

A Delisting “Wirth” Celebrating

October 2014 Snapshots

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Theodore Wirth Park is the Minneapolis Park and Rec Board’s largest park. At 759 acres the park, located in the City of Minneapolis and Golden Valley, boasts year-round recreational activities, many of which occur on or near Wirth Lake. It’s a popular local destination for swimming, fishing and boating. And for the past twelve years, the lake has been on the state’s impaired list because of high phosphorus levels. Elevated phosphorus affects water clarity and can cause algal blooms. Not only do these water quality issues impact the lake and its aquatic life, they also affect recreational use.

Removing a water body from the state’s impaired list can take years of work. In Wirth Lake’s unique case, just a few projects helped tip the balance. The impetus for the latest project came when the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission determined that seasonal overflows from Bassett Creek, which flows through the park, were a major contributor of phosphorus to the lake. Through careful analysis of phosphorus loading to the lake, the Commission’s TMDL study identified the Wirth Lake Outlet Modification Project as a key implementation project. The Bassett Creek outlet structure, which controls flow from the creek to the lake, was modified to achieve the phosphorus reductions needed to meet the lake’s water quality goals.



Construction of the outlet structure, 2012.

A modified outlet structure was installed in 2012 that operates based on water levels in the creek. Now when creek levels are high enough to result in back flows into the lake, the gate closes, preventing the backflow. Thanks to the project, which was partially funded through a BWSR Clean Water Fund grant, Wirth Lake has met its water quality goals, and park users are already seeing increased clarity.

“Public response has been very positive,” BCWMC Administrator Laura Jester said. “We’re seeing improved water quality, we’re seeing benefits to aquatic life, and we’re seeing a lake that recreational users are once again enthusiastic about using.”



Wirth Lake was removed from the state’s Impaired Waters list in July.

Partnerships were critical to the successful delisting. \$175,000 in local funds were leveraged from a variety of sources in addition to the \$75,000 BWSR Clean Water Fund grant to make the project happen. Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission led the efforts, with construction of the project by the City of Golden Valley, and with the help of the City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, BWSR, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

“The delisting is a testament to the focus and resolve of everyone involved, from residents providing comments and attending public hearings to the agencies, cities, and organizations involved in the monitoring, planning, and implementing of projects,” BCWMC Chair Jim de Lambert said.