

Mentor Marsh restoration sees ‘major milestone’ with cleanup start

A groundbreaking ceremony took place on the Mentor Marsh site this week for the beginning of the site’s cleanup. (Marah Morrison — The News-Herald)



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The [Ohio Environmental Protection Agency](#) is currently working with [The Great Lakes Construction Co.](#) to remediate the legacy contamination at Mentor Marsh.

Also known as the Osborne Salt Fill, the Mentor Marsh has been a source of chlorides that have impacted the marsh, causing water quality issues and altering natural vegetation. The goal of the project is to remove material and return the site to a stable, more natural condition.

Construction is currently taking place beside 9603 Deer Ridge Road, a neighboring property, in Mentor. A groundbreaking ceremony took place on the site July 7 for the beginning of the site’s cleanup.

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“We took the cleaning material off and stockpiled it, and now it’s prepared to start hauling the salt and fly ash material off site,” said Great Lakes Construction project manager Jeremy Levenson. “We’re going to start working from the west side to the east with that excavation. It ranges roughly from 10 to 20 feet thick. There’s about 115,000 tons anticipated to go off, and we’ll have 20 to 30 trucks running. The trucks can do maybe four to six loads per day.”

According to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, which owns the Mentor Marsh, the area was designated by the National Park Service as a National Natural Landmark in 1966. A campaign to protect the marsh throughout the early 1960s was fought with many local partners, including organizations represented at the groundbreaking. Partners fought for the legal protection of the marsh, and hundreds of \$5 donors thought permanent protection worthwhile.

When most of the eastern basin had been acquired, the 800-acre wetland suffered when salt-mine tailings leached into Blackbrook Creek. By 1973, most of the swamp forest trees and marsh plants had died, and the nearly four-mile-long wetland basin was overtaken by one billion Phragmite stalks, highly flammable, nonnative, invasive grass from Eurasia that were 24 feet tall.

After another Phragmites grass fire that burned 400 acres and the museum's \$80,000 Wake Robin Boardwalk, the museum decided to clear the tall grass surrounding the boardwalk. The museum was emboldened to take on the massive restoration effort due to the landfill being capped in 1987 and Blackbrook Creek being rerouted north along Route 44, and because of the water-quality monitoring



of salinity by the museum's partner, the Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District,...

“At the Soil and Water District, we were more on the government side of things, working with state and federal agencies, and coordinating with local governments on our approach and participation in this project for the last 25 years,” said Dan Donaldson, the agency’s district administrator.

This is the Conservation District’s largest restoration project they’re working on, Donaldson said.

“It’s going to provide the most immediate improvement to water quality, and this is a major milestone in the restoration of the Mentor Marsh, which is, to my knowledge, the largest hydraulically connected wetland on the Great Lakes,” he said.

Since the salt is still leaking out into the marsh, it’s still keeping the plants from growing. As soon as it’s hauled out, there will be an immediate response in the vegetation at the marsh, Donaldson said.

The project is expected to be complete before winter, and funds to restore the historical creek valley still need to be secured.

“After 56 years of 250,000 tons of rock salt sitting in Blackbrook Creek, which feeds into Mentor Marsh, it’s hugely significant in that it’s being removed by Great Lakes Construction,” said [David Kriska](#), Cleveland Museum of Natural History’s biodiversity coordinator.

The restoration project is a major step in getting the site as close to its original condition, Levenson said.

“The Marsh is a landmark, so it’ll improve the experience and the ecosystem,” he said. “It’s neat for construction guys like me and my team here to get involved with environmental projects. We always consider that a treat. They’re a little bit more unique and less common than building buildings, roads or bridges.”

“On this job, because of the fact that so many have such a long history and have worked hard at getting this done, once I got involved and started attending those meetings, it added a whole new level of pride to be able to be a part the project.”