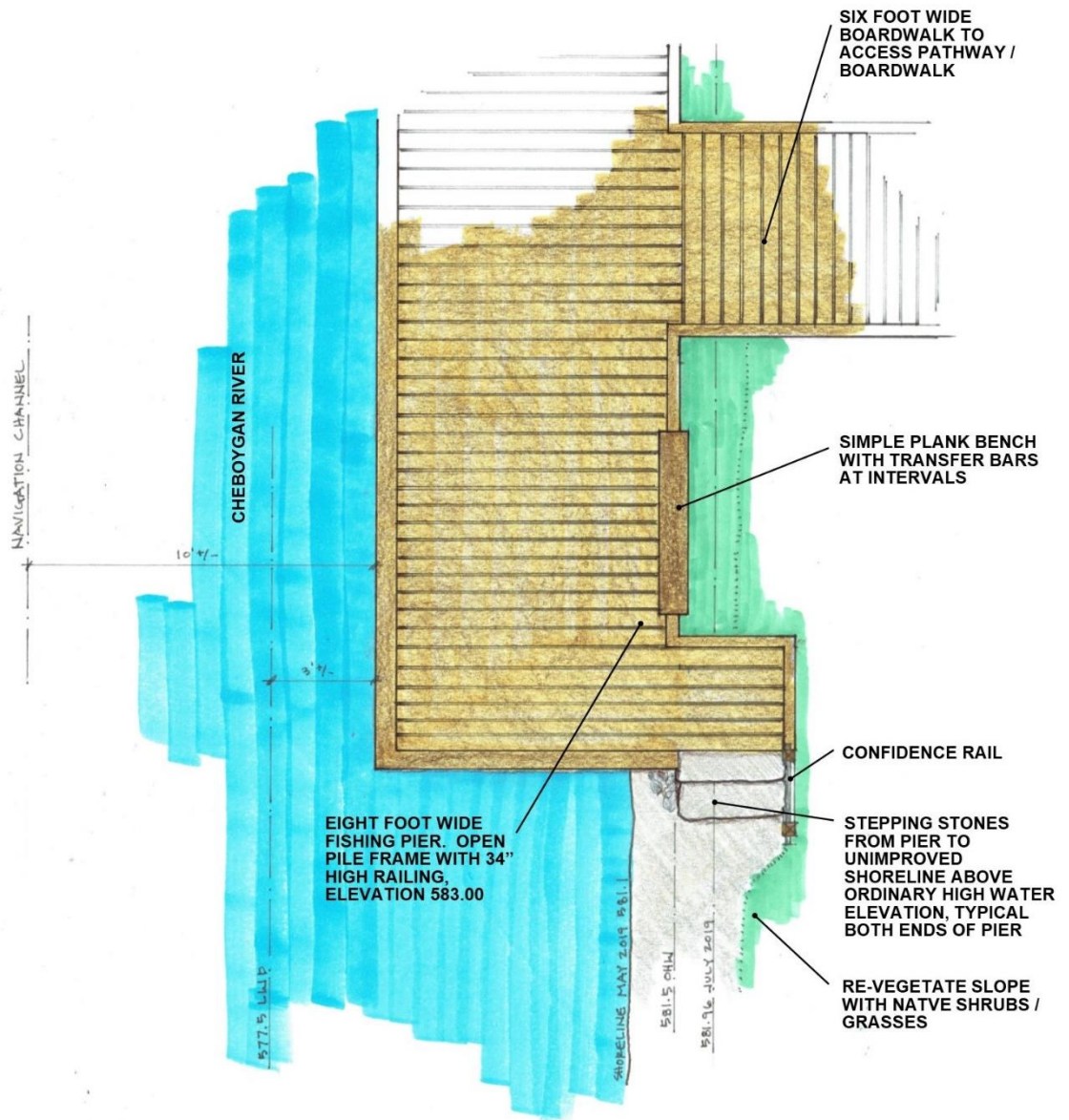
sees a spring and fall run of steelhead salmon. The best time to catch walleye is March through May.

- e. Does the DNR regularly stock any fish species at or near the site? If so, what species, at what time of year, and how often? The DNR stocks rainbow trout and Chinook salmon at the Cheboygan County Marina in the spring of each year. Walleye are stocked by a Tribe (does not specify which one) in the spring or early summer in the same spot annually.
- f. What tactics do you recommend for catching these species (e.g., small bags, bottom casting, minnows, wobbling plugs, Hot 'n Tots, etc.)? Casting in the middle of the current is a good tactic for catching all species. Steelhead salmon like spawn bags. Worms and artificial bait will also catch fish here.
- g. Where can anglers stay overnight near the access site (e.g., campgrounds, motels, hotels, B&Bs)? There are local hotels and B&Bs in addition to camping at the beautiful Cheboygan State Park.
- h. Is there anything else you would want to share with a potential visitor to the access site? The site is accessible for children and families and includes a nearby “storybook” walking trail.
- i. Were any project objectives met? Why or why not?

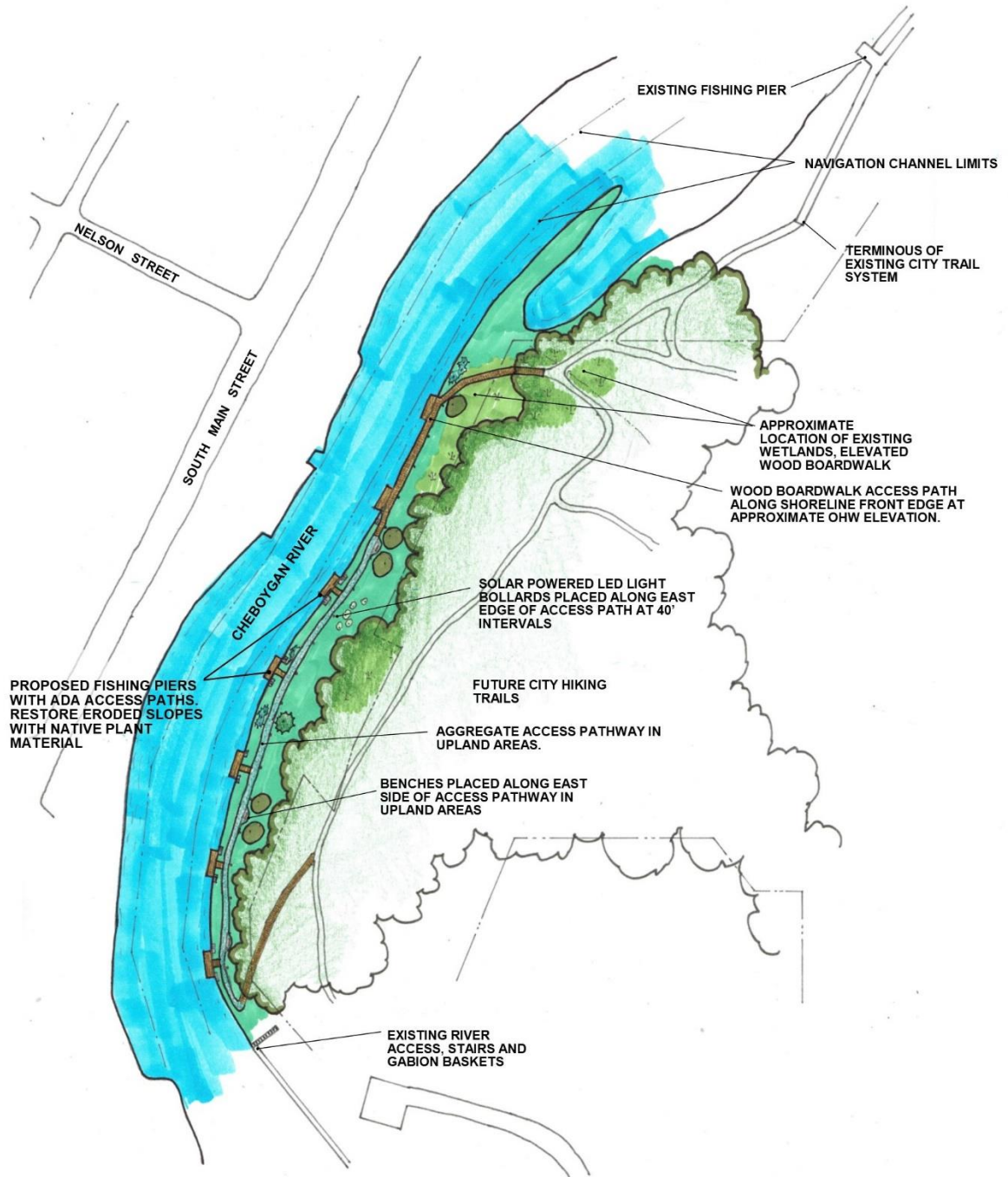
Project objectives were met. The design will allow for use of people across varying ages and mobility levels.

Pictures

1. Provide at least three photos of the completed project.



PLAN VIEW—OPEN PILE CONSTRUCTION
 SCALE: 1" = 3'-0"



PROPOSED FISHING PIERS WITH ADA ACCESS PATHS. RESTORE ERODED SLOPES WITH NATIVE PLANT MATERIAL

EXISTING FISHING PIER

NAVIGATION CHANNEL LIMITS

TERMINOUS OF EXISTING CITY TRAIL SYSTEM

APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF EXISTING WETLANDS. ELEVATED WOOD BOARDWALK

WOOD BOARDWALK ACCESS PATH ALONG SHORELINE FRONT EDGE AT APPROXIMATE OHW ELEVATION.

SOLAR POWERED LED LIGHT BOLLARDS PLACED ALONG EAST EDGE OF ACCESS PATH AT 40' INTERVALS

FUTURE CITY HIKING TRAILS

AGGREGATE ACCESS PATHWAY IN UPLAND AREAS.

BENCHES PLACED ALONG EAST SIDE OF ACCESS PATHWAY IN UPLAND AREAS

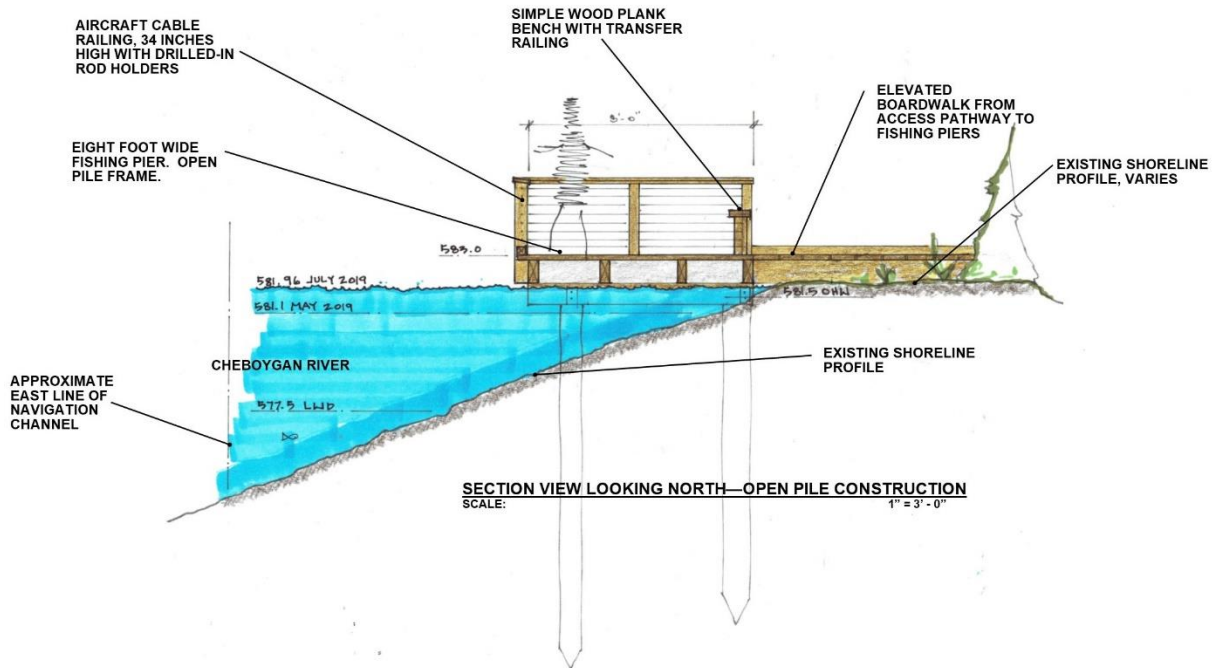
EXISTING RIVER ACCESS, STAIRS AND GABION BASKETS



PROPOSED SITE PLAN - CHEBOYGAN RIVER FISHING PIERS

SCALE:

1" = 100'



2. The Great Lakes Fishery Trust requires each project it funds to have suitable permanent public acknowledgement of GLFT assistance. The GLFT has provided this sign to you (via mail) and requires photo verification of the posting of the sign before it will process your final reimbursement request.
No sign was posted as construction has not started.

Related Efforts

3. Was this project a standalone effort or was there a broader effort beyond the part funded by the GLFT? Have other funders been involved either during the time of your GLFT grant or subsequently?

So far this project has been a standalone effort. Other funders will subsequently be involved for the construction phase, including the City of Cheboygan, and State of Michigan.

4. Has there been any spinoff work or follow-up work related to this project?

An Access to the Great Lakes Fishery construction grant was applied for in August 2019.

Reflections

5. Please describe any unanticipated benefits, challenges, surprises, and/or important lessons learned over the course of the project.

The Pier Michigan website does not work.

The benefit of this project was providing something for Cheboygan residents to look forward to and rally around. The project raised the awareness of Tip of the

Mitt Watershed Council to do additional work in the City of Cheboygan. Some residents dominated public meetings and I would like to learn how to facilitate those better.

6. What recommendations (if any) would you make to other project directors working on similar efforts or to the GLFT?

Make sure times for public meetings are variable enough that people who work or attend school can show up. Have plenty of opportunities to engage the public and cast a wide net looking for other groups who could show their support.