

# Shiawasse River Restoration Project

In the spring of 2005 it became obvious to all of us that we were in danger of losing the dam. After years of effort to find funding to restore the dam it became just as obvious that no one was going to help us with the costly upgrades and repairs that were needed. When emergency repairs were needed to keep the dam from failing, a number of private citizens donated or pledged money needed to make those repairs and we were able to avoid what otherwise would have been a disaster. It was about this time that the Village learned that funding might be available to help us solve this problem once and for all, and to perhaps improve our river in the process.

We have all probably heard that dams are not good for the ecological health of a river. This is probably the main reason why no one was willing to help us restore the dam, they would rather that it just be removed. Obviously, just removing the dam and losing the Showboat is not a realistic option. So the trick is, how do you remove the dam but keep the backwaters. In recent years the Minnesota DNR has perfected what is known as a Rock Ramp for passing walleye and other non-jumpers over dams. The Rock Ramp is essentially a man made rapids that is designed to provide the right combination of resting pools and small riffles so they can be easily navigated by walleye and other fish moving up and down the river. By starting the top of the rapids at the height of the existing dam, the backwaters behind the dam remain unchanged.

The key to designing a rock ramp is to keep the speed that the water flows down the rapids slow enough to ensure it does not create a velocity barrier that blocks fish passage. Walleye are relatively slow swimmers and so are particularly susceptible to velocity barriers. In order to slow the water, a series of boulder weirs are built across the rock ramp. Deeper pools of relatively still water form between the weirs, giving the fish a safe place to rest before making the effort to cross over the next weir. These pools and riffles create habitat for more than just walleye. In Minnesota they are also used to create new spawning habitat for Lake Sturgeon. Currently efforts are underway to restore lake sturgeon to the Great Lakes basin. Part of that effort includes research to determine where these 40-50 year old fish may still be spawning. The orange buoys scattered below the dam this spring are attached to egg mats that have been placed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife and are part of that research.

Changing the focus of our efforts from Dam Restoration to River Restoration has opened doors to funding that was not available to us before. It has also given us the opportunity to make an improvement to the river that will be felt well beyond our community. MDNR Fisheries believes that this will ultimately lead to habitat improvement and increased walleye populations all the way from Owosso to Saginaw Bay.

*We need your help to ensure that this program is successful. We are in need of funds to pay for the engineering portion of this project. WadeTrim (our engineering firm) has assured us that grants are available to fund the construction phase of this project. We need to come up with approximately \$105,000. We have received pledge commitments from many dedicated citizens, but are short of our goal. Please consider donating to this cause. The Shiawassee River Restoration Project affects so many in our community and communities upstream and downstream. Please be a part of the effort to improve our beautiful Shiawassee River for our kids and their kids to enjoy for years to come.*

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***Shiawassee River Restoration Project***  
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