



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**The City of Benton Harbor Recognized for the Ox Creek Restoration and Revitalization Project by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative**

HAMILTON, Ontario — May 8, 2026 — The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (Cities Initiative) announced that the City of Benton Harbor, Michigan, has received the 2026 Wege Small Cities Sustainability Best Practices Award, which recognizes meaningful projects that balance economic, social and environmental aspects of protecting water quality that could be used as a best practice inspiration for other cities. The City was recognized for the Ox Creek Restoration and Revitalization project. In addition to being recognized as a winner of the Wege Award, Benton Harbor will also receive a \$4,000 contribution to support the project.

The City was honored during the Cities Initiative's awards gala at its 2026 Annual Conference, held May 6–8 in Hamilton, Ontario.

"I am grateful for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative for providing the space and place for small cities to benefit from being a member of this great organization," said Mayor Marcus Muhammad of Benton Harbor. "The WEGE award will help facilitate change that will lead to transformation."

Ox Creek, a long-neglected tributary running through the heart of Benton Harbor, has been impacted by decades of industrial contamination, agricultural runoff, and illegal dumping. With support from local, state, and federal partners, the City of Benton Harbor is transforming the 4.5-mile corridor into a vibrant ecological and community asset. The Ox Creek Revitalization Plan focuses on key priorities including habitat restoration, water quality improvement, economic development, connected trails, public spaces, and community-building. Cleanup efforts have removed more than 120,000 pounds of debris. A 3,000-foot habitat restoration pilot will launch in 2026, and engineering is underway for the full Ox Creek trail.

The Wege Small Cities Sustainability Best Practices Award was created to support and recognize small cities, with populations of under 100,000 and with limited resources, who demonstrate leadership in tackling water quality issue while ensuring economic vitality and social equity. Submissions for the Wege Award are evaluated by Cities Initiative staff and reviewed by the organization's board of directors. This year, three members of the Cities Initiative were selected for their exemplary projects to further improve the quality of freshwater resources for future generations: the City of Benton Harbor, MI, the City of Sault Ste. Marie, ON, and the City of Gaspé, QC.

**About the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative**

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of municipal and Indigenous government executives representing communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region who are working to promote economic prosperity in our communities and protect our fresh water for the benefit of current and future generations. With more than 425 communities represented, the Cities Initiative is leading the way in advancing the environmental, economic, and social health of the region by addressing issues impacting its residents. In September 2025, the Cities Initiative launched its *Economic Transformation Action Plan: A Blueprint for Economic Growth* and Freshwater Stewardship in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region.

**For more information, please contact:**

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