

MUSKEGON RIVER INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT

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Project Costs: \$36,500 (K&A)

Project Completion: Phase I – 2000 Phase II – September, 2000

The Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GLFT), established in 1996 as a result of the settlement agreement with the Ludington Pump Storage Plant, provides funding to enhance, protect, and rehabilitate Great Lakes fishery resources. In the spring of 2000, GLFT selected KIESER & ASSOCIATES (K&A) to conduct the Muskegon River Watershed Initiative Assessment. This assessment was to determine whether sufficient watershed groups and stakeholder resources existed within the Muskegon River watershed to be the focus of the GLFT's "River Initiative," a model fishery enhancement program involving multi-million dollar funding support.

KIESER & ASSOCIATES' initial objective for the Muskegon River Initiative Assessment Project focused on two important tasks: the collection of information from a broad range of existing groups and organizations within the watershed that were participating in related efforts, and the assessment of individual or collective organizational capacities to pool resources and guide a holistic, comprehensive program to enhance and preserve the Muskegon River fishery. In order to expedite the process, K&A created a website specific to the project, hosted on a neutral domain, www.muskegonriver.org. This website provided project background and contact information for the organizations involved. The site was heavily advertised throughout the watershed during the assessment period.

The first phase of this assessment was to survey watershed groups or organizations that may directly or indirectly facilitate, manage, or undertake projects related to the GLFT objectives for the Muskegon River Initiative. Over 340 such organizations, including public and community organizations and agencies, academic institutions and regulated entities with the watershed, were directly contacted by K&A with information explaining the project and the website. The survey process was facilitated by providing web-based electronic forms for information submission at www.muskegonriver.org. Over 90 submissions were made to the General Organizational Information form. Twenty-six of these organizations submitted project information, resulting in 49 submissions to the Project Information form.

A second portion of Phase I involved an assessment of existing studies related to Great Lakes fisheries within the Muskegon River watershed. Over 350 references, in the form of websites, technical reports, journal articles and project form submissions were placed in a relational database for future access. Additionally, twenty-three key individuals were identified and interviewed regarding the potential success of a Muskegon River Initiative and related needs.

The Phase I Assessment identified sufficient support for a Muskegon River Initiative, leading to Phase II of the Assessment. Phase II of this Assessment Project involved a strategic assessment of available information to determine: a potential lead organization to facilitate the Initiative; organizational alignments to implement GLFT goals; opportunities for new alliances, and; potential projects. The Phase II evaluation for deriving objective recommendations on organizational roles used two modeling approaches: 1) a matrix scoring scheme for selected questions in Phase I questionnaires and a weighting of responses, and 2) an optimization modeling strategy that examined the same questions but also applied constraints emphasizing varying levels of experience and expertise related to GLFT objectives.