

Students Documenting the Wastewater Pond Restoration Project in Port Wing

Visitors and residents of Port Wing may have noticed the activity along Highway 13 just west of town and the large mounds of soil being stored in a field further up the highway. On Wednesday, May 15th, the South Shore Chemistry class visited the site of the old Port Wing Wastewater Ponds to find out more about the project that is the cause of the activity. They met with Michele Wheeler, Water Resources Specialist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. There have been some inquiries from the public about the funding, purpose, and scope of the project, so the Chemistry students collaborated on writing this article to help address some of those questions.

The Port Wing Wastewater Ponds were constructed in 1968 but are no longer used since a new wastewater treatment facility was developed in 2011. At that time, the waste material was removed from the site. The site is owned by the Town of Port Wing, and it is adjacent to the Port Wing Boreal Forest State Natural Area, which is owned and managed by the DNR. The restoration project is fully funded by the DNR, and the main goal is to restore the wetland habitat by reconnecting it to the Flagg River watershed and Lake Superior. Wetlands are a crucial component of the ecosystem. They help improve the water quality of Lake Superior and there are a variety of wildlife that use wetlands as their homes. For example, students encountered a snapping turtle and heard the call of an American Bittern. In addition, several rare plants and animals have been documented at this wetland.

The restoration project will require removal of the berms from the perimeter of the ponds to allow water to exchange with the surrounding wetland. Silt fences will be used to eliminate runoff of sediment into the surrounding wetlands. Soil removed from a different project is being stored about a mile up the highway and will be brought in to establish specific water levels and to provide a seed bank of native wetland plants. An earthen observation platform will be installed and the road will be improved to the site, including a parking area.

With school out for the summer, a new group of students are getting involved with the project. They recorded a flyover video of the site with a drone, and they will continue to document the progress throughout the summer. The images will be made available through a link on the Town of Port Wing website [<https://portwingwi.com/port-wing-pond-restoration>]. Any South Shore students who are interested in participating in this project during the summer should contact Beth Hoagland at bhoagland@sshore.k12.wi.us or Stacy Jardine at sjardine@sshore.k12.wi.us.