

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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The Nature Conservancy and Partners to Restore Sodus Bay Wetlands for People and Nature

Sustain Our Great Lakes grant will help revitalize more than 115 acres of coastal wetland habitat along Sodus Bay

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – The Nature Conservancy has been awarded a \$193,521 grant from the Sustain Our Great Lakes program to restore and enhance more than 115 acres of wetland habitat in Sodus Bay by reconnecting floodplain habitat and assessing road-stream crossings that prevent fish from reaching spawning habitats.

The effort is a partnership among Save our Sodus, the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF), the Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) and The Nature Conservancy. With contributions from partners and private funders, the total budget for the project amounts to more than \$362,000.

“Sustain Our Great Lakes and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) have been critical partners in protecting wetlands,” said Jim Howe, executive director of The Nature Conservancy’s Central and Western New York Chapter. “Healthy wetlands filter our water, absorb storm surges and provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife. They’re vital to maintaining a healthy Bay and the benefits it provides—recreational boating, fishing, swimming and tourism—to our local economy.

The Nature Conservancy will first assess the effectiveness of 10 existing road stream crossings in improving passage for fish to upstream spawning habitat. Then, beginning in winter 2017 when the wetland mat is still frozen, an excavator will be used to create a more natural wetland with a meandering stream corridor, at least two acres of backwater potholes and new channels that connect streams to their floodplains. The revitalized wetland will offer new and improved habitat for species like northern pike, black ducks, green winged teal, least bitterns and potentially even black terns, a NYS-threatened species that hasn’t been observed breeding in the area in 10 years.

“The southern Sodus Bay wetland is one of only a few remaining coastal wetland complexes in the Lake Ontario basin,” said Gregg Sargis, director of ecological management for The Nature Conservancy. In addition to restoring wetland habitats for fish and wildlife, this project will make the shoreline of Lake Ontario more resilient for people by absorbing storm surge, increasing flood storage and reducing the amount of nutrients and pollutants entering Sodus Bay.”

"This wetland restoration project will be a great benefit to the entire watershed community, economically and environmentally," said Save Our Sodus Board Member Edward Leroux. "Not only will the project benefit fish and wildlife, but the improved functioning of the wetland will significantly reduce nutrient loading from tributaries flowing to the Bay. Projects such as this one are an important

contribution to the preservation of our recreation- and tourism-based economy as well as shore owners."

"This project will also build upon invasive species management efforts currently underway across Sodus Bay while helping to deepen partnership for the benefit of the region," said Lindsay Gerstenslager, District Manager for the Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District. "The District is glad to have worked with many partners to improve water quality and invasive species management over the years, and adding The Nature Conservancy to these efforts will broaden our scope and expertise."

"We are excited to work with The Nature Conservancy on this important project," added Gregory Boyer, Director of Great Lakes Research and Professor of Biochemistry at SUNY-ESF. "While this project will improve fish habitat in the wetlands, we are hoping it will have an equally important role in limiting the nutrients entering Sodus Bay via Sodus Creek. This should lead to long-term benefits such as improved water quality and a reduction in harmful algal blooms that have plagued the Bay in past years."

Additional private funds will be needed to complete this vital environmental restoration initiative. The Helen & Ritter Shumway Foundation has provided a grant in support of the effort, and The Nature Conservancy will be looking to raise additional funds over the next year.

Sustain Our Great Lakes is a public-private partnership that supports habitat restoration in the Great Lakes basin. Administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a significant portion of program funding is provided by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), a federal program designed to protect, restore and enhance the Great Lakes ecosystem. In 2016, the Sustain Our Great Lakes program awarded The Nature Conservancy \$1.19 million for Great Lakes coastal wetland conservation projects in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and New York.

[Learn more about Nature Conservancy projects](#) across the Great Lakes basin that received Sustain Our Great Lakes funding this year.

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The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. The Nature Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide. In Central and Western New York, The Nature Conservancy has protected nearly 100,000 acres for people and nature and owns and manages preserves totaling 30,000 acres. www.nature.org