

Sturgeon Bay Prepares Bid to become NERR Site



The City of Sturgeon Bay's newly appointed Ad Hoc NERR Advisory Committee is busy preparing a bid for the City to become the home of the bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR). NERRs are a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and coastal states to study, protect, and conserve nationally significant coastal and estuary systems to support the health of a reserves' ecosystem, economy, and communities. The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay led the effort to establish a NERR in the region and is currently engaged in the competitive site selection process.

Sturgeon Bay's NERR Advisory Committee is led by Co-chairs Caitlin Oleson and Mark Holey. Oleson was a member of a Door County grassroots group who wanted to bring a university research presence to Door County because water is so important to the economics of the county. Her efforts led to a grant from the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program that supported the feasibility study, conducted through UWGB and lead by Oleson, which ultimately resulted in the NOAA's decision to bring a NERR to the bay of Green Bay.

Co-chair Mark Holey, a fish biologist and avid trout fisherman, led the Green Bay office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which afforded him the opportunity to work on a Great Lakes-wide basis to conserve native fish species. Upon his retirement, after 39 years of public service, Mark was recognized with the Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor to be granted by the department of Interior, which oversee the U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

Working with Oleson and Holey are Committee members Laurel Hauser, Gregg Meissner, Matthew Peter, and Charlie Henriksen. The Committee meets regularly at The Crossroads at Big Creek and meetings are open to the public.

The Committee has collected 17 Letters of Support, two of which are resolutions, from individuals and organizations including The Crossroads at Big Creek, Door County Land Trust, Door County Maritime Museum, Door County Community Foundation, Door County Economic Development Corporation, Destination Sturgeon Bay, Destination Door County, Sturgeon Bay Sport Fishing Association, and municipalities throughout the County. In addition to their work to gain support from the community, the group researches site evaluation criteria to evaluate existing publicly owned land within the City of Sturgeon Bay for construction of a NERR Visitor Center.

The City of Sturgeon Bay is at the center of some of the highest aquatic biodiversity anywhere in the Great Lakes due to its proximity to both Green Bay and Lake Michigan – from areas of the Fox River impacted by agriculture and industry to near-pristine bays and estuaries along the northern shores of Door County. Twenty-nine State Natural Areas and more than 26,000 acres of protected land that support fish and wildlife habitat are found in Door County.

Becoming the home to the NERR for the greater Green Bay Ecosystem will bring benefits to the City of Sturgeon Bay, such as an exemplary visitor center providing international exposure and a powerful tourist draw, increased research dollars and assistance stewarding local aquatic treasures, local economic development, educational resources, and unique recreational opportunities.

To learn more about the bay of Green Bay NERR designation process, a free presentation by Emily Tyner, Director of Freshwater Strategy at UW-Green Bay, hosted by the Door County Environmental Council will be held on July 27th at 7pm at the Door county Maritime Museum, 120 N. Madison Ave., in Sturgeon Bay or via Zoom at dcec-wi.org. Additional information regarding the City of Sturgeon Bay's effort to become the next NERR site can be found at the City website sturgeonbaywi.org.