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## **ROOT-PIKE WIN AND THE VILLAGE OF SOMERS TO BEGIN PRAIRE AND WETLAND WORK AT GITZLAFF PARK**

Somers – Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) in collaboration with the Village of Somers will restore the North half of Gitzlaff Park, a unique part of the Pike River watershed. The parcel is located on the North side of the Somers Branch of the Pike River within the undeveloped Gitzlaff Park parcel. The improvements are primarily designed to reduce flooding, curb erosion and mitigate pollutants to the Somers Branch. The work will also add a trail system, boost diverse pollinator vegetation and improve the Oak Savanna.

Wetland systems and associated upland native habitats have been diminished and altered ever since people first started to settle in southeastern Wisconsin. In the Pike River watershed, more than 90% of pre-settlement wetlands have been filled or drained to make way for cropland or urban development according to the Pike River Plan (2013). Today, prairies, wetlands and oak savannas are a rarity in the Root-Pike basin.

Without prairie buffers and wetland functions, storm water volume and velocity causes erosion, tree falls, and infrastructure failures downstream. The Gitzlaff Park improvements will also bring back the native and diverse vegetation that process pollutants, recharge groundwater, and sequesters carbon. A trail system through the parcel is also part of the improvements. Together, all of these improvements will create a new place where people want to be.

Root-Pike WIN secured \$125,000 in grants from the Fund for Lake Michigan and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to fully fund the project's design and construction. No Village funds are being used for the design, construction and short-term maintenance of this project. Wetland scrapes and plantings will start this fall and undergo three years of maintenance. After the three years of invasive species mitigation, minimal work will be needed to keep the land types properly functioning.

According to George Stoner, Board President, "We are focused on improving water quality and increasing water retention. The Village is happy that we can partner with Root-Pike WIN on projects like this to achieve mutual goals, that in the end, benefit us all."

Dave Giordano, the Executive Director of Root Pike WIN says, "The best part about our work is that it is never an 'either, or.' We can reduce flooding and erosion along the Somers Branch while simultaneously creating a unique new natural area for residents to enjoy. People are rediscovering our wide-open natural spaces due to COVID19 and this location will add to the

opportunities to get out while safely distancing. The Village of Somers understands that building the resiliency of our rivers also strengthens the Village's brand."

Jason Peters, Somers Village Administrator adds, "It has been informative and prosperous working with Root-Pike WIN. The Village is very excited to see the Gitzlaff Park improvements progress. This just a first step, in many, in creating a better environment for Somers and Lake Michigan stakeholders."

Gitzlaff Park is a 24-acre property that was generously donated to the Village of Somers by Larry Gitzlaff in 2007. The Gitzlaff family has been a prominent agricultural products provider in the Somers community for many generations. The South side of the park is being considered for other passive and active recreational amenities.

Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit that restores, protects and sustains the Root-Pike basin by building partnerships, finding funding, and managing projects to improve some of the most impaired Lake Michigan tributaries in the state of Wisconsin.

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