

# Restoring the Root River



## RUMORS AND RESPONSES TO THE HORLICK DAM REMOVAL PLAN

EXCERPTS FROM THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS DECEMBER 2023 REPORT

- 1. WON'T ALL THE SEDIMENT FLUSH DOWNSTREAM AND CLOG THE WEIR & HARBOR? **No. Most sediment will be kept in place. Some will flow downstream in a managed process.**  
"An incremental removal of the Horlick Dam to ensure that restored sediment transport does not exceed the average annual sediment budget for a stream and watershed of this size and type. Sowing of temporary native cover crops on exposed banks, new upland soils or fine sediment bars that become exposed during the incremental dewatering and removal process." (Exec. Summary, Pg. 1)**
- 2. WHY WEREN'T OTHER OPTIONS EXPLORED? **Other options to dam removal were explored in 2014 (SEWRPC) and 2020 (USACE). USACE's recommended option echoes that of SEWRPC.**  
"After taking into considerations costs, habitat benefits, USACE policy, risk and uncertainty along with plan acceptability, completeness, efficiency, and effectiveness, the NER plan (dam removal option) was selected." (Exec. Summary, Pg. 1). Ch. 5 of Root River Plan (2014) explores six dam options and recommends removal.**
- 3. WE WON'T BE ABLE TO PADDLE IN OUR BACKYARD ANYMORE. **False. Paddling will be different, and more of the river will be accessible to everyone, especially the communities downstream.**  
"The impoundment provides relatively calm conditions that are easy to navigate for beginning level paddlers, so implementation of the recommended plan could make it more difficult for beginning paddlers to navigate the river. However, many of the impacts discussed above could also provide paddling benefits to more advanced paddlers." (Pg. 94) "Additional beneficial impacts to recreation include expanded paddling and kayaking opportunities. With the removal of the dam, paddlers would be able to continue their journey downstream up to 6 miles to Lake Michigan." (Pg. 45)**
- 4. REMOVING THE DAM WILL HURT ENDANGERED SPECIES LIKE SAND HILL CRANES. **False. The area affected is not Sand Hill Crane habitat and they are not endangered.**  
"... the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined the recommended alternative (removal) would have 'no effect' on federally listed species or their designated critical habitat." (Executive Summary, Pg. 3)**
- 5. ISN'T IT CHEAPER TO JUST MODIFY THE DAM? **No. With dam removal, the County share for all items to remove the dam: planning, design, construction, and restoration is estimated to be \$275,000, with no ongoing maintenance costs needed. If the County were to consider an option that keeps the dam in place, the feasibility study and environmental document alone would cost a minimum of \$275,000.** "Based on plan formulation analyses, study problems, study objectives, acceptability to the non-federal sponsor, and meeting cost effectiveness criteria, it is recommended to carry forward alternative plan (A) Dam Removal as the NER plan." (Executive Summary, Pg. 1 and Pg. 109)**
- 6. WHY CHANGE THE HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM THAT'S ALREADY THERE? **The dam water is dirty. Habitat upstream of the dam is classified as "very poor," but moves to "excellent" if removed.**  
"EX HSI scores for the Root River study reaches upstream of the dam are 26 near the boat launch, and 28 near river mile 7, both of which are classified as "very poor" stream habitat." The dam removal project would dramatically increase the current habitat unit score of 27 ("very poor") to 87 ("excellent") in the upstream section. Downstream scores would move up from 84 to 87, which is already "excellent". (Fig. 10)**
- 7. OUR SHORELINE WILL BE MUCK FOREVER! **False. Bare ground will be seeded, and vegetation will grow back within months after drawdown. Shorelines should be fully grown in about 2 years.**  
"As the impoundment water levels slowly drop, new exposed sediment flats would be planted with an appropriate native cover crop under best management practice measures to ensure stability and compliance with water quality regulations." (pg. 28)**

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8. **WHY CAN'T A FISH LADDER OR BYPASS BE INSTALLED? Both were tried in the past but failed. Other options are costly, unsafe, and hard to maintain.** "Previously constructed bypass channels have shown to be susceptible to clogging with sediment and debris, which significantly drives up O&M costs. Fish ladders tend to not provide for small native fishes such as juveniles of all species, minnows, madtoms, darters, etc. Also, this alternative would not restore or improve habitat and water quality conditions in the river." (pg.30)
9. **IS DAM REMOVAL REALLY THE BEST OPTION? Yes. Removal is the best for the environment, recreation, and all taxpayers of Racine County.** "Alternative (A) Dam Removal clearly maximizes benefits towards the federal objective, has the lowest federal and non-federal expenditure, and requires no operations and maintenance since the alternative restores the natural feature by removing a manmade structure and returning riverine processes." (Pg. 42)
10. **REMOVING THE DAM WILL INCREASE FLOODING DOWNSTREAM. No. The dam is "flow in / flow out," which means the dam doesn't control flood events. The dam is currently considered unsafe by the DNR, and if a significant flood event occurs, people and businesses downstream would be at risk.** "Because the existing dam functionally does not provide any flood storage, there will be no noticeable impacts to base flows or flood flows because of the dam removal." (Pg. 44)
11. **RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES WOULD END IF THE DAM IS REMOVED. No. Better sportfishing, fly-fishing, and paddling accessibility will likely increase after the dam is removed.** "Overall, implementation of the recommended plan is likely to result in a shift from slack water paddling limited to the impounded section of the river to more free-flowing paddling conditions with connectivity to the rest of the river, including potential access all the way to Lake Michigan." (Pg. 45)
12. **IS THE WATER QUALITY UPSTREAM OF THE DAM REALLY DIRTY? Yes. The water upstream of the dam has toxic algae and is designated as "impaired" by the DNR.** "The Root River upstream of Horlick Dam to river mile 20.5 is considered to have impaired water as determined by WIDNR. The impairments for this reach include chronic aquatic toxicity and degraded biological community." (Pg. 68)
13. **THERE WILL BE LESS FISH (AND FISHING) IF THE DAM IS REMOVED. False. The area will allow for more migratory sport fish like pike, trout and salmon to pass into 160 miles of the Root River currently blocked by the dam.** "Upstream from the dam, the river supports a poor-quality fishery with relatively few species. This section of the stream is dominated by species tolerant of poor water quality, with few top predators (SEWRPC, 2014)." (Pg. 79) "Overall, the dam removal alternative would not have any direct or indirect, short-term or long-term significant adverse effects to the study area's fish population but would instead increase species richness and abundance through improved riverine hydraulics by removing the most significant fish passage obstruction on the Root River." (Pg. 81)
14. **MIGRATORY BIRDS WON'T COME AROUND ANYMORE. False. Migratory birds love shoreline habitat after the draw down.** "The restoration of the stream channel morphology will aid in the development of heterogenous riparian habitat. This increase in habitat can provide stopover areas for migratory birds and diverse year-round habitat for resident bird species." (Pg. 82)

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15. **WILL THIS PROJECT NEGATIVELY AFFECT UNDERSERVED PEOPLE? No.** Dam removal will not adversely affect underserved people downstream, but will make it more accessible to everyone. "...no adverse effects to any low-income populations and/or minority populations are expected." (Pg. 86)
16. **THE ASTHETIC VIEWS FROM MY PROPERTY WILL BE GONE. False.** The unhealthy impoundment views will change to a natural river system. Studies have shown increases in property values when impoundments are removed as the views become even more scenic. "... no direct or indirect, short-term, or long-term significant adverse effects on human health or welfare, municipal or private water supplies, or aesthetic values." (Pg. 89)
17. **HOW CAN YOU REMOVE A HISTORIC PART OF RACINE? The dam is not classified as "historic."** "... no longer retains the historic integrity of the original dam and does not meet the age or significance threshold to be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places." (Pg. 89)
18. **SALMON AND STEELHEAD FISHING BELOW THE DAM WILL END. No.** Salmon and trout will not be as concentrated in the area below the dam but will move into far more areas of more fishable waters in Racine and Milwaukee counties. "Dam removal would eliminate the largest fish passage obstruction on the Root River, which would remove the prolific "stacking up" of salmonids during the spawning season that anglers take advantage of, as well as open up passage for these salmonids to travel further upstream, opening up additional fishing locations." (Pg. 94)
19. **BUSINESSES BY THE DAM WILL SUFFER BECAUSE FISHING WILL DECREASE. Not likely.** The area where the dam will be removed will create more fishable waters upstream with easier access. "Implementation of the proposed project would remove the largest fish passage obstruction on the Root River, which would eliminate the dense concentration of fish above the dam that anglers take advantage of. However, this would also open up passage for these fish to travel upstream to additional fishing locations. Bedrock could potentially be exposed in the immediate vicinity of Horlick Dam, upstream of the dam in the newly exposed riparian zone. This will provide extended area for fly fishing that was previously unavailable. (Pg. 45)
20. **REMOVING THE DAM WILL ALLOW INVASIVE SPECIES LIKE GOBIES TO TAKE OVER THE RIVER. Not likely.** "The minimal impact of Round Goby, absence of Sea Lamprey within the river system, the existing availability of preferred habitats and the ability to block migration of fishes by the WIDNR fisheries dam has reduced the risk from medium to low. Additionally, the nearby Milwaukee and Menomonee Rivers have established populations of Round Goby that has had minimal impacts on native fish assemblages as these rivers maintain high abundances of native species. A similar response is expected in the Root River." (Pg. 108)
21. **REMOVING THE DAM WILL DECREASE MY PROPERTY VALUES. Not likely.** "The general conclusion that emerges from the data is that shoreline frontage along small impoundments confers no noticeable increase in residential property price compared to frontage along free-flowing rivers and that residential non-frontage property located in the vicinity of a free-flowing river is more valuable than identical property located in the vicinity of an impoundment." (Does Small Dam Removal Affect Property Values? UW-Madison, Bill Provencher, Ph.D., 2006) "Residential property by a river but not by a dam is more valuable than identical property located by a dam. The study found that there is a penalty for being near the dam sites. Properties near the dams have lower value than properties further away. The penalty for being close to the two existing dams is approximately three times larger than the penalty for being close to the site of the former Edwards Dam." (Contemporary Economic Policy, Lynne Y. Lewis, Ph.D., 2008.)