

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Muskegon River Group: Rogers, Croton, and Hardy

June Meeting Summary for Prosperity Group

June 6, 2024 | 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Newaygo County Sportsman’s Club (7951 Elm Ave., Newaygo, MI 49337)

Attendees (Organizations Represented)

TOTAL NUMBER OF ATTENDEES: 32

- Camping: Mecosta County Parks (1)
 - Michigan Trout Unlimited (1)
 - Homeowner association representative (1)
 - Consumers Energy (3)
 - The Right Place: Economic Development Organization (2)
 - Michigan Department of Natural Resources (1)
 - Ferris State University (1)
 - State Legislators (1)
 - Mecosta Township (1)
 - City of Big Rapids, Mayor (1)
 - Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (2)
 - Croton Township (1)
 - Angling: Joe Lunch Box Group (2)
 - Newaygo County Commissioner (1)
 - Omni Tech International (3)
 - Planning: West Michigan Shoreline Redevelopment Commission (1)
 - River County Chamber of Commerce (1)
 - Newaygo County Parks (1)
 - Big Prairie Township Parks (1)
 - Newaygo County Drain Commissioner (1)
 - Newaygo County Administrator (1)
 - Mecosta County (1)
 - Great Lakes Fisheries Commission (1)
 - Big Rapids Township (1)
 - Public Sector Consultants (1)
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Welcome and Overview

New members were welcomed and invited to add to the successful outcomes.

The meeting purpose and agenda were reviewed. Group expectations/ground rules were reviewed and new members were invited to add any additional thoughts.

Review of Workflow

An overview of the previous work was summarized, including the April activities and outcomes (list of opportunities/assets by dam site). A summary of the feedback survey was also reviewed. The data collected were used to set future meeting dates and agendas.

Guest Speaker

Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) program director Kim Balke presented an enlightening overview of the Boardman River Dam Decommission and answered participants' questions. Her presentation covered CRA's current work plan, river restoration and reforestation, the dam removal process, benefits, cost/funding mechanisms, historical changes to the river, construction sequence and river alignment, sediment solutions, engineering work, fish rescue, and continued stabilization. Participants discussed the differences and commonalities between that decommissioning situation and the hypothetical situations at Rogers, Croton, and Hardy Dams.

Opportunity Mapping/Scenario Planning

Activity: Mapping Community Assets

Participants were grouped by dam location and/or interest (Rogers, Croton, or Hardy). Participants reviewed the list of community assets (categorized by Nature, Economy, and People) that were generated for each dam site at the last meeting. They were asked to prioritize their top five assets/opportunities to further explore for both scenarios (i.e., the hydro facilities continue or are removed).

Individual Group Report Out

Rogers, Croton, and Hardy individual groups reported on their priorities for each scenario. Each group elected a scribe and/or spokesperson, and flip charts were used to capture the feedback. Omni Tech Intl. captured detailed notes to compile the feedback.

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Rogers: Opportunity Analysis and Scenario Planning

Asset/ Opportunity	Scenario One: Hydro Facility Continues Operation	Scenario Two: Hydro Facility Is Removed
One	Continue to build upon current recreational assets to maintain and grow tourism and ensure that it remains as is or better	Develop a master plan that builds upon the added recreational land, shifting tourism to more land- and river-based activities
Two	Ensure property values continue to hold their value	Develop a plan to shift management/funding for dam emergencies to other opportunities
Three	Ensure that the community does not have to worry about a long-term buyer plan	Address issues with sediment removal that was affected by Big Rapids dam decommission/removal
Four	Continue to maintain high satisfaction levels with property owners	Implement initiatives to ensure that there is no flooding up-river
Five	Maintain current habitats/wildlife to ensure that they are not affected	Continue to create and build upon opportunities that focus on an increase in habitats/wildlife (nature-based tourism)

Croton: Opportunity Analysis and Scenario Planning

Asset/ Opportunity	Scenario One: Hydro Facility Continues Operation	Scenario Two: Hydro Facility Is Removed
One	Further develop tourism and resident attractions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan more events that draw in tourists • Further develop trail system • Improve tourism infrastructure 	Develop plans to recapture and shift resources/time currently spent on dam safety (no flood risks, no costs for dam safety, repair)
Two	Ensure that the sea lamprey barrier continues	Develop opportunities for property expansion (extension of property under former pond)
Three	Develop opportunities to maintain/improve crossing of the Muskegon River and overall river health/management	Build/expand new recreational opportunities (e.g., coldwater fishery expansion, full river habitat restoration, trail improvement)
Four	Ensure Croton Pond recreational access remains for residents and the public	Develop/expand new economic drivers elevate reputation of river (guided fishing tours; increase number of jumping fish)
Five	Maintain status quo (boating/fishing, land values, public access, wetland habitats)	Expand riverfront real estate development and opportunities (e.g., apply for riverfront grants)

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Hardy: Opportunity Analysis and Scenario Planning

Asset/ Opportunity	Scenario One: Hydro Facility Continues Operation	Scenario Two: Hydro Facility Is Removed
One	Continue to maintain undeveloped parcel, increase activities, continue developing Dragon Trail/trailhead camp sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain undeveloped parcel Invest in river tourism, develop trail system/associated events, ORV park/trail, and rustic camp area
Two	Undeveloped habitat control with Consumers Energy and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undeveloped habitat Expand trails, river access (canoe launches)
Three	Cold water opportunities Change dam operation	Cold water restoration of sturgeon fishery
Four	Stability of existing businesses	Stability of existing businesses
Five	Community retirement destination	Community rebranding

Questions, Wrap-up and Next Steps

Questions, Other Issues, and Other Potential Topics

The following questions, potential topics, and requests for information were added to a “hopper list” for future considerations:

- What are property rights to waterfront access if dams are decommissioned?
- What would communities look like post dam removal?
- What is the budget for the emergency team for dams?
- Will the Dragon Trail still be there if Consumers Energy doesn’t own the dam?
- Who owns the land wrapping around the river?
- Who gets the money allocated for the Dragon Trail? Is it in contract?
- Corporate counsel presentation on who owns the lands around the rivers
- Beneficial to see modeling on what it will look like if dams are removed
- Are we documenting/capturing risks associated with each scenario?

Future Meetings

Future meeting times were discussed for **September 4, 2024**, and **October 29, 2024**, and proposed agenda items include working in an optional tour of the three dam sites, economic development considerations/tourism, and continued community asset mapping of with and without a dam (including further prioritization and development of potential plans).