



Big Island Restoration

Project Overview

The restoration work on Lake Minnetonka's Big Island shows what can happen when local and state agencies cooperate with a similar vision. In 2008, the City of Orono, the state and MCWD pitched in to buy the 56-acre eastern third of Big Island, which had spent the previous eight decades as a state-owned campground for veterans and was the site of a theme park in the early 1900s. Without the purchase, the land would've likely been developed into nine private residential home sites.



The partners decided to return the portion of the island to a passive, natural state for the public to enjoy, and asked MCWD to hold the conservation easement that limits new buildings and bans motor vehicles, new developments, and organized events.

The District worked to restore about 3,000 feet of severely eroded shoreline to enhance water quality in Lake Minnetonka, using a variety of techniques that include riprap, bio rolls and coir block, live stakes, brush mattresses, wetland seeds, plugs, and one-inch caliper trees. It also removed buckthorn and helped clear the island of about 150 tons of garbage.

At a Glance:

Property Info

- 56 acres
- 7,500 feet of undeveloped lake shore
- 7.59 acres of wetlands
- Bald eagle nesting site
- Undeveloped uplands
- Significant stands of maple-basswood forest
- Price: \$5.7 million.

Results

- Valuable natural land protected as public open space
- Restored nearly 3,000 feet of eroded shoreline
- Acres of buckthorn replaced with native trees
- Tons of trash removed
- Revenue supports veterans

Partners

- City of Orono
- Gabriel Jabbour
- State of Minnesota
- Big Island Veterans Camp
- MCWD

History

In the early 1900's, Big Island was home to an amusement park that brought revelers from the city to its roller coaster, carousel and other rides. After its closure in 1911, most of the structures on the property were dismantled and the island became the site of a veterans' camp.

For 80 years, the camp provided a refuge to veterans and their families, but growing liability concerns and maintenance costs and declining interest by veterans statewide prompted the Big Island Veterans Camp of Minnetonka Board of Governors to put it up for sale.

In 2006, the city of Orono, in partnership with the state of Minnesota and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD), bought the 56-acre site for use as a park. Support from State Senator Gen Olson (R-Minnetrista) was integral in obtaining state backing for the \$5.7 million project.

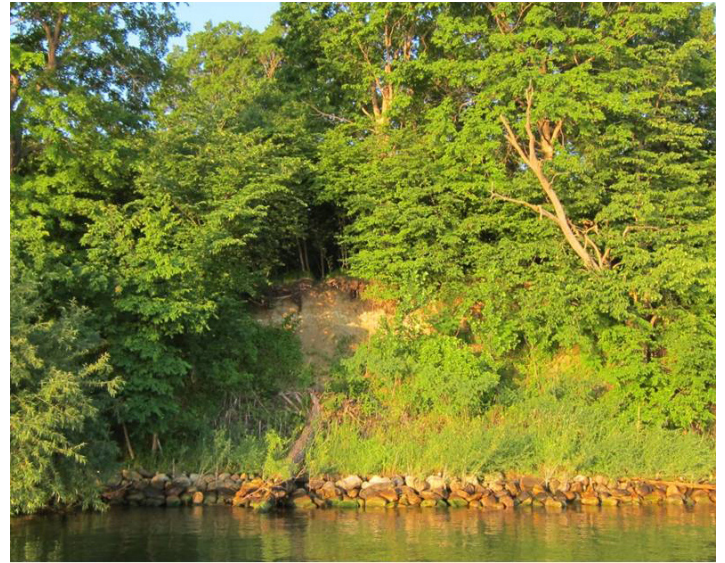


Results

- **Public Open Space Protection:** The Big Island Park remains public property with its natural resources preserved in perpetuity. It features handicap accessible docks and an exit ramp with a sidewalk.
- **Protection and Restoration:** Removed multiple old buildings. Multiple barges carried tons of garbage – from old mattresses to the hull of a rusted boat – from the island. Removed acres of buckthorn and replaced them with native trees. Replaced nearly eroding 3,000 feet of shoreline.
- **Minnesota Veteran’s V 4 V Trust Fund:** The non-profit group Veterans for Veterans manages the income from the sale, and the money was used for: new televisions in all veterans homes across the state, the “Make A Wish” program at the Veterans Medical Center Hospice Program, vans to shuttle veterans to medical appointments, and a non-profit ranch in Elk River used for therapeutic purposes by severely injured veterans.



East-end shoreline **before** restoration



East-end shoreline **after** restoration

Partners

- **Gabriel Jabbour:** Mr. Jabbour, the former mayor of Orono, was integral to halting the pending sale of the camp and raising funds for its purchase. He serves as custodian of the island and has coordinated the removal of tons of debris by area businesses and volunteers.
- **City of Orono:** The City of Orono has a strong philosophy for open space and natural resource protection. The City Council, including current Mayor Lili McMillan, worked tirelessly to secure \$2.85 million in funds to acquire the 56-acre parcel.
- **The State of Minnesota:** The state bonded \$2 million for the purchase.
- **Minnehaha Creek Watershed District:** The MCWD contributed \$850,000 toward the purchase and holds a conservation easement over the property to ensure the goals of natural resource preservation and passive recreational use are maintained in perpetuity.
- **Big Island Veterans Camp:** The Board of Governors for the Big Island Veterans Camp took a risk by rejecting a private cash offer and entering into a two-year purchase agreement, because it recognized the value of keeping the property in public hands.

