

Riparian Project Transforms Waterfront Site

The Challenge:

An environmental assessment in 2014 of land where an auto body shop formerly operated in Buffalo, NY, revealed leaking underground gas tanks, contaminated soils, and other issues. The current landowner, the Buffalo Niagara River Land Trust, entered New York State’s Brownfield Cleanup Program. The program allowed the land trust to take steps to clean up contaminated groundwater and soil and restore the site to provide wildlife habitat and public access to the Scajaquada Creek.

The Solution:

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, an environmental non-profit, worked with the land trust to hire a consultant to perform additional investigations and determine a plan for remediation. Waterkeeper received a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant from the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture for \$150,000 in 2015. The GLRI grant allowed the site to become an “urban forest” in this industrial section of the city. Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper matched the Forest Service grant with funds from the Buffalo and Erie County Standing Committee, Greenway Commission, New York Power Authority, and New York State Canal Corporation. In total, over \$750,000 was invested on remediation of the site and creation of a waterfront green space in the underserved, urban neighborhood.

Resulting Benefits:

The project transformed the defunct auto body shop into a micro-park, giving residents and wildlife access to the waterfront along a historically significant portion of Scajaquada Creek. After extensive site analysis, soil testing, and design development, crews removed aboveground structures and underground gas storage tanks to prepare the site for restoration. The site was graded and the shoreline was softened and stabilized with live branches as part of the Forest Service riparian buffer restoration project. Final grading and installation



Before (top) and after (bottom) photos of the project site. (Courtesy photos by Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper)

of pathways, planting soils, and native vegetation occurred in August 2019.

Waterkeeper staff members worked closely with the contractor to inspect plant stock health, map out the ideal location for each plant species, and verify correct planting methods. The contract also paid for the purchase and installation of 9 black tupelo trees, 5 male *Ginkgo biloba* trees, 12 serviceberry bushes, 5 red bud trees, 30 ornamental grasses, and various wildflowers.

Sharing Success:

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper is very involved with the local community. Plans are in the works to conduct site visits of the restored project area with community members to introduce them to their new green space. To further revitalize the area, Scajaquada Creek, next to the transformed site, is now participating in a New York State water quality improvement program, further purifying the water for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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