



**ACCESS TO THE FISHERY FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT  
BLACK RIVER PARK FISH CLEANING STATION – SOUTH HAVEN  
PROJECT # 2018.1814**

***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?**

For the most part, the project was completed as originally intended. A few things had to be addressed along the way:

At the project start, the city had just found out that a new sewer line that had been installed to the wastewater treatment plant had failing connections, and the extent of the damage or its potential impact on the proposed fish cleaning station was unknown at the time of release of bid documents. The City had to figure out how to proceed with the project while it was waiting for more information. It decided to go forward with bids. The results of the investigation showed that the fix that was needed wouldn't impact the project directly, so no changes to the plans were necessary. Future repairs of the sewer line will connect to the new fish cleaning station line.

Then, historic rain levels in June 2019 delayed the project substantially and it finished about 30 days later than outlined in the grant schedule. As part of the high water levels, the high water table at the park also created dewatering headaches for the contractor to overcome. Many pre-rain, easily accessible items turned into difficult to reach underwater items.

A 2015 geotechnical report used to design the fish cleaning station site indicated the helical piers would need 30' embedment length and 6000 ft/lb torque so each pile would support a working (service/allowable) load of 30 kips each. Work in the field, however, encountered more organic material than noted in the geotechnical report, which required the piers to be an additional 15' longer to get to the proper support load. Also, there was an existing fiber optic cable underground running through the fish cleaning station location and the supplier didn't have precise mapping of where it ran. The City decided to just pull the line and provide wifi instead of trying to figure out a reroute.

Construction bids for the project came in much higher than anticipated, in large part due to busy contractor schedules and high concrete prices in spring 2019. This was for several

projects across the area, not just at this site. The City chose to move forward with the project and came up with additional funding by soliciting donations, buying the fish cleaning tables directly, using reserve fund monies, and seeking a more cost effective pavilion provider.

## **Outcomes**

### **2. 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.)**

Five outcomes were intended with this project:

- i. Pre-construction activities - Grant award notification - achieved
  - ii. Design Phase – Topographic survey was performed. Design was finalized and specifications for construction were completed. Plans and specifications were reviewed by the City and representatives of the South Haven Steelheaders for final design approval. All steps were achieved
  - iii. Bidding and Notification – The project was advertised to bid on 2/21/2019 with a due date of March 19, 2019. Four bids were received. The City proceeded to award the contract to the low bidder, Balkema Construction. Contracts were issued in April 2019. We achieved a successful bidding process.
  - iv. Permitting – Building, SESC, utility, and site planning permits were acquired for the project.
  - v. Construction of Facilities – Balkema Construction mobilized equipment including a construction trailer at the site. They excavated for helical pier installation and connection to utilities/sewer. Helical piers were installed and construction of the concrete pad, access walks, and pavilion followed. Fencing and cleaning tables were installed last. Restoration and installation of signage completed the project. Final project goal of a new fish cleaning station was achieved.
- ### **3. What audience(s) were you particularly hopeful of reaching? To what extent did you reach them? Did you receive any feedback?**

We wanted to reach out to our entire fishing community. We feel we successfully reached them. Several came to the ribbon cutting ceremony and were eager to jump in to clean their catch right after it finished. There has been extremely positive feedback about the station on several Facebook pages and the City has received numerous emails saying the station is great. A few members of the fishing community say this is one of the best fish cleaning station in Michigan. The spaciousness is a big factor in their positive response.

### **4. What relationships or opportunities were developed or strengthened through the work?**

Our relationship with the local fishing community improved a great deal through the project. They are very pleased with the results.

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

The most important benefit is helping the fishing community feel appreciated and supported. As a waterfront community, there are many outdoor recreation opportunities available and it sometimes seemed to the anglers that they were the neglected family member. The City's support of their pursuits is a very important benefit of this project.

Another important benefit was the increase in ADA access to the facility. The pull through drop off lane to an accessible entrance dramatically improves access for all mobility levels compared to the previous station.

### ***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](http://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.

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

The new fish cleaning station is a 24'x44' steel pavilion structure with two tables that include 8 stations for fish cleaning, two of which are wheelchair accessible. The station is located at the 16.42 acre Black River Park, off Dunkley Avenue in South Haven, Michigan. The park provides about a half mile of shore based fishing on the Black River and also has boat launch facilities on site. Lake Michigan is approximately one mile away. The station is accessible via both the fee parking portion and non-fee portion of the park and car and boat trailer parking is available.

The design includes a pavilion structure over two large stainless steel cleaning tables on concrete floors that allow for a wide range of maneuverability. The tables include sprayers, grinders, cutting boards, cooler washing area, emergency grinder stop buttons, and draining boards. A fish scaler is available. Also part of the design is LED lighting, aluminum fencing on top of a masonry wall, and a lockable gate. There is an ADA drop off ramp to access the building and an accessible pathway to the restroom building. Amenities supporting the station are trash cans, a vending machine, educational signage, a DNR Freezer, and hose bib connection.

**7. 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.)?**

The project site is in South Haven city limits, in Black River Park, which sits on the Black River about one mile upstream from the coast of Lake Michigan. It's in the northwest portion of Van Buren County in southwest Michigan. It is accessed from Dunkley Avenue which can be reached by either I-196/US 31, Blue Star Highway/A-2, or CR 388.

To get there by car, take I-196 to exit 20. Head west on Phoenix Street. Turn right (north) onto Blue Star Highway/A-2. Turn left (west) onto E. Wells Street. Follow East Wells as it becomes Dunkley Avenue. There will be a large parking lot on the north side of the street. Turn right and follow the access road to the boat launch parking lot. You can park either within the park for a fee, or park outside of the park for free. The cleaning station is on the southeast corner of the park, near the restroom building. Parking is available adjacent to the fish cleaning building. ADA drop off access and sidewalks connect users to the facility from all directions.

- b. What amenities are offered at the access site (e.g., restrooms, benches, barrier-free access, handicapped parking, lighting, etc.)?** Amenities include: restrooms, showers, picnic tables, kayak/canoe launch, skid piers, boat launch, boat trailer and car parking, ADA parking, accessible fishing dock, accessible walkways, trash cans, and lighting. Several retail/food shops are within a one mile radius.

- c. What educational opportunities (e.g., interpretative signs) are offered at the site, if any?**

Signage about the Black River watershed, the common fish species found in the Black River and Lake Michigan each season, and the history of the Celery Pond wetlands and its associated creek is present.

- d. What species of fish are commonly caught at the site? During what months of the year is fishing best for each species?**

Anglers catch Steelhead, Coho salmon, perch, Chinook salmon, rainbow trout, lake trout and brown trout. Shore and pier fishing adds walleye, catfish, paddlefish, whitefish, drum, sucker, carp, smallmouth bass and largemouth bass.

- 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?**

Yes. In the past 5 years, the DNR has stocked the following:

Rainbow Trout – March/early April 2015-2019 – Black River in South Haven

Walleye – late May/early June 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019 – Black River in South Haven

Chinook Salmon – May 2015, 2016, 2018 – Black River in South Haven

Brown Trout – April/May 2015-2017 - Black River in South Haven

- f. What tactics do you recommend for catching these species (e.g., small bags, bottom casting, minnows, wobbling plugs, Hot ‘n Tots, etc.)?**

Per the DNR, these methods are recommended for fishing:

Rainbow trout in the Black River – live bait, artificial lures and flies

Rainbow trout in Lake Michigan - live bait, artificial lures and flies, trolling or by fishing with bait or jigging through the ice in winter

Walleye – Early in the season, fishing bottom with lead-head jigs tipped with minnows or with plastic grub bodies is the top technique, but as the season progresses, trolling with plugs (such as Rapalas and Wiggle Warts) or spoons or with spinners and crawler harnesses becomes the preferred method. Slow trolling baits at a variety of depths is important as, although walleyes are usually associated with the bottom, the most active fish are sometimes suspended in the water column. But walleyes can readily be taken on live bait; nightcrawlers drifted along the bottom, leeches suspended under a slip bobber or minnows fished on a tight line will all produce. In fall, jigging with spoons in deep water is a popular technique.

Chinook Salmon – Lake Michigan - downriggers and lead-core or copper line to get spoons, dodgers and flies or cut bait rigs down to the strike zone.

Chinook Salmon – Black River - artificial baits -- spoons, spinners and plugs – as well as with spawn, fished on the bottom in bags or in chunks of cut skein under a bobber.

Brown Trout – Lake Michigan - wade, fish from piers with live bait or artificial lures, or who troll in largely inshore water with imitation minnows or other plugs.

Brown Trout – Black River - live bait as well as spinners or artificial minnows. Best on rainy or overcast days or after dark with insect hatches, especially the giant Michigan mayfly (*Hexagenia limbata*). But large streamers and big splashy surface flies, such as mouse patterns, produce well, too.

- g. Where can anglers stay overnight near the access site (e.g., campgrounds, motels, hotels, B&Bs)?** Numerous accommodations are available near the access site. A list can be found here:

[https://www.southhaven.org/accommodations?filter\\_accommodationTypeID=&filter\\_amenityID=](https://www.southhaven.org/accommodations?filter_accommodationTypeID=&filter_amenityID=)

Accommodations include hotels, bed & breakfasts, resorts, vacation rentals, KOA campground, an RV park, and motels.

- h. Is there anything else you would want to share with a potential visitor to the access site?**

The fish cleaning station is in the center of the downtown area, and visitors can easily reach restaurants, entertainment, and other recreation by foot, bike or car. Visitors can visit beaches on Lake Michigan, museums, playgrounds, a skate park, trails, shops and many other diversions. Public wifi is being added to the downtown area in late 2019/early 2020. The city hopes to have more tournaments at the park with this new amenity in place.

- i. Were any project objectives met? Why or why not?**

Yes, all project objectives were met.

**Pictures**

**8. Provide at least three photos of the completed project.**











9. 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.

Sign is visible on right side of photo.



### ***Related Efforts***

10. 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?

This was a standalone project, although the City has been steadily working toward making improvements all throughout Black River Park to fulfill its Black River Park Master Plan vision. In 2019, two new skid piers replaced old skid piers with the assistance of DNR MNRTF funds.

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

No.

### ***Reflections***

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

Dealing with the high water levels was a challenge not only around the project site, but it also affected the access roads to the site, which also flooded. Figuring out how to keep the project moving while also dealing with flooding all throughout the community was tricky.

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

We would recommend providing the maximum amount of time possible for the construction window. The unanticipated amount of rain in June significantly impacted the timing of the project and having more buffer would have helped.