

Island Restoration Project is complete!

by Sue Orzell

Waves washing through the seawall on the Greater Ward Island (the “big island”) from approximately the center of the island to the north caused erosion to the shoreline behind the gabion wall, leaving gaps as wide as 10 feet behind the seawall. A restoration plan was developed, proposing the placement of landscape cloth on the eroded shoreline and filling the gap with stone. The original plan was to transport stone to the islands using the land bridge between the peninsula and the islands during the 10-foot drawdown for the dam project in 2019.



The east side of the big island, looking north, taken in 2019.

Fund-raising was immediately organized, with a Go-FundMe account established, and a celebrity bartender night hosted at the Coalyard Tavern in DeRuyter. Over the course of a month, more than \$9,000 was raised from friends and present and former residents of the lake! With funding in hand, the project was well founded.

Unfortunately, approval of the permit for the project was delayed, and the lake level rose to drown the land bridge before any work could be done. The COVID19 pandemic intervened, and further delayed action. Stone was ordered and delivered to the Town/Village Recreation Area

in February 2021, and one winter work day was held in February 2022, moving stone using four-wheelers and wagons over the ice. Repeated efforts to move stone from the Town/Village Recreation Area to the islands through the rest of 2022 and 2023 were foiled by relatively warm winter weather and thin ice.

In 2024, it was proposed that the stone be moved over the water during the summer months, and Sue Orzell, Bill Orzell and Gary Ward agreed to organize the work. Gary volunteered the use of his pontoon barge, and determined how the stone could be moved by truck from the Recreation Area to his back lot, and from there, transported by front loader to a loading dock built on Claude Staley's shoreline. Claude's permission was generously granted, and the loading platform built on **July 22, 2024**.



Gary Ward demonstrates how a scoop of stone would be deployed to the pontoon barge. Photo: Debby Lewyellyn

A trial work session was scheduled for **Thursday, July 24** with only 8 people, to practice and refine the proposed work process. Gary and Sean Ward and Tim Coon handled all shoreside activities, using Gary's two front loaders to move stone from the piles to the pontoon waiting at the loading dock. Sean piloted his boat, towing the pontoon barge loaded with stone to the island, with Debby Llewellyn steering the barge with an improvised rudder. On the island, work started midway up the island, where the erosion was the worst. Bill Orzell, Sue Orzell and Dick Alter laid lengths of landscape cloth in the gaps to be filled, fastened them to the shoreline with landscape staples and weighting the cloth down with stones which had been placed into the gap over the years. Once the barge was towed to the island, all hands, including the shore crew plus Tim and Sam Coon, boarded the barge and threw stones by hand onto the waiting cloth. Once the barge was unloaded, the shore crew returned to the west side, loaded the barge again, and brought it back to the islands to be unloaded. Three barge loads were moved that day, proving the method that would be used for the rest of the project.

The next work session was set up for **Saturday, July 27**. The notice for the work session was emailed to people who had expressed interest in working, and others heard about the work by word-of-mouth. Unbelievable! Fifteen people came to the island to work on Saturday. There were nearly too many people on the barge to unload stone, with those on the lake side of the barge timing their stone-tossing to miss those working on the side closest to the gabions. There were plenty of people to help hold the barge in place and move it along the seawall as the gaps were filled. Work progressed from mid-island to the north, filling the worst of the erosion areas. Mike Kennedy was the tow master that day, bringing the barge to and from the island 8 times. Two generations of the Sherlock and Meyers families worked that day.

The progress made inspired the workers so much that another work day was spontaneously planned for **Sunday, July 28**. Many of the workers from Saturday worked Sunday as well, and 16 showed up to work through the 4-hour session. Some



*Debby Llewellyn steers the pontoon barge.
Photo: Kathy Sherlock*



Brian and John Sherlock chat with Sue Orzell and Mike Swan (partially hidden). Photo: Kathy Sherlock

of the workers never got a chance to handle a rock from the barge, preferring to stay safely out of the melee, instead rearranging stones to protect the shoreline better and moving overturned stones from the island soil to the fill area. Bill and Sue Orzell prepared the areas to be filled with landscape cloth. Work continued to fill the areas north, filling the eroded areas, under shrubs and tree roots, to the north end of the island. Two generations of the Sherlock, Coon and Meyers families worked that day, and three generations of Browns (Anne Knapp, Ashley Brown and her 2 sons) lent their assistance.

Sunday, August 4. More stone was placed on the center section, and then proceeded south from there, working to the clearing near the south end of the island. This included sections under drooping tree branches, which meant drawing them up with ropes to expose the gabions and the gap behind. Nine people joined the island crew, and four more on the shore and pontoon crew.



Thursday, August 8. A small crew of 6 retirees gamely tossed three loads of stone in the area that we left unfinished on August 4. Rain further shortened the work session. Despite the limited work session, progress was made—landscape cloth was laid and weighted with stones to the southeast corner of the island, and the gap behind the gabions, much shallower and narrower than on northern portions of the shore, was nearly filled.

The southeast island shoreline during work on August 4. Photo: Kathy Sherlock

Sunday, August 11. Three 2-hour sessions were offered so that the size of the volunteer work crews could be managed better. Sixteen people arrived over the course of the day to work on the island, many of whom worked on the original seawall on the island. The objective that day was to fill across the south end of the island, hopefully to start on the big void behind the seawall on the southwest side where a tree fell over about 15 years ago, crushing the gabions so the top surface of the cages were below the lake level, and leaving a hole in the soil of the island where the tree was uprooted. The

tree was removed from the gabion seawall a number of years ago, and the remaining trunk and root ball pushed behind the gabion. The void behind the seawall was as wide as the gap on the east side of the island, but not as long.

Work started on shore around 10:30am, and the first load was delivered to the southeast corner of the island around 11am. Landscape cloth was being laid in the shallow depressions on the southeast corner of the island, ready for the stone. It was a challenge to lay the cloth ahead of the stone deliveries, and three people dedicated their time to cutting strips of cloth during the day for the ongoing work. The shallow sections were filled quickly, but a 20 foot length of seawall under low branches were deeper, and took 1½ barge loads to fill. Then, the big challenge was at



Terry Smith and Dan Bates evaluate the work to be done. Photo: Kathy Sherlock

hand. After one load of stone was placed, the void was still large enough that it was decided to install a new gabion behind the existing wall to ballast it. Unused cages from the original project were still stashed on the island, and one was taken to shore and assembled. The gabion basket was placed around 2 feet behind the existing seawall, and lined with landscape cloth to prevent soil from moving from the island shore through the gabion. It was surprising that it took 3 barge loads of stone to fill the gabion. Once filled, stones were placed in front and at the sides of the new gabion to fill the remaining areas. Six loads of stone were moved that day.



Terry and Don Smith, with Dan Bates on shore and Joe McAllister in the water, wait for the next delivery of stone at the south end of the island. Photo: Kathy Sherlock



At work at the south end of the big island. On shore: Sue Orzell. On the barge (l-r) Doug Beeler, Nellie Sherlock, Mike Swan, Casey Cushing, Terry Smith and Don Smith. Photo: Kathy Sherlock

Thursday, August 28. Work started at the northern end of the island. The eroded depth there was only about 1½ feet, but still took 3 barge loads to fill the area. The erosion was worse behind the seawall on the northwest side of the island, and the water fully surrounded the end of the seawall. Landscape cloth was laid and fastened to the shore, and laid behind the gabion wall before stone was placed. Stone was deployed to fill the gap even with the top of the gabion wall. This finished the work on the big island!

There was still work to be done; the southern end of the small island suffered similar erosion at the end of the seawall. Landscape fabric was laid and fastened there as well, and stone piled to the level of the top of the existing seawall, and extended north to join the existing stone on the inside of the island.

The rest of the seawall around the small is-

land was in good shape, with no erosion behind the wall. The only work left was to move the remainder of the stone from the west side shore to the island. There has been discussion about erecting a nesting platform for eagles or osprey on the islands, and the leftover stone could be used to ballast a pole. The rest of the stone was piled around the southwest corner of the big island, to be used later.