

Media Notice

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IMMEDIATE NOTICE

Pre-event media tours available

Minnehaha Creek Watershed District spearheads restoration of a historic landmark

GROUNDBREAKING EVENT NOV. 21 WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS AT MINNEHAHA FALLS AND GLEN; PROJECT INCLUDES MAJOR REPAIRS TO WPA-ERA STREAMBANK WALLS AND IMPROVEMENTS TO BETTER MANAGE STORMWATER AND CREEK EROSION

DEEPHAVEN, MN., — November 10, 2008 — Minnehaha Creek Watershed District and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board will host a groundbreaking ceremony Friday, November 21. The groundbreaking will mark the start of a major restoration project of the Minnehaha Falls and Glen area in Minnehaha Park.

Historic WPA-era streambank walls and other eroded park sections above and below Minnehaha Falls have literally been falling down over the years. Recently, flooding in the Minnehaha Glen – the area below the falls – has put the historic structures in danger of collapse, and has threatened the overall stability of the stream bank and usability of Minnehaha Park.



Now a major restoration of the area, including the creek bed and banks near the Minnesota Veterans Home and the historic Godfrey Mill (1854), is scheduled for winter 2008 through summer of 2009. The \$5.8 million project is led by the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) working in partnership with the State of Minnesota, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), the Minnesota Veterans Home, and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The area will be highly restricted during the main construction phase.

A groundbreaking event with elected federal, state and local officials who helped provide support for the restoration project will take place at Minnehaha Park (4901 Minnehaha Avenue, Minneapolis), Friday, November 21 at 1:00 p.m. The public is invited to attend. Media tours of the deteriorating structures and eroded streambank and bluff sites, sediment islands and other features are available upon request prior to the groundbreaking. Media Kits about the restoration are available at www.minnehahacreek.org

A dedicated website for public information about construction progress and other information will be available until the entire project is completed at:
<http://www.minnehahacreek.org/MinnehahaFallsandGlenRestoration.php>



Ard Godfrey's flour mill, Minnehaha Creek, 1865
Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

With more than 850,000 visitors each year, Minnehaha Park's falls and lower glen are major natural amenities for Minnesota residents and visitors. A historic landmark, the park has over the years been home to one of the principal mill sites in the region, a zoo, a racetrack, campgrounds, and more. Minnehaha Falls has been one of the area's largest tourist destinations since before statehood, attracting visitors from all over the world.

It has also been in dire need of structural improvements for a long time.

“The development of this project has truly been a collaborative effort among State, Federal and local agencies that will serve to preserve the cultural and natural resources found in this area for generations to come,” says Eric Evenson, MCWD Administrator. “It is an area rich not only in natural beauty but also historic significance, including the many walls along the creek that were built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s.”

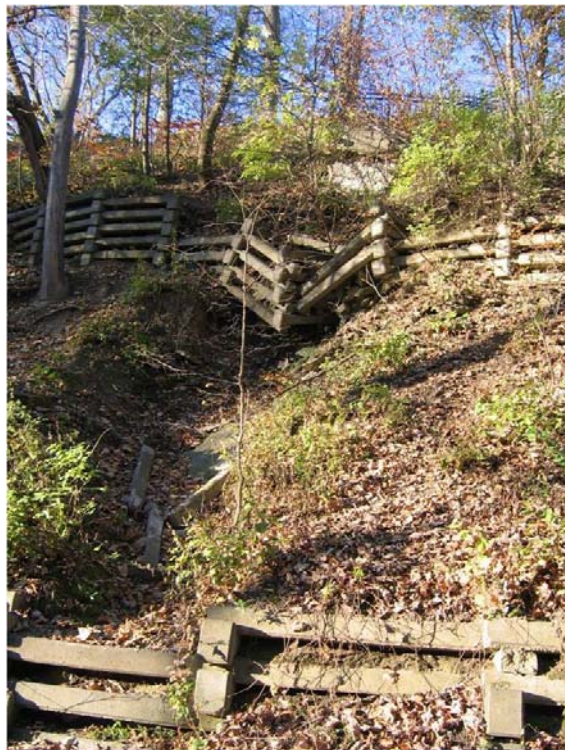
This historic restoration will take place in two phases, first at the Veteran’s Home and then along the Minnehaha Creek. In total, the restoration consists of over 30 project elements, including:

- Stabilizing streambanks and bluffs around the creek
- Protecting historic and cultural resources
- Managing stormwater throughout the site
- Constructing new trails and walkways
- Managing invasive species and reforesting the area

“This badly needed restoration will ensure a well loved and much used park will be enjoyed well into the future,” said fifth park district commissioner Carol Kummer. “There will be greater protection of all natural resources on the site, including a revitalized trail system along Minnehaha Creek below the falls, an elevated boardwalk, and stabilized stairways.”

According to Renae Clark, Project Manager for MCWD, new stormwater management features will be put in place near the Veterans’ Home Site.

“There is an area with a washout that will be repaired and stormwater will be directed into a new rain garden,” Clark points out. “Innovative practices will be used to manage stormwater on the Veteran’s Home site such as rain gardens, porous concrete, and infiltration areas.”



Evenson noted that any further delays in repairing the historic WPA walls would have meant more damage to them as well as the creek and streambank. "Currently, some walls have gaps of 1-2 feet underneath the concrete footing that is supporting the walls. Walls have experienced some recent failures - the portion closest to the falls already toppled over. And some areas downstream have sloughed due to the lack of structural support."

"The walls reflect an important chapter in our Nation's history and need to be repaired. The repairs will ensure that the walls will continue to be a part of the Minnehaha Creek experience for generations to come," Colonel Jon Christensen, Commander St. Paul District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The restoration goes beyond fixing the walls; a major focus of the project is restoration of the creek bed, streambank, bluffs, and vegetation, improving stability, habitat, and aesthetics.

A copy of the Corps' Environmental Assessment on this project can be found at:
<http://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/environment/default.asp?pageid=1464>

For more information — or to request a tour of the area or interview with project principals, please contact Martin Keller or Julie Westerlund at the above phone numbers and emails.