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## After decades of planning, work begins on key St. Marys River restoration project

**Sault Ste. Marie, Mich** – A key project to restore the Little Rapids portion of the St. Marys River kicked off today after decades of planning by local, state, federal and tribal partners. The Little Rapids Restoration Project will construct a new bridge to replace two undersized causeway culverts between Sault Ste. Marie and Sugar Island, which will result in reconnected water flow, improved habitat for native fish populations, revitalized tourism and sport fishing opportunities on the river, and better community access for fishing, bird watching, and recreation via a new pedestrian walkway.

The project is also likely to be the final step toward formally removing the St. Marys River from the list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern -- the worst “toxic hotspots” in the region. \$9.4 million in Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funding is being provided for the project through a regional partnership between the Great Lakes Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

“This remarkable project will benefit the community, the environment, and the regional economy,” said Jon Allan, chair of the Great Lakes Commission and director of the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes.

“Congratulations to all of our incredible partners for coming together to make this project a reality. We are grateful for the continued bipartisan support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which has funded more than 550 restoration projects across Michigan -- reducing threats to public health, creating recreational opportunities, and strengthening the economy in our waterfront communities.”

“The Little Rapids restoration project is a perfect example of the enormous value of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in strengthening our local communities and protecting natural resources for future generations,” said Rep. Dan Benishek (R-MI), who serves on the Great Lakes Task Force and spoke at today’s event. “The Great Lakes are absolutely critical to our culture and economy in Michigan, and I congratulate all those involved in this important work.”

The St. Marys River was designated as an Area of Concern in 1987 after decades of pollution and habitat degradation. Planning for this restoration project began in the early 1990s when the Soo Area Sportsmen’s Club recognized the opportunity to boost the local economy by improving sportfish habitat in the Little Rapids area. In 2011, the Chippewa County Road Commission, Lake Superior State University and the Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning and Development Commission were awarded GLRI funding for this project by the Great Lakes Commission and NOAA, which are working together to implement high-priority habitat restoration projects in U.S. AOCs. “NOAA is pleased to support the incredible work taking place in Areas of Concern around the Great Lakes through our partnership with the Great Lakes Commission,” said John Catena, Northeast and Great Lakes

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Regional supervisor for NOAA's Restoration Center. "This St. Marys River project is truly a community effort, and it is an honor to be involved in restoring a vital ecological and economic resource."

"Our community has been working together on this project for decades and we are very excited to see construction beginning," said Bud Willis, president of the Soo Area Sportsmen's Club. "Our dream of restoring more than 50 acres of sport fish habitat to the St. Marys and supporting a world-class fishery are finally becoming a reality and we can't wait to get out on the river." Other partners assisting with the project include the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, Michigan Departments of Environmental Quality and Natural Resources, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The overall restoration program is guided by the St. Marys River Binational Public Advisory Council.

This project is underway and construction is anticipated to be complete by November 2016. Payne and Dolan, the project contractor, completed the temporary road for traffic this spring and is in the process of beginning construction of the bridge. A detailed timeline and additional information about the Little Rapids project can be found [here](#).

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*The Great Lakes Commission, led by chairman Jon Allan, director of the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors' appointees, state legislators, and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a "Declaration of Partnership." The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Learn more at [www.glc.org](http://www.glc.org).*