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Springfield, Ohio Gets First River Recreation Park

Obsolete dam converted into downtown amenity

Boulder, Colo. (March 4, 2011): A series of dangerous and outdated low-head dams on Buck Creek in Springfield, Ohio, have been converted into a new whitewater park, ushering in a new source of revenue and recreation for the community.

Designed by Boulder, Colo.'s Recreation Engineering & Planning (REP) and facilitated by local developers John and Kevin Loftis, two renovated low-head dam sites have opened on the creek so far, with two more scheduled for construction this year. The new park is already luring kayakers, canoeists and other recreation users from across Ohio and nearby states, especially during scheduled reservoir releases.

"The project has multiple aspects — recreation, environmental and stream restoration, improvement of the aquatic environment," says John Loftis, who spearheaded the project through nonprofit Friends of Buck Creek. "It's already proving to be a great amenity to the town." Loftis adds that while Wittenberg University is currently working on economic impact figures for the project, the total cost to date of the two phases is $900,000, with two small dam sites still to go.

History shows it should provide a significant benefit to the town. The City of Golden, Colo. built the country's first publicly funded whitewater park in 1998 for $165,000, also designed by REP. Golden's director of public works Dan Hartman estimates the park brings in 40,000 visitors and $4 million to the community each year.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources recently honored the Friends of the Buck Creek Recreation Corridor for its work by presenting the group with the Cardinal Conservation Award, recognizing organizations whose projects "balance the wise use and protection of our natural resources for the benefit of all." "Springfield is at the forefront of a trend to create whitewater features from low-head dams," says Pamela Dillon, chief of ODNR's Division of Watercraft. "What they did was amazing -- they identified a series of hazards in the form of low-head dams and, through engineering modifications, turned them 180 degrees around to create play areas and activity areas. Paddlers are already traveling into Springfield from surrounding states to use the facility. It's a great draw to an area not previously known for its whitewater opportunities."

An integral part of the town's history, Buck Creek was the lifeblood of early Springfield, supplying fresh water to inhabitants and power to more than 65 mills along its banks. Recreational enhancements will once again connect the community to the creek. The four low-head dams' modification also factor into the town's newly formed Eco Sports Corridor and Buck Creek Educational Corridor, with water quality and stream habitat monitored via a new weather station, a stream gauging station and two water quality stations. Local teachers are already incorporating the stream setting and logged data into their science and math courses.

The five-mile-long renovation project was designed by REP, the nation's leader in whitewater park design. "It's a showpiece for the entire state," says REP president Gary Lacy. "More and more communities across the country are recognizing the natural amenities they have in their own backyards and converting them into new recreation venues, boosting local economies."

About REP
Since its founding in 1983, REP has created nearly 80 percent of all of in-stream whitewater parks in the United States, with an aggregate value of more than $50 million. In its 27 years it has seen more than 30 projects through from inception to fruition, varying in size from an $8 million park on Calgary's Bow River and the $21 million National Whitewater Center in Charlotte, N.C., to smaller projects in more rural communities, and has helped design nearly 50 more. Info: www.boaterparks.com.

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