

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT COORDINATING A COLLABORATIVE AND ADAPTIVE HABITAT RESTORATION INITIATIVE

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In the Great Lakes region, the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers historically served as some of the most important spawning grounds for fish such as lake sturgeon, walleye, lake whitefish and cisco. However, construction of commercial shipping channels removed or covered highly productive fish spawning areas, contributing to fish population declines. In 2001, a consortium of partners began working to mitigate for historical habitat losses by creating fish spawning reefs made of rock rubble placed on the river bottom. After establishing and studying six reef restoration projects, a number of lessons have emerged about both the bio-physical and social aspects of habitat restoration planning and implementation.

This talk will focus on the human aspects of coordinating a diverse team, facilitating an effective adaptive management process, and engaging key stakeholders to achieve desired restoration outcomes. We will describe the roles within the restoration team and the internal and external factors that enabled the group to work together for more than twelve years without a formal agreement. Although a team with diverse expertise and affiliations has been invaluable, group coordination and decision making can be complicated and each stage of a project presents distinct challenges for collaboration. Over time, we have documented our adaptive management process and have identified strategies for each stage that will likely be applicable for other coastal management issues that require multi-organization collaborations, adaptive planning, and targeted outreach. Examples will be provided about how the restoration team has responded to hurdles and improved the collaborative process and specific techniques used to restore fish habitat. Lessons learned have been summarized in a recent publication for practitioners, which will be available for participants.