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Bradford Beach to get a cleanup

Rain gardens, dunes, native plantings, swales included

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By this time next year, Bradford Beach should be sporting a new look, with \$1.2 million in rain gardens, dunes and grassy swales installed as a means of diverting bacteria-laden storm water runoff from the sand.

Low spots near the beach that now are mowed will be shaped into basins with native plantings to help hold and absorb excess rainwater, and nearby berms will be planted with dune grass.

The beach parking lot will be altered slightly - about six feet will be shaved from the lake side and added to the west side of the lot.

On the lake side of the lot, a long swale - or shallow trough - will also help filter the runoff and keep it from the beach. A rain garden planted in shrubs and small plants and surrounded by a low wall will be built south of the Bradford bathhouse.

The combined impact of the installations should cut about 90% of storm water from reaching the beach, said Stevan Keith, a county environmental engineer. The storm water is directed toward the beach by a series of seven storm sewer outfalls that drain the bluff overlooking Bradford.

The project should cut down on the bacteria left on the beach after a storm, as well as restoring a more natural look, Keith told the Milwaukee County Board Parks Committee on Tuesday.

The improvements should "help stabilize the soil and act as natural treatment devices," Keith said.

The beach-scaping efforts follow studies by a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee researcher that identified the storm sewer pipes as a source of bacteria found in the beach sand.

The county studied moving the Bradford storm sewer outfalls that empty rainwater near the beach and its parking lots, which has been identified as one source of potentially harmful bacteria in the sand. But that proved too costly.

The county approved the funding for the project in 2006. The work must be done next year to meet terms of a state-issued storm water permit, Keith said.

An additional \$50,000 toward the project will be contributed by the state and \$15,000 by the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. The parks panel approved applications for the state and MMSD grants.

Some similar measures at McKinley Beach are also planned. The Parks Department is seeking \$300,000 in its 2008 budget request for some beach improvements there.

Water garden possible

Also Tuesday, a plan for a separate \$650,000 "water garden" project at Bradford Beach to be paid for through private donations was advanced by the Parks Committee.

The money would go toward construction of a series of low concrete and stone benches along the north flank of the North Point snack bar parking lot. Visitors could hand pump water from low-capacity wells drilled there, and the water would flow along the benches. A nearby children's sandbox with a timber deck would also be built.

The water garden would "expand recreational opportunities in an area of high public interest with a subtle, yet artistic flair," according to a county analysis of the project. It should improve shoreline erosion-control measures, the analysis said.

The committee recommended that the parks department negotiate a contract for the project with Friends of Bradford Beach, a citizens group. Proof that the full \$650,000 has been raised would be required before the water garden could be built.

Parks Director Sue Black said the two projects would complement one another and help beautify the lakefront.

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