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# Merrimac Ferry Wayside Improvements Town of West Point

## Background

During 2009, The Town of West Point developed an Open Space Plan to improve recreational opportunities and preserve sensitive lands within the town. The purpose of the plan is as follows:

1. To recommend projects for recreational development and land preservation in the town,
2. To assure that the Town is eligible for grants to improve facilities and preserve open space,
3. To guide decisions by the town... and other providers of recreation as demands for recreation continue to increase.

During the plan development process, it became very apparent that there is limited opportunity for the public to access Lake Wisconsin to enjoy for fishing, wildlife viewing, and other low impact recreation. The West Point Open Space Committee (OSC) became aware of the Merrimac Ferry Wayside Park as a recreational asset. The Open Space Plan recommended a set of improvements to Park.

The West Point Open Space Plan was reviewed and approved by WDNR and the town became eligible for state and federal grants. Shortly after the plan was approved, the West Point Open Space Committee looked to partner with Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) on improvements to the Wayside.

## The Plan

The Town of West Point OSC with support from Friends of Scenic Lodi Valley (FSLV) and working with DOT staff have developed a project to make significant changes to the Wayside Park. The facilities at the Wayside are basic pit toilets despite the number of hikers, bicyclists, and autos using the ferry each season. Construction will begin this summer on a new restroom facility with running water and flush toilets. The DOT project is being managed by Raine Gardner P.E. with MSA Professional Services.

As a part of this overall improvement to the park, the Town of West Point secured an Outdoor Recreation Grant (through WI DNR) for the construction of an accessible fishing pier, three benches, a concrete path, and signage.

## Purpose and Need

In 2012, there were 157,689 people with disabilities receiving Social Security disability benefits in Wisconsin. These are the people typically whom have life-long disabilities that require accommodation of some sort. The American Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, and Title III of the ADA regards public/commercial accommodation. [Title I is for workforce accommodation, and Title II is for public entity accommodation.]

According to a recent US Census Bureau Report, *Older Americans with a Disability: 2008-2012*, as the baby boomer population ages, nearly 40 percent of people age 65 and older have at least one disability. Mobility – the ability to walk and climb - is the most common disability.

Fishing is an activity much appreciated across genders, ethnicity and ages. With aging, it becomes more and more difficult to get in and out of boats, wade on rocky shorelines, etc. While the aging population gains from the construction of accessible fishing accommodations, the need is even greater for those with lifelong disabilities. Fishing from shore, may be the only opportunity to experience water based recreation for many people. All groups gain with the addition of accessible fishing piers.

When considering locations for accessible pier structures, there could not be a better option than the popular Merrimac Ferry location. Each year thousands of visitors come to make this historic crossing, which is one of the last free ferries in the country, and the only one in the state.

The Wayside Park improvements will be a considerable asset to the community. In fact, the improvements to the Wayside Park including the ADA compliant fishing pier will address several national trends dating to the 1990s:

- Support for laws and policies addressing accessibility,
- A growing importance and interest Eco-Tourism (natural resource based tourism),
- A Recognition of the economic value of parks and open space,
- Valuing heritage resources through historic preservation.



Ice Age Trail Connection at the Wayside



"The Ferry"

## **Budget**

The total project cost for the accessible fishing pier and amenities is between \$95,000 and \$100,000. Of this the State of Wisconsin will pay \$69,300, which is approximately 75%. State funding is part of US Fish & Wildlife Service - Sport Fish Restoration Grant. The Town of West Point is responsible to raise 25% of the cost, or approximately \$23,100.

## **Timeline**

The Town of West Point has until December of 2016 to complete this project or lose funding. Arrangements have been made with the Town of West Point to secure the match while fund raising continues. Construction will begin during the spring /summer of 2016 to comply with the grant guidelines.



Wayside ADA Pier will be similar to WI River Pier at Lake Delton

## **Financial Assistance Requested**

Individuals, organizations, and groups are encouraged to donate towards the 25% local match for the ADA compliant fishing pier grant. All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. No donation is too small. If requested, all donations will be acknowledged. The partners in who have invested time and resources to this project include:

- The Town of West Point
- Friends of Scenic Lodi Valley (a local 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization)
- WIS DOT and WI DNR
- Columbia County Highway Department
- Sen. Jon Erpenbach, Former Rep. Fred Clark, and Rep. Keith Ripp.

## References

Town of West Point Comprehensive Plan, 2007

<http://www.co.columbia.wi.us/ColumbiaCounty/Default.aspx?tabid=574>

Town of West Point Outdoor Open Space and Natural Area Plan, 2009

[http://townofwestpoint.us/Comprehensive%20Plan/WP\\_Outdoor\\_Open\\_Space\\_&\\_Natural\\_Area\\_Plan-Adopted.pdf](http://townofwestpoint.us/Comprehensive%20Plan/WP_Outdoor_Open_Space_&_Natural_Area_Plan-Adopted.pdf)

*Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, J. Mertes and J. Hall, 1996*

<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2014/cb14-218.html>

[http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys\\_statistics/general/2014/ssqf/Social-Security-2014-Wisconsin-Quick-Facts-AARP-res-gen.pdf](http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/general/2014/ssqf/Social-Security-2014-Wisconsin-Quick-Facts-AARP-res-gen.pdf)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americans\\_with\\_Disabilities\\_Act\\_of\\_1990](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americans_with_Disabilities_Act_of_1990)