



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Muskegon River Watershed Assembly Celebrates Dam Removal on the Little Muskegon River**

HINTON TOWNSHIP, MI – The Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (MRWA) will be celebrating the removal of the Altona Dam on the Little Muskegon River in Hinton Township on Wednesday, September 24, 2025 with a water-themed ribbon cutting ceremony.

The Altona Dam was originally constructed in the late 1860's to power a sawmill and flourmill. The mill helped the community of Altona develop. Eventually the mill fell out of use and the derelict structure presented a public safety hazard and adversely impacted the health of the river. The mill dam altered stream flow, increased water temperature, and diminished habitat quality in the Little Muskegon River. Most critically, the remnant dam blocked upstream movement of small fish and reduced streamflow velocity. Sediment deposit, both upstream and downstream of the dam, widened the stream channel and covered gravel substrate that is important for fish habitat.

Removal of the dam reconnects the downstream river with 116 miles of cold-water upstream tributaries. This allows the passage of both native fish and game fish to critical spawning, natal, and refuge habitats. Natural, self-sustaining stream function has been restored.

Removal of the dam on this navigable river opened 6.2 miles of river to paddle sports and other recreation. Included in the project was restoration of a collapsing bank above the dam that had become an informal kayak and canoe launch prior to the dam's removal. The bank has been excavated and stabilized with native trees, plants, and shrubs, and includes the installation of an accessible, sustainable, and hardened surface for kayak and canoe launching.

“We are stunned with the natural beauty of this site, now that the dam has been removed for a year and the river allowed to heal,” said Paul Haan, MRWA Executive Director. “Our partners from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were just at the site last month taking fish surveys and the results are impressive with many natural fish and large brown trout passing freely and thriving,” said Haan.

**Preserving, Restoring, and Sustaining the Muskegon River**

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The dam was removed in late August 2024, followed by tree planting, bank restoration, and the installation of the canoe and kayak launch this past summer. Removal and site improvement costs to date total \$615,000. MRWA was responsible for fundraising and overall project management with assistance from South Peat Environmental of Rockford, MI. Funding partners included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Mecosta County Road Commission provided critical in-kind support.

MRWA and partners will be celebrating the dam removal with two special events. A formal ribbon cutting will take place on Wednesday, September 24. The event begins at 4:30pm, with the ribbon cutting happening at 5:00pm and will feature a unique photo opportunity with kayakers and anglers participating.

Prior to the ribbon cutting, MRWA will be hosting the Altona Community and Family Fun Day from 10:00am to 1:00pm on Saturday, September 20. The celebration will feature tours of the site, free family-friendly canoe rentals, educational activities, and fishing for children. A free hotdog roast will provide lunch after 11:00am.

“The rebirth of this beautiful river is exciting to see, and we want to share and celebrate it with the local community. These are special places that we can all enjoy, and connecting community to river restoration is at the soul of these projects,” said Haan.

The Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (MRWA) is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and sustaining the Muskegon River and its tributaries throughout a nine-county service area from Higgins Lake in Roscommon County down to Muskegon Lake. The Assembly advances this mission through various conservation and restoration initiatives that advance the Muskegon River Watershed Management Plan, including dam removals, bank stabilizations, and other conservation projects. The non-profit organization was formed in 2000 and is based in Big Rapids. More information can be found at [mrwa.org](http://mrwa.org).

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### **Photo Opportunities:**

#### **Saturday, September 20 – 10:00am – 1:00pm**

Community and Family Celebration

What: Canoes and kayaks, kids fishing, site tours, education, hot dogs.

#### **Wednesday, September 24 – 4:30pm – 5:30pm**

Ribbon Cutting

What: Water-themed photo opportunity with dignitaries, paddlers, and anglers. Live remote available.