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Fishing pier coming to O'Sullivan's Island in Derby

By Jim Shay Updated 7:44 am, Friday, September 4, 2015



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John Machowski Jr. spends some time fishing along the bank of the Housatonic River at O'Sullivan's Island Recreation Park in Derby, Conn., on Friday Dec. 26, 2014.

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DERBY - With earlier environmental concerns eased, a fishing pier will be erected on O'Sullivan's Island where the Housatonic meets the Naugatuck River. The pier will be designed and permits secured this year with construction slated for completion in early fall 2016.

Mayor **Anita Dugatto** said a \$325,000 grant has been awarded by the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**, on behalf of the **Connecticut Housatonic Natural Resource Truste Council**, to construct an accessible fishing pier. The money is a small part of a \$15 million settlement that General Electric had to pay for dumping PCBs in the Housatonic River for decades.

Plans to build a pier comes as good news for anglers, who have fished this location for years. The Housatonic makes a turn in Derby as it flows toward Long Island Sound in Milford and Stratford. This area the tidal section of the Housatonic that offers a variety of fresh and saltwater species including striped bass, Atlantic salmon, bluefish, fluke, trout, perch, catfish, even shad

during the spring.

O'Sullivan's Island, actually a peninsula, has a long toxic history. Over the years, the land had been used a horse racing track, city dump and dredging for sand and gravel in the 1970s and '80s. After the dredging, several leaking 55-gallon barrels were found in the riverbank, and 900 barrels were eventually pulled out of the ground during the **EPA**-sponsored cleanup. O'Sullivan Island was closed for a time after a 1999 inspection found unsafe levels of PCBs, toluene and xylene.

Today, with the majority of toxic materials removed, it's now called "O'Sullivan's Island Recreation Park" with the Derby Greenway passing through.

Dugatto said in a release, "although previously planned, the project was unable to be approved due to ongoing environmental issues at the site. The **Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments** was able to secure the funding after conducting extensive analysis of the soils and groundwater. Based on those studies NVCOG requested a report on potential public health risk from the **Connecticut Department of Public Health. Meg Harvey**, Epidemiologist with the CTDPH and author of the June 2015 Health Consultation for the site concluded that, "the available site information indicates that the intended construction and engineering work can proceed as planned in a safe manner."

Still, there are some environmental concerns with the site.

Because of this while the pier is being built, a "licensed environmental professional" will sample and review conditions of all soils excavated and disturbed to properly manage any potential contamination that is known to exist below the surface layer.

Art Gerckens, **Board of Alderman** president, said "securing this grant is a fine example of local government working together with other agencies to achieve a positive goal. This is a win for the citizens of Derby and will give our fishermen a better opportunity to land some huge stripers."

The grant was made possible by funding set aside specifically for sites along the Housatonic River like O'Sullivan's Island. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, an October 2000 consent decree required GE to provide \$15 million to the Natural Resource Trustees for natural resource damages; these were associated with the environmental harm caused by releases of PCBs into the Housatonic River watershed in western Massachusetts and Connecticut. The funds were roughly divided so that \$7.5 million would be available for restoration projects in each state's portion of the Housatonic River watershed.

The Derby project was originally selected for funding in 2010 under the Housatonic River Restoration program, but not funded due to an inability to secure environmental clearances.

"We look forward to working with the NVCOG and the City of Derby to improve public access to

the Housatonic and Naugatuck Rivers,” said **Tom Chapman**, Supervisor of the **USFWS New England Field Office**. “The new path and accessible fishing pier will re-connect people with these extraordinary rivers.”

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