

County receives state grant to help reduce pollution flowing into Grand River

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Sand Creek used to be a coldwater trout stream but the creek has gotten overgrown and full of material that has limited its flow. (*Jeffrey Cunningham/Mlive.com*)

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By **Jeffrey Cunningham**

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The upper Sand Creek watershed in Chester, Tallmadge and Wright townships is targeted for restoration under work being done by the Ottawa County Water Resource Office.

The 22-mile-long Sand Creek has been identified by the Ottawa County Conservation District as among the top 10 priority Grand River sub-watersheds for restoration.

The Ottawa County Water Resource Office has been awarded the \$600,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's "Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Grants" program.

The funding is designed to reduce "nonpoint" source pollution within the upper Sand Creek watershed. "Nonpoint" source pollution is caused when rain, snowmelt or wind carry pollutants off the land and into lakes, streams, wetlands, and other water bodies, according to Ottawa County Resource Commissioner Joe Bush.

Sand Creek is a coldwater stream and was designated as a trout stream by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources many years ago. "I have been told that it was a great fishing stream years ago," said Bush.

Over the years, the aquatic life has diminished and the stream has become less productive, Bush said. "It would be nice to get the stream healthy."

Unfortunately, the coldwater fishery is no longer supported due to excessive sedimentation, siltation, nutrients, temperature and flow regime alterations, according to a 2015 study.

Sand Creek and its pollutants flow into the lower Grand River and ultimately Lake Michigan.

The Water Resource Office previously received a grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality in 2014 for \$260,919 to fund a study of the feasibility of restoring the upper Sand Creek Watershed. The work was done on 2014-2015 by GEI Consultants, of Grand Rapids.

The results of that study will allow Water Resource officials and consultants to begin the work to restore the health of the watershed.

The project is aimed at reducing polluted sediment reaching Sand Creek by stabilizing the unnaturally eroding stream banks, restoring the filtering wetlands and promoting the farm bill pollution prevention practices.

Bush said the county will start the restoration work this fall at the head of Sand Creek on the south side of Harding Avenue east of 16th Avenue in Chester Township. The grant will allow the county to restore five miles of the watershed.

The improvements along the creek are aimed at reducing sediment by an estimated 1,250 tons per year, improving water quality throughout the watershed.

The grant is funded under the federal Clean Water Act and the Clean Michigan Initiative - Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Grants Program.

Bush said his office is already seeking additional grants that would allow the county to eventually restore the entire Sand Creek watershed.