



# Planned Projects Will Revitalize Buffalo River Corridor

*Second Update on Collaborative Restoration and Redevelopment Efforts*

*May 2010*

## **Introduction**

The Buffalo River restoration partnership, consisting of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), Honeywell, and Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER® (BNR), has been collaborating on plans to clean up the Buffalo River to facilitate ecological restoration and economic development around this natural urban resource. The Buffalo River played an important role in the development of Buffalo. Years of industrial and municipal use, however, degraded the river, and subsequent economic changes left the region with a number of abandoned, contaminated properties and deteriorating facilities on or near the river. The Buffalo River partners are working to address several of these environmental challenges so that the Buffalo River can once again contribute to a vibrant Buffalo.



*Aerial photo of Buffalo River, courtesy of Patricia Manley*

The Buffalo River partners are providing this fact sheet to inform you about upcoming environmental activities (sediment remediation and dredging), ecological restoration, and development proposals in the vicinity of the Buffalo River.

## **Remediation**

Remediation refers to actions taken to clean up, contain, minimize, or otherwise address environmental contamination. Current remedial actions on the Buffalo River include dredging contaminated sediments (funded by two different programs, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and the Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA)), cleaning up brownfield sites, and addressing water quality problems caused by combined sewer overflows (CSOs).

### *Great Lakes Restoration Initiative*

President Obama created the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), which is a multi-year, multi-agency initiative to restore the Great Lakes. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is supporting the Administration's Initiative for the restoration of the Great Lakes through on-the-ground projects that clean up contaminated sediments. Using GLRI funds, the USACE will strategically dredge contaminated sediments from certain navigation channels in order to complement sediment cleanup by the Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Legacy Act and other programs. The first such dredging will be focused at the Buffalo River, where approximately 600,000 cubic yards will be removed from the authorized limits of the Federal navigation channel.

USACE is authorized to operate and maintain the Federal channel under the Rivers and Harbor Act and Water Resources Development Acts of 1986, 1988, and 2007. Sediment dredged from the Buffalo River Federal channel will be placed in confined disposal facility number 4 located adjacent to the former Bethlehem Steel facility. For more information, see the USACE link in the “More Information” section on the last page of this fact sheet.

### *Great Lakes Legacy Act*

In 2002, the GLLA authorized \$270 million for cleaning up contaminated sediments in 31 highly contaminated areas of the Great Lakes, known as Areas of Concern (AOCs). Utilizing these funds, the USEPA in May 2010 will release and solicit public comment on a report, called the draft Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study, about sediments in the Buffalo River AOC. This report summarizes the results of multiple sediment sampling events, technical evaluations, and ecological information collected on the Buffalo River AOC and uses this information to evaluate a range of cleanup alternatives for the sediments. The report documents the evaluation process and preliminarily identifies, subject to public comment, the cleanup approach that best meets the goals of the project. During the public comment period, interested persons will have the opportunity to comment on the proposed project and make recommendations. Comments and questions from the public will be addressed and where appropriate, integrated into the final version of the report. Reaching a decision on the remediation approach is critical because it allows the next phase to start, the remedial design. This summer, additional sampling of river sediments is planned as part of the design effort.

### *Brownfield Cleanups*



*Demolition work at Buffalo Color Site*

Significant progress has been made with planning and implementing the cleanup of contaminated sites adjacent to or near the Buffalo River. The most significant cleanup to date occurred at the former Republic Steel and Donner-Hanna Coke properties, an approximately 200 acre area known as Steelfields that extends from the Buffalo River south to Tifft Street. Between 2003 and 2008, wastes associated with steel and coke manufacturing were cleaned up at the site. Contaminated groundwater from the site no longer impacts the river. Portions of the Buffalo Color site on the north side of the river have been successfully remediated. Demolition and cleanup activities on other sections of the site are currently underway. To the east of Buffalo Color, progress has been made at the Exxon Mobil Former Buffalo Terminal site, where metals and chemicals

associated with oil and gas refining are being addressed. Environmental investigation and cleanup plans at other portions of the property are being developed. Finally, further west toward the lake, the Former Sovereign Specialty Chemicals site sits sandwiched between the southern end of the City Ship Canal and the Buffalo River. Contamination has been addressed through technologies that treat groundwater and soil vapor.

### *Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) and Water Quality*

As with many older cities across the country, Buffalo is served by combined sewers. During dry weather, all wastewater collected in the combined sewer system is transmitted to the Bird Island wastewater treatment plant, treated, and discharged to the Niagara River. However, during heavy rainfall events, the combination of stormwater and sanitary sewage overwhelms the sewers, and overflows to nearby waterways occur.

There are 27 CSOs in the Buffalo River watershed (52 total in all of Buffalo). The Buffalo Sewer Authority (BSA) is currently updating a CSO Long Term Control Plan that will identify its plans to address these overflows. In the interim, the BSA is undertaking several CSO control projects, some of which will reduce overflows to the Buffalo River watershed.

## **Habitat Restoration**

Key to the recovery of the Buffalo River and removing it from the list of AOCs is the restoration of fish and wildlife habitat and the populations that thrive within the river's ecosystem. Throughout the history of the Buffalo River, there has never been a better opportunity for habitat restoration. In collaboration with the Legacy Act project, shoreline redevelopment, and sewer abatement efforts, numerous habitat projects will be implemented over the next 3-5 years. Activities vary from the simple, such as providing a minimum 100-foot setback for re-development projects, to the more complex, such as restoring emergent wetland vegetation or naturalizing hardened streambanks. Other planned efforts include underwater fish habitat improvements and native tree and shrub plantings that will combine to help bring the Buffalo River to its fullest ecological potential.

## **Redevelopment**

Environmental cleanup and restoration work is enabling formerly contaminated or under-utilized lands to be used in new ways that respect the environment, support economic development, improve public access to waterfront recreation, and strengthen communities. Some of the projects along or in the vicinity of the Buffalo River include:



### *Buffalo River Brownfield Opportunity Area*

*Image of potential reuse for land south of Buffalo River*

The New York State Department of State (NYSDOS) and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) established the Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) program to give impacted communities the resources needed to plan for their rehabilitation and revitalization. The proposed Buffalo River BOA represents a large concentration of brownfields and vacant and/or underutilized parcels. Included in the proposed BOA are the Buffalo Color, Mobil Oil, and Allied Chemical brownfield sites. The Buffalo River communities (Old First Ward, Valley, Seneca-Babcock, Bailey) are some of the most economically disadvantaged in Erie County. Since these communities are located downstream of over 400 square miles of the Buffalo River watershed, they also have the burden of a disproportionate amount of environmental degradation. The City of Buffalo has been approved for a BOA grant to address the area's environmental problems and plan for productive reuse.

### *South Buffalo Brownfield Opportunity Area*

Through the BOA program, the City of Buffalo received a grant to study a nearly 2000 acre area south of the Buffalo River that had been utilized mainly for heavy industrial purposes. This area, known as the South Buffalo BOA, is bound by NYS Route 5 on the west, the Buffalo River on the north, Hopkins St and South Park Ave on the east and the Buffalo / Lackawanna boundary on the south. In 2009, a Master Plan for redeveloping this BOA was released. It will guide the evolution of this strategic area to higher value employment, complemented by a mix of new uses, strengthened communities and significant open space and natural areas. More information is available at: [http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/City\\_Departments/Office\\_of\\_Strategic\\_Planning/South\\_Buffalo\\_Brownfield\\_Opportunity\\_Area](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/City_Departments/Office_of_Strategic_Planning/South_Buffalo_Brownfield_Opportunity_Area)

## *RiverBend*

RiverBend, a remediated former brownfield site (also known as Steelfields) that once housed the Republic Steel and Donner Hanna Coke facilities, is a portion of the South Buffalo BOA. The City of Buffalo and Buffalo Urban Development Corporation (BUDC) recently invited teams of development professionals to submit plans for developing the site so that it becomes a model for sustainable development, fosters long-term economic growth, creates special public spaces and a new community on the banks of the Buffalo River, and encourages restoration of the Buffalo River. The City is currently reviewing proposals to redevelop the site, and design work is anticipated to begin with the selection of a design team in Fall 2010.

## *Greenway Trail and Public Access*

The planned Buffalo River Greenway will form the backbone of an extensive, interconnected system of natural and recreational corridors linking the Buffalo Inner Harbor with the Old First Ward, the Valley, South Buffalo, and adjoining towns. In addition to recreational trails on land, the greenway will also encompass the Buffalo River Urban Canoe Trail, and an Industrial Heritage Trail of national significance. Major greenway themes in the plan include habitat restoration, heritage interpretation, enhancement of public access to the river, establishment of setbacks for non-water-dependent land uses, and creation of linkages between neighborhoods and the river.

## *Green Energy Corridor*

The Green Energy Corridor is an industry initiative that aims to develop existing infrastructure along the Buffalo River for use in bio-fuel manufacturing and storage. Some of the projects and anticipated start dates include a biomass storage and handling terminal (May 2010) and Green Energy Pilot Plant (Summer 2010) on Childs Street; biomass storage and handling (tentative, Summer 2011) at Concrete Central; and rail yard improvements (pending funding, Summer 2011) at the Ohio Street Yard. For more information, call the Green Energy Corridor Association at 856-6525 ext. 503.

## **How Can I Obtain More Information?**

The Buffalo River restoration partners have developed a website to serve as a central resource for information about the Buffalo River. Visit [www.BuffaloRiverRestoration.org](http://www.BuffaloRiverRestoration.org) for updates and the latest information.

A number of other websites with good information about the Buffalo River are also available:

<http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/aoc/buffalo.html> (information about the Buffalo River Area of Concern)

<http://www.lrb.usace.army.mil/missions/BufferoRiver/index.html> (USACE GLRI environmental dredging project)

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/37554.html> (provides links to brownfield sites along the Buffalo River)

[www.bnriverkeeper.org](http://www.bnriverkeeper.org) (provides links to all Buffalo River Remedial Action Plan documents)

## **Who Should I Contact If I Have Questions About the Buffalo River?**

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