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Buffalo's Ugly Waterfront Brownfield Becomes a Greenway

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BUFFALO, New York, August 21, 2008 (ENS) - A new shoreline trail that opens a prime section of Buffalo's Outer Harbor is now ready for the public after undergoing a \$13.5 million environmental restoration to improve public access to the waterfront.

"This site has gone through a transformation," said state Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis, "from an environmental wasteland, standing as a barrier between the Buffalo community and the Lake Erie waterfront, to a spectacular green space and recreational resource."

At the formal opening of the Greenway Nature Trail on Wednesday, Grannis said, "The Outer Harbor's makeover will help draw more people to the waterfront and stimulate further revitalization around one of Buffalo's greatest natural assets."

The landowner Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and the Department of Environmental Conservation collaborated to turn a previously unusable and inaccessible stretch of shoreline into a clean and scenic Greenway Nature Trail.

Gregory Stamm, NFTA Chairman said it will take many steps to revive the waterfront but Buffalo is making "tangible progress" with the completion of the Greenway Nature Trail, which "permanently dedicates beautiful lakeside green space for public access," he said.

"The Greenbelt preserves the water's edge for public park space, makes adjacent land more attractive for future development, and offers residents another new opportunity to enjoy Buffalo's waterfront," said Congressman Brian Higgins, who secured some funding for the project through federal highway programs.

"This project in conjunction with the Outer Harbor Parkway project under construction now provides unprecedented access to this waterfront stretch," Higgins said.

"With this momentum, in just 18 to 24 months residents will have what they demanded and deserve - a completely transformed Outer Harbor with beautiful boardwalks, bike and pedestrian paths, recreational space, fishing piers accompanied by an efficient and attractive roadway to take them there."

The Greenway Nature Trail, also called the Greenbelt, stretches more than a mile along Lake Erie's shore from the former Pier restaurant to the Terminal B building of Buffalo's old port facilities and connects to an existing bike path.

The trail is part of a 120-acre parcel of land along Buffalo's Outer Harbor that is currently owned by the NFTA.

From the mid-19th century, the land was artificially built by dredging soils from the bottom of the Buffalo Outer Harbor and depositing the material along the shoreline, a practice that continued until the mid-1960s.

Dredged from the harbor shipping channels, the soils were contaminated with municipal ash and construction disposal debris, and the waste products of heavy industry that once existed along the waterfront.

In 2002, the NFTA site was accepted into the DEC's Environmental Restoration Program, making it eligible for more than \$12 million in cleanup funds.

Under DEC oversight, NFTA remediated contaminated soils along the shoreline and stabilized the shoreline slope with a heavy stone embankment to prevent erosion.

Ecological improvements along the shoreline and within the bay area known as the Bell Slip also were made. Shallow-water fish habitat that is conducive to spawning for local fish species was built. NFTA planted native

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vegetation along both sides of the pathway to attract local wildlife.

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Parks & Trails New York chose the North Buffalo Greenway as one of its Healthy Trails, Healthy People projects because of the citizen interest and support for the greenway; the alarmingly high rates of cardiovascular disease in Erie County; and the multiple opportunities to link to bus routes, a light rail metro station, schools, health centers, parks and other community resources, including the Tonawanda Rail Trail, which is in the planning stages and is a newly-selected HTHP project.

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown said teamwork has achieved an "incredible outcome."

"With this great achievement," said the mayor, "we again mark significant progress in the redevelopment of Buffalo's waterfront, making this area more accessible to the public, improved environmentally and linking this transformed waterfront area of the Outer Harbor to existing bike paths and the ongoing Outer Harbor Parkway project.

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