

Social Aspects of Dam Removal

– An Engineer’s Perspective



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Overview

- Why consider social aspects?
- How people think about nature
- How people act
- Keys to success
- Real world experiences



Why Consider Social Aspects

- Most dam removal projects are driven by ecological and dam safety considerations
- However.....



How People Think About Nature

- Intrinsic value of nature
 - Restoration of natural systems for nature's own sake
- Utilitarian value
 - Nature's value as perceived for human benefit
- Most people express support for the concept of intrinsic value
 - However.....



How People Act

- The intellectual struggle between intrinsic and utilitarian value may be dictated by the significance of direct impact to the individual
- Things people often value in practice:
 - Their view (river vs. lake)
 - Their recreation (kayaking vs. pontoon boating)
 - Their memories (community gatherings, personal)
 - Their money (property values, taxes)



How People Act

- These values have generally been reflected in policies and funding
 - Dam removal funds > dam construction funds
- However.....
 - State of Michigan pumped out ~\$250M to reconstruct dams following 2020 failures
 - Feds have invested billions in latest infrastructure bills



Keys to Success

People and communities vary – on size solution doesn't fit all

- Understand the issues
 - Property ownership issues
 - Historical vs. Historic?
 - Recreation
 - Lake vs. River
 - Angler concerns
 - Public use
 - Fears/Misconceptions
 - River flows
 - Flooding

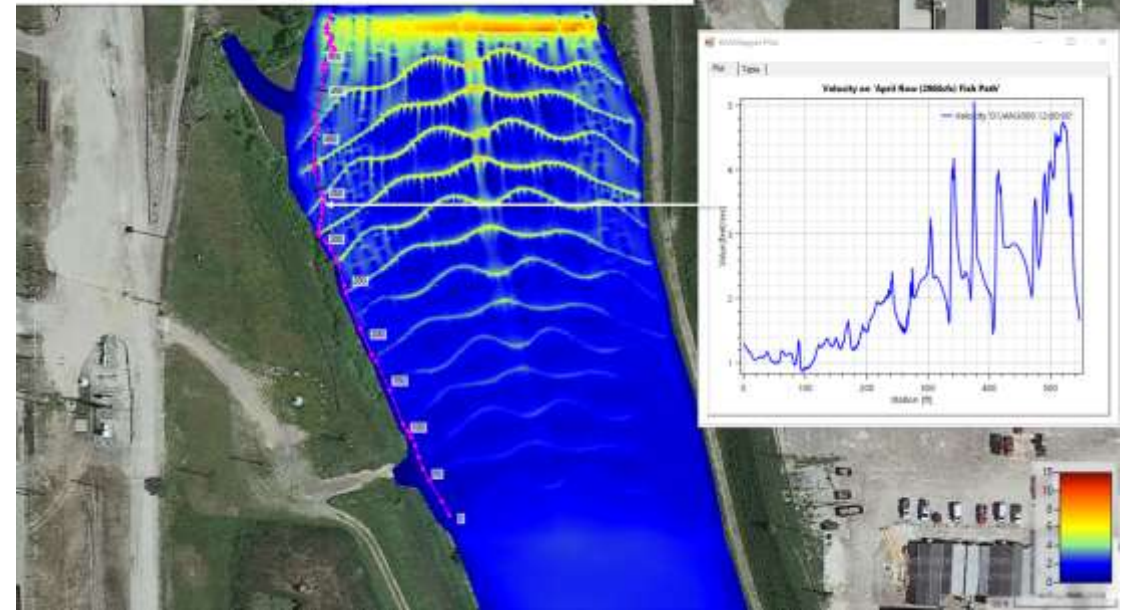


Keys to Success

- Mitigate the issues
 - Information
 - Pictures
 - Computer modeling results
- You will not please everyone
 - Some people like lakes better than rivers
 - Other beneficial uses (flood control, water supply, property values, etc.) may prevail



Velocity at April (median) Flow (2,960cfs)



Lessons Learned

- Picture is worth 1,000 words



View Looking North from S. State Street

White River Restoration
White Cloud, MI

Views are for Illustrative Purposes only.



View Location Map

February 10, 2022

Prepared by:
ELEMENTS STUDIO
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

Lessons Learned

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View Looking South from S. State Street

White River Restoration
White Cloud, MI

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Lessons Learned

- Public engagement doesn't stop at project approval/acceptance



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For more information, contact:

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or come visit our booth!

