

Hammond Launches New Recreation Area

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HAMMOND, Ind., Sept. 20 -- Hammond officials today officially opened Lost Marsh Environmental Recreation Area, a 330-acre championship golf course, youth golf academy and nature preserve built on the site of a former slag heap.



Lost Marsh is the largest brownfield reclamation project in the Midwest.

"This site, once best described as a moonscape, is now an environmental treasure rich with greenery, wildlife and recreational opportunities," said Hammond Mayor Duane Dedelow Jr. "Like many parts of our nation, this area grew thanks to heavy industry that brought good jobs and good wages to residents. But that industry also left behind scars on our land.

"We can proudly say we are leaving a different legacy for our children -- one of environmental responsibility that will help redefine Northwest Indiana as a recreational destination."

Lost Marsh has dramatically transformed a site near the shores of Lake Michigan that had long been disfigured by a mountain of slag (a non-toxic byproduct of steelmaking), polluted wetlands, worn tires and car parts.

Today, alongside a new 18-hole championship golf course and a 9-hole youth course and golf academy, the Lost Marsh Environmental Recreation Area offers biking and nature trails; fishing; birdwatching; wetlands and wooded areas; an environmental education center; and winter activities such as ice skating and cross-country skiing.

"For decades, blight and pollution kept this area off limits to residents," said Jim Davis, president of the Hammond Redevelopment Commission.

"Today, it is an oasis where people can come together and re-connect with each other and with nature. This is a giant step in the transformation of Hammond and Northwest Indiana."

The environmental benefits go well beyond Lost Marsh itself. The remediation of the land included the re-use of biosolids from the nearby sanitary district mixed with sand and limestone, saving millions of dollars for the cleanup of biosolids lagoons there. The project also allowed for the removal of 200 homes from floodplain by lowering the water table.

"The project has several sustained environmental benefits, including the reclamation of the once-polluted south basin of George Lake; cleanup of the former research and development sites once used by BP; and the return of wildlife and restoration of native plants," said Sam Senn of Bascor Environmental, Inc., a national and international environmental expert who served as project engineer for Lost Marsh. "No other remediation projects in the area have accomplished improvements equaling those here at George Lake." Senn also noted that the project has received praise from by leading environmental experts, including Dr. George Ware of Morton Arboretum; Dr. Ken Brock of Indiana University Northwest; and Daniel Goldfarb of the Wildlife Habitat Council.

For its far-reaching impact on the environment and quality of life, the \$33-million project has received the Indiana Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence and has been recognized by the United Nations Conference on the Environment.

"I hope residents from throughout the region will take advantage of this new addition to our community, which will enhance the quality of life for our children and our families," Dedelow said. "Our goals at the outset were to reclaim this site from decades of blight and to make it accessible to all. Anyone who visits Lost Marsh will see for themselves it is a success on both fronts."

The championship golf course, which ranks among the most challenging in Chicagoland, will feature fees as much as 50 percent cheaper than nearby courses like Chicago's Harborside and White Hawk and Crown Point, Indiana. All other activities are free.

In addition to generating revenue for the City of Hammond, fees collected at the golf course will support youth golf programs at Lost Marsh, including the Hammond Youth Golf Academy, a charter member of the prestigious First Tee program of the World Golf Foundation. The youth golf program has already served more than 6,000 boys and girls from all Hammond neighborhoods.

The natural offerings are unmatched in the region. With coyotes, beavers, Canada geese, egrets, ducks and countless

fish species fish swimming just below the surface, George Lake is the centerpiece of the environmental recreational area. Walking and biking trails weave around the lake and through the nature areas. Organized bike rides will be scheduled twice a month.

A 200-foot pier, to be installed in 2004, will offer a beautiful view of the lake for birdwatching and will create a wonderful fishing spot. At the Environmental Education Center, environmental education programs teach youth and adults the fundamentals of the three "R"s -- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle -- and how human actions impact the world in which we live and future generations.

"Growing up in Hammond, we never had access to anything as wonderful as this," said Tom Dabertin, a member of the citizens advisory committee for Lost Marsh. "Today, our kids and their parents can enjoy the great outdoors right here in Hammond and take a renewed sense of pride in our community."

For more information on golfing and other activities at Lost Marsh, please call 219-932-4653.

Source: Lost Marsh Environmental Recreation