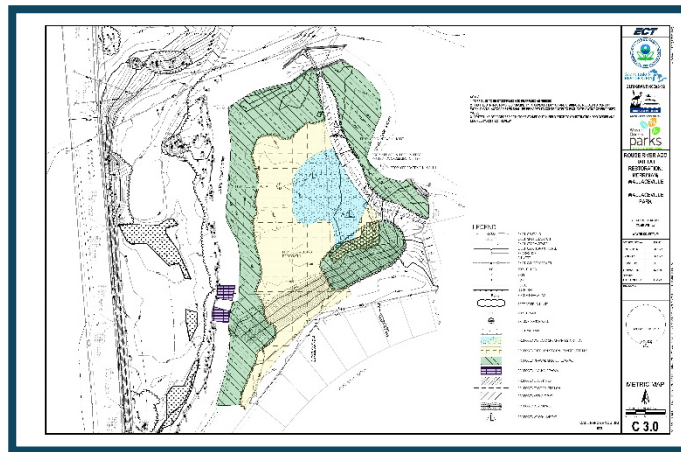
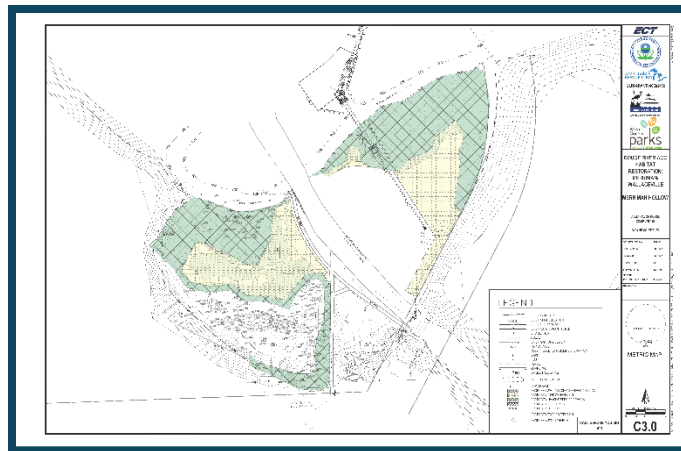


Rouge River AOC Habitat Restoration: Merriman Hollow/ Wallaceville Design US EPA GRANT: GL-00E03452 Final Report



April 2025

ROUGE RIVER AOC HABITAT RESTORATION DESIGN PROJECTS

EPA Grant Number: GL-00E03452

Grantee: Alliance of Rouge Communities

Community Partners: City of Dearborn Heights
City of Westland

Award Amount: \$365,000.00

Project Location: City of Dearborn Heights, Michigan (48127),
City of Westland, Michigan (48185)
Wayne County
Congressional District: M12

Waterbody: Middle Rouge River

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SUMMARY

The Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC), using the \$365,000 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant from United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), completed the design of habitat restoration at Merriman Hollow Park in Westland, Michigan and Wallaceville Park in Dearborn Heights, Michigan. The purpose of these projects is to provide habitat features that will address three of the Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) associated with fish and wildlife habitat in the Rouge River, namely Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations, Degradation of Benthos, and Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat. This work will facilitate delisting the Rouge River watershed as an Area of Concern (AOC) as designated by the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA). The ARC engaged Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc. (ECT) as the firm that would complete the design, permitting, and construction documents. A general history of the grant issuance and amendments is as follows:

- Grant issued 6/1/23
- Grant No-Cost Extension 1 issued 11/4/24
- Grant end date 4/30/25

Merriman Hollow Park Habitat Restoration Summary

The Merriman Hollow Park habitat restoration design proposes to create approximately 4.4 acres of habitat restoration. This will be accomplished by permanently excavating 984 cubic yards of material and place 158 cubic yards of material to create approximately 0.3 acres of wetland, restore 3.1 acres of wetland, create 1.0 acres of native wet meadow/prairie habitat, and treat invasive species on over 2.7 acres. This design will reduce habitat fragmentation, repair wetland hydrology, manage invasive species, and diversify the flora through native seeding and planting. The project site is located in Wayne County along Hines Drive, west of Merriman Road in Westland, adjacent to the Middle Rouge River.

Wallaceville Park Habitat Restoration Summary

The Wallaceville Park habitat restoration design proposes to create approximately 5.5 acres of habitat restoration, This will be accomplished by permanently excavating 2079 cubic yards of material and place 1880 cubic yards of material to create approximately 0.9 acre of wetland, restore 0.2 acres of wetland, create 2.9 acres of native wet meadow/prairie habitat, restore 1.4 acres of riparian habitat, and treat invasive species on over 3.9 acres. This design will reduce habitat fragmentation, repair wetland hydrology, manage invasive species, and diversify the flora through native seeding and planting. The project site is located in Wayne County along Hines Drive, east of Beech Daly Road in Dearborn Heights, adjacent to the Middle Rouge River.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

During the last century, tributaries of the Rouge River have suffered from declining water quality, loss and impairment of aquatic habitat, and increased frequency and magnitude of peak flood flows. The flat river slope and the meandering channel could not pass the large flows associated with major precipitation events. Increasing urbanization within the watershed as well as urbanization upstream exacerbated this problem by increasing impervious surfaces, leading to frequent flooding within downstream local communities.

Fortunately, water quality has improved since 1992 thanks to the federally-funded Rouge Project. For example, 89 of the 127 miles of the larger streams and tributaries in the watershed are now free from public health threats associated with uncontrolled combined sewer overflow discharges. Water quality improvement is exhibited by increased dissolved oxygen levels needed to sustain fish and aquatic life. Increased populations and diversity of benthos, fish, and wildlife have been measured along the river since 1999. The USEPA Office of Inspector General declared the Rouge Project “a blueprint for success” (EPA OIG report number 2002-P-00012).

The ARC is the Rouge River Public Advisory Committee’s (PAC) fiduciary and coordinating organization. Many of the previously completed reports [Ex: Habitat Delisting Targets (2008), Rouge River Delisting Strategy (2012), Upper Rouge Delisting Strategy (2012), and Rouge River BUI Report Card (2013)] listed project types, in addition to specific projects, that needed to be completed in the watershed to remove the Habitat BUIs and delist the AOC have been implemented by the ARC and Wayne County. The USEPA, Michigan Department of Environmental, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Rouge River Advisory Council (RRAC), ARC and our local members began facilitating the development of the formal list for removal of the Habitat BUIs in 2015. This work resulted in the development of a final Rouge AOC Habitat list that was approved by the PAC/RRAC and submitted to EGLE in March 2016. On that list were two projects that were considered by EGLE, MDNR and USEPA to be top priority projects:

- *Merriman Hollow Park Habitat Restoration*
Riparian Wetland Creation of 0.8 acres. The proposed project site is adjacent to the Rouge River and would create wetlands in the existing riparian floodplain lawn area. This will provide a natural habitat for mammals, reptiles, fish and amphibians.
- *Wallaceville Park Habitat Restoration*
Riparian Wetland Creation of 0.8 acres. The proposed project will create wetlands and/or wet prairie in existing riparian floodplain lawn area. The wetland would be adjacent to the Rouge River and have several direct connections to the river. A timber culvert or box culvert may be necessary to connect sections of the wetland while maintaining access to the exiting foot bridge that provides access to an active recreation area. Excavated soils could be used to re-grade adjacent areas to focus flood waters into the new wetlands.

2.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

Merriman Hollow Park Habitat Restoration

Merriman Hollow Park, part of the Wayne County Parks system, is located in the City of Westland along Hines Drive and along the Middle Rouge River just west of Merriman Road. Most of the park area is routinely mowed and used for active recreation. However, the portions of the park are low-lying and routinely flood. The project plan proposes to create wetlands in maintained lawn areas by establishing wet meadow habitat and enhancing existing forested riparian wetlands by controlling invasive species and planting native forb, shrub, and tree species to increase plant diversity. The wetlands would be adjacent to the Rouge River and have direct connections to the river. Existing wetlands in forested areas will be restored by managing invasive species and planting native tree species to replace canopy loss caused by the emerald ash borer. Native shrubs and forbs will also be planted to increase plant diversity and provide wildlife food. Maintained lawn areas will be restored by planting wet meadow or prairie seed mix. These native communities will contain diverse flowering forbs that provide food for pollinators. Small mammals and birds will benefit by the increased habitat diversity and cover. Habitat diversity in the maintained lawn areas will also be increased by excavating shallow depressions and creating mounds. The shallow depressions will store water that will provide habitat for amphibians. The more diverse topography will increase plant diversity by creating varying hydrological conditions.

Wallaceville Park Habitat Restoration

Wallaceville Park is located along Hines Drive within Wayne County Parks, in the City of Dearborn Heights. Most of the park area is routinely mowed and used for active recreation. However, the portions of the park are low-lying and routinely flood. The project plan proposes to create wetlands in maintained lawn areas by establishing wet meadow habitat and enhancing existing forested riparian wetlands by controlling invasive species and planting native forb, shrub, and tree species to increase plant diversity. Existing wetlands in forested areas will be restored by managing invasive species and planting native tree species to replace canopy loss caused by the emerald ash borer. Native shrubs and forbs will also be planted to increase plant diversity and provide wildlife food. Maintained lawn areas will be restored by planting wet meadow or prairie seed mix. These native communities will contain diverse flowering forbs that provide food for pollinators. Small mammals and birds will benefit by the increased habitat diversity and cover. Wetland diversity in the maintained lawn areas will also be increased by excavating shallow depressions and creating mounds. The shallow depressions will store water that will provide habitat for amphibians. The more diverse topography will increase plant diversity in the wet meadow by creating varying hydrological conditions. A timber culvert or box culvert may be necessary to connect wetland areas while maintaining access to the exiting foot bridge that provides access to an active recreation area. Excavated soils could be used to re-grade adjacent areas to focus flood waters into the new wetlands.



Figure 1. Rouge River Watershed

3.0 PROJECT SCOPE

Within the grant, the project was divided into the following tasks:

- Task 1: QAPP/Reporting & Administration/Public Outreach
- Task 2: Preliminary Engineering and Field Investigation, and
- Task 3: Design/Permitting

3.1 QAPP/Reporting & Administration/Public Outreach

Following the grant award, the project began with the development of a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) as required by the USEPA to ensure environmental data collection was conducted under a formal management protocol. In October 2023 the QAPP was approved by the USEPA and data collection required for design commenced.




Throughout the project, the ARC completed semiannual status reports and other documentation required by the USEPA. This document serves as the final project report as required under this task.

Project partners reached out to the public to inform them of the proposed activities and to obtain input. Social media was heavily utilized to inform the public about activities proposed in the two public parks and answer questions. The Alliance of Rouge Communities posted information related to each project on the ARC web site and a project-specific informational flyer was distributed to interested organizations and the public at large. See Appendix A for the distributed flyer.



Figure 2. Project Public Flyer

Figure 3. Social Media Posts

Date	Post Text	Post Photo
3/14/25	<p>With funding from the U.S. EPA Region 5 (Great Lakes Region) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (Grant GL-00E03452-1) the Alliance of Rouge Communities is designing wetland habitat adjacent to the Rouge River at Merriman Hollow and Wallaceville Parks (seen here in its current condition) in Wayne County Parks. Projected outcomes include increased habitat and plant diversity and connectivity to focus flood waters to the new wetlands. For More information visit: https://www.allianceofrougecommunities.com/merriman.html</p>	
3/26/25	<p>Design continues for Merriman Hollow (seen here in its current condition) and Wallaceville Parks thanks to \$365,000 in grant funding from the U.S. EPA Region 5 (Great Lakes Region) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (Grant GL-00E03452-1) to the ARC. Portions of Merriman Hollow and Wallaceville Park are in the planning and design stage for environmental restoration. This work will include invasive species removal, log jam removal, and wetland restoration, helping to increase habitat for native plants and animals. For more information visit: https://www.allianceofrougecommunities.com/merriman.html</p>	
3/31/25	<p>Is this a kind of Milkweed on steroids that will be used on the U.S. EPA Region 5 (Great Lakes Region) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant funded habitat restoration design at Merriman (City of Westland - Administration) and Wallaceville (Dearborn Heights City Hall) Parks? The flowers of this swamp milkweed are so much darker than its brother the common milkweed which can be found along the roadside and in people’s yards. However, the swamp milkweed, as the name suggests, likes to have its feet wet and is always thirsty sucking up water. That means it’s a good plant to have near our streams, rivers and lakes for their services to help filter the water and secure the riverbanks along the Rouge River. It is a native plant that is an important food source for the monarch caterpillars. Swamp milkweeds will be part of both the Merriman and Wallaceville projects’ seeding plan to jump start the banquet for wildlife. Look out for the fleshy pink flowers in late summers to come! For more information visit: https://www.allianceofrougecommunities.com/wallaceville.html</p>	

3.2 Preliminary Engineering and Field Investigation

Between the fall of 2023 and the summer of 2024, a series of data collection activities were completed. A summary of the critical information obtained is as follows:

Topographic Survey

A topographic survey of each property was conducted by a registered land surveyor. The spatial scope of the surveys is shown in Figure 4. The topographic survey played an essential role in the design of the project and the preparation of the permit application. The Merriman Hollow Park survey was completed in May 2024, and the Wallaceville Park survey was completed August 2024.



Figure 4. Extent of Topographical Surveys

Wetland Assessment/Riparian Vegetation Mapping

ECT conducted surveys of each project area to map the location of different plant communities that occur on site. Wetland boundaries were delineated and recorded using a GPS with sub-meter accuracy. Information on the dominant vegetation types were used to inform habitat restoration design and the permitting process. Characterization of site vegetation and wetlands was completed in October 2023 for the Merriman Hollow Park and Wallaceville Park sites.

At the Merriman Hollow site, two forested wetlands were identified (Wetlands A and B). Primarily, upland characteristics were consistent with a disturbed southern forest with some areas consistent with some areas consistent with undisturbed southern forest.

Five wetlands were identified at the Wallaceville Park site, including forested wetlands (Wetlands A, B, and E) and emergent wetlands (Wetlands C and D). Primarily, upland characteristics were consistent with a disturbed southern forest with some areas consistent with some areas consistent with undisturbed southern forest.



Figure 5. Wetland Delineation efforts, Wallaceville Park

Summaries containing more detailed results of the vegetation and wetland characterization efforts are included in Appendix C.

Threatened & Endangered Species (T&E)

Merriman Hollow Park

The proposed project timing and activities are anticipated to have no effect, or not likely to adversely affect, any T&E species identified via the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) Natural Heritage Database and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC)

tool. The verification letter for the Michigan Endangered Species Determination Key (Michigan DKEY) was issued on 5/13/2024, and no further comments were received from the Service within 30 days of the IPaC report. Best management practices for bat species included the timing for removal or trimming of trees ≥ 3 " dbh. These actions should take place between October 1 and March 31 when bats are present. Additional BMP's for EMR include the use of wildlife-safe materials for erosion control and site restoration, notifying all on-site workers and subcontractors to watch MDNR's "60-Second Snakes: The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake" and/or review the USFWS EMR factsheet, and for on-site workers and subcontractors to report any EMR observations (or any other sightings of listed T&E species) to the USFWS within 24 hours.

ECT also conducted a site investigation at Merriman Hollow Park to assess habitat conditions and record dominant plant species within the project area. ECT identified two (2) wetlands (Wetland A; Wetland B); however, these wetlands did not contain suitable habitat conditions or structural species composition that would be required to support T&E species identified in the MNFI and IPaC databases. Memos summarizing these results are included in Appendix D1.

Wallaceville Park

ECT used the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) natural heritage database and the Information, Planning, and Consultation (IPaC) tool from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to complete a desktop review of threatened and endangered species (T&E) in the project area. A verification letter from the Michigan Endangered Species Determination Key (Michigan DKEY) was issued on 5/13/2024, and no further comments were received from the Service within 30 days of the IPaC report. ECT also performed a site assessment at Wallaceville Park to determine wetland habitat conditions and dominant plant species within the project area. Memos summarizing these results are included in Appendix D2.

ECT's review indicated that the project area did not contain suitable habitat types, conditions, or structural species composition required to support species identified in the MNFI and IPaC databases. Best management practices recommendation included: 1) the timing of tree removal or trimming of trees ≥ 3 " dbh, which should take place between October 1 and March 31, 2) the use of wildlife-safe materials for erosion control and site restoration, 3) notifying all on-site workers and subcontractors to watch MDNR's "60-Second Snakes: The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake" and/or review the USFWS EMR factsheet, and 4) on-site workers and subcontractors will need to report any EMR observations (or any other sightings of listed T&E species) to the Service within 24 hours.

ECT also identified palustrine forested wetland conditions in the project areas. This wetland was dominated by a mixture of boxelder maple (*Acer negundo*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), and sedge species (*Carex* spp.) along the lower vegetative layer. The remaining project area contained mostly mown turf grass with an upland forested buffer along the riparian zone of the Middle Rouge River.

3.3 Design/ Permitting

Merriman Hollow Park

After examining site assessment data, habitat restoration design was completed. A summary of project design as well as alternatives are considered as follows.

Wetland Creation

Wetlands could be created almost anywhere on site, but wetland creation was prioritized in areas adjacent to existing wetlands to accommodate existing drainage patterns, minimize impact, and hydrologically connect pocket wetlands where feasible.

Wetland Restoration

Existing wetlands are considered to be minimally impacted. Some of the existing wetland areas will be converted from turf to native wet prairies, followed by seeding with native seeds.

Turf Conversion

To help provide habitat for local flora and fauna, converting existing turf areas into a richer vegetation composition will help boost biodiversity and provide habitats that local insects, birds and other animals depend on. Rewilding these areas provide covers, food and shelter and will help provide ecosystem functions such as pollination for local agriculture, as well as educational and recreational opportunities. It also provides a higher level of landscape mosaic adjacent to wetland and riparian areas for species that require both upland and wetland habitats to complete their lifecycles.

Habitat Protection

Edge protection of habitat areas was proposed to discourage vehicle traffic and designate "no mow" zones. Out of the options we have experimented and implemented in the past, the log revetment has been the best practice to keep a clear boundary between the "no mow" zones and regular turf areas. It serves as both a visual and physical boundary, clearly demarcating the boundary between maintained turf areas and protected habitat zones, thereby preventing inadvertent encroachment by park users and maintenance staff.

Riparian Wetland Restoration (Invasives Species Removal and Seeding)

Wooded riparian wetlands are currently majorly occupied by invasive shrubs, so our plan will be cutting and treating herbicide in those areas. Followed by native seeding and maintained with follow-up treatments to ensure good establishment.

No Action

The "do nothing" approach was ruled out as it does not accomplish the project goal of creating/restoring wetland habitat, increasing wildlife productivity and diversity, restoring water quality and quantity functions associated with wetlands, and aiding in the removal of the Rouge River BUIs.

Most of the work for the Merriman Hollow Park project is located within the 100-year floodplain. This required the issuance of a joint permit from EGLE and United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). A joint permit application was completed, including all necessary attachments. Quantities of cut and fill within the ordinary high water mark (OHWM) and the 100-year floodplain was calculated from the design drawings and tabulated. The application was submitted on February 17, 2025.

Wallaceville Park

After examining site assessment data, habitat restoration design was completed. A summary of project design as well as alternatives are considered as follows.

Wetland Creation

Wetlands could be created almost anywhere on site, but wetland creation was prioritized in areas adjacent to existing wetlands to accommodate existing drainage patterns, minimize impact, and hydrologically connect pocket wetlands where feasible.

Wetland Restoration

Existing wetlands are protected considered to be minimally impacted. Some of the existing wetland areas will be converted from turf to native wet prairies, followed by seeding with native seeds.

Turf Conversion

To help provide habitat for local flora and fauna, converting existing turf areas into a richer vegetation composition will help boost biodiversity and provide habitats that local insects, birds and other animals depend on. Rewilding these areas provide covers, food and shelter and will help provide ecosystem functions such as pollination for local agriculture, as well as educational and recreational opportunities. It also provides a higher level of landscape mosaic adjacent to wetland and riparian areas for species that require both upland and wetland habitats to complete their lifecycles.

Habitat Protection

Edge protection of habitat areas was proposed to discourage vehicle traffic and designate "no mow" zones. Out of the options we have experimented and implemented in the past, the log revetment has been the best practice to keep a clear boundary between the "no mow" zones and regular turf areas. It serves as both a visual and physical boundary, clearly demarcating the boundary between maintained turf areas and protected habitat zones, thereby preventing inadvertent encroachment by park users and maintenance staff. To connect the constructed wetland hydraulically to the eastern wetland, two sections of timber culvert are proposed as part of the path. The timber culvert will be composed of a short 8-foot section of wood planks. This was chosen instead of a pipe culvert due to maintenance concerns and allow for more open flow.

Riparian Wetland Restoration (Invasives Species Removal and Seeding)

Wooded riparian wetlands are currently majorly occupied by invasive shrubs, so our plan will be cutting and treating herbicide in those areas. Followed by native seeding and maintained with follow-up treatments to ensure good establishment.

No Action

The "do nothing" approach was ruled out as it does not accomplish the project goal of creating/restoring wetland habitat, increasing wildlife productivity and diversity, restoring water quality and quantity functions associated with wetlands, and aiding in the removal of the Rouge River BUIs.

Most of the work for the Wallaceville Park project is located within the 100-year floodplain. This requires the issuance of a joint permit from EGLE and USACE. A joint permit application was completed, including all necessary attachments. Quantities of cut and fill within the OHWM and the 100-year floodplain were calculated from the design drawings and tabulated. The application was submitted on February 17, 2025.

For both projects, the design plans and technical specifications were finalized to prepare for the bidding process.

4.0 PROJECT OUTCOMES

The primary goal of this project was to improve the water quality in the Rouge River and support the removal of three BUIs associated with fish and wildlife habitat: Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations, Degradation of Benthos, and Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat.

As a result of this Rouge River AOC Habitat Restoration Design Grant the achieved outputs were:

- QAPP, Topo Survey, T&E Assessment, Section 106 Review, Design Plans, Technical Specifications, and EGLE Permit Application for Merriman Hollow Restoration.
- QAPP, Topo Survey, T&E Assessment, Section 106 Review, Design Plans, Technical Specifications, and EGLE Permit Application for Wallaceville Park Restoration.

However, the outputs, outcomes, and measures to be expected when implementation of both projects are complete are as follows:

Short-term outputs:

- A total of approximately 9.9 acres of habitat restoration consists of the following:
 - 1.2 acres of created wetland
 - 3.3 acres of restored wetland
 - 3.9 acres of wet meadow/prairie habitat restored
 - 1.4 acres of riparian habitat restored
- 6.6 acres of invasive species removed
- 4 constructed habitat structures

Long-term outcomes:

- More diverse and intact wetland wildlife habitat.
- Restored wetland functions, especially water quantity and quality.
- Greater wildlife diversity and productivity.
- Aid in the removal of three of the Rouge River AOC BUIs: Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations, and Degradation of Benthos.
- Added recreational and educational value to the heavily used parks.
- Mitigate maintenance challenges to ensure long-term care of these projects.

Measures:

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan III, Measures of Progress (MoPs) for the overall project (design Grant GL-00E03452) when the Implementation was to be completed are:

- 4.1.1. Acres of coastal wetland, nearshore, and other habitats restored, protected, or enhanced: 1.6 acres of habitats.
 - Merriman Hollow Restoration: 4.4 acres of habitats restoration.
 - Wallaceville Park Restoration: 5.5 acres of habitat restoration.

4.1 Project Highlights

The success of these projects, and a notable highlight was the involvement of the property owner. Wayne County Parks' feedback on maintenance and recreational needs was able to be incorporated into design considerations early on to help the project's success in the long run. In several instances, mutual benefit was gained as a result of the present or future efforts by WCP. For instance, the path at

Wallaceville enabled cost savings for restoration of the construction access route, which will take place over the same footprint. In addition, with the support from Wayne County Parks, the project was able to achieve more habitat metrics than the grant proposal outlined for.

4.2 Obstacles Encountered

Merriman Hollow Park

During the early design phase, ECT was made aware of an ongoing sewer replacement project within the project boundary. In response, ECT proactively contacted the engineering company developing the sewer project and incorporated their layouts as part of known site conditions, ensuring that ECT's project could avoid conflicts before the new sewer was built.

Wallaceville Park

A few months into the design development, when the first project concept was drafted, the design team was notified by the property owner, Wayne County Parks department that the proposed project area will no longer be available due to county's Sherrif's Department moving their equestrian units to the once-considered project area. After that was confirmed, the team moved the proposed project elements into the current site across the river and adapted the design to site conditions. Changing focus areas caused unexpected delays in the project timeline but will provide similar habitat benefits as the original project footprint.

4.3 Next Steps

Project implementation, including project bidding, will be advanced under other grants if awarded: Rouge River AOC Habitat Restoration - Merriman Hollow Implementation and Wallaceville Implementation.