

A footbridge was also proposed in the Ruckert-Mielke plan to connect the two sides of the park. Since the stream is intermittent and shallow, there are many times of the year currently when the stream can be crossed by foot.

Maintenance Road

A gravel maintenance road currently exists that runs between Highway E and the maintenance shed and fenced yard. This road could be extended north in order to provide access to the northern site. The road could be utilized for general maintenance of the property including prescribed burns and regular police patrol as the park use is developed. A preliminary proposal on the Gitzlaff restoration plan is to insert a locked gate into the chain link fence on the north side of the yard to provide limited access for wetland restoration construction and maintenance.

Restoration Goals:

Improve the ecological function of Gitzlaff by restoring four wetland scrapes on the banks of the Somers Branch of the Pike River thus improving water infiltration and modulating flow.

Provide and enhance upland buffers to wetlands and stream by converting agricultural land on south side to prairie buffer and restoring north field to prairie

Enhance wildlife habitat, songbird and amphibian habitat with wetland restoration and prairie establishment

Manage woody debris on stream banks while maintaining wooded buffer

Control Invasive Species as funding and volunteer opportunities develop

Establish an aesthetically pleasing, ecologically managed, and accessible park that provides a public setting for wildlife observation and education. Include planning for trails and boardwalks and investigate some connection to Neumiller Woods around an active railroad track.

Integrate restoration of Gitzlaff Park with the adjoining Town-owned Neumiller Woods and the entire Somers branch of the Pike River, to amplify the impact of restoration and ecological services to the Pike River and Lake Michigan downstream.

Restoration and Conservation Strategies for Gitzlaff:

This plan represents one year of field review and observations of Gitzlaff Park. There are two ways to proceed with restoration and management:

1. Tasks to restore Gitzlaff Park with limited funding:

- Control invasive species on north side of stream with volunteer “weed-outs”
- Plant additional prairie species on north side to enhance diversity
- Remove trash on stream banks
- Plant at least 100 feet of farm field on south end as native prairie to serve as a buffer

2. Tasks to integrate the restoration of Gitzlaff Park with Neumiller Woods and the Somer’s branch of the Pike River

- Seek funding from Fund for Lake Michigan and Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Grant for implementation of Neumiller Woods and Gitzlaff Park wetland and prairie restoration
- Initiate restoration of Gitzlaff Park with funding
- Obtain all permits
- Replace culverts under access road to maintenance shed
- Find funding for a property boundary survey to accurately understand all property corners
- Continue to meet with all partners to strategize on immediate and long-term goals for the park and prioritize restoration work

4. ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SITE

Post-restoration, Gitzlaff Park shall be monitored and adaptive management shall be used to identify problems or threats as they develop and implement management.

Invasive Species:

As Gitzlaff Park is restored, ongoing monitoring and removal of invasive plants that are established or become established should be part of the routine maintenance activities. Current targets include reed canary grass, common buckthorn, honeysuckle, garlic mustard, and dame’s rocket. Most of these plants are in relatively low numbers and could be controlled over time with citizen “weed out” days. Because this is a riverine system there are constant inputs into the system from within the watershed, which makes invasive control ongoing.

Other invasive species are present within the watershed and need to be prioritized for control if they colonize Gitzlaff, including giant reed grass (*Phragmites australis*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), cut-leaved teasel (*Dipsacus laciniatus*), and reed manna grass (*Glyceria maxima*). Appendix 5 contains a description of the major invasive species and how to manage them.

Areas of management should be prioritized annually according to the size of the invasive stand and the quality of the surrounding vegetation. Smaller stands in otherwise intact native communities have higher

priority than larger, more persistent stands in more degraded areas. Likewise, as stated above, newer infestations should have priority over more established populations.

Stormwater:

Recognize the negative impact of untreated stormwater on Gitzlaff and the Somers Branch in terms of delivering sediment and pollution into the wetlands and stream. New development within the local watershed should be evaluated to avoid future uncontrolled inputs into the wetland.

Public Access and Use:

Trails and a footbridge could be constructed on the park as funding or volunteer opportunities develop. As the public uses the park for passive recreation it may be necessary to post restrictions, for example to keep dogs on leash and pick up their droppings, not litter, not rut trails with bikes, etc. Signage can be posted as necessary.

Litter:

Some parks and natural areas have ongoing problems with deliberate dumping. This park's central location within Somers may preclude such activity, but the town may need to take action to protect the site from fill, including but not limited to grass clippings, Christmas trees, soil, compost, leaf matter from other sites, trash, and any other objects not native to the existing environment.

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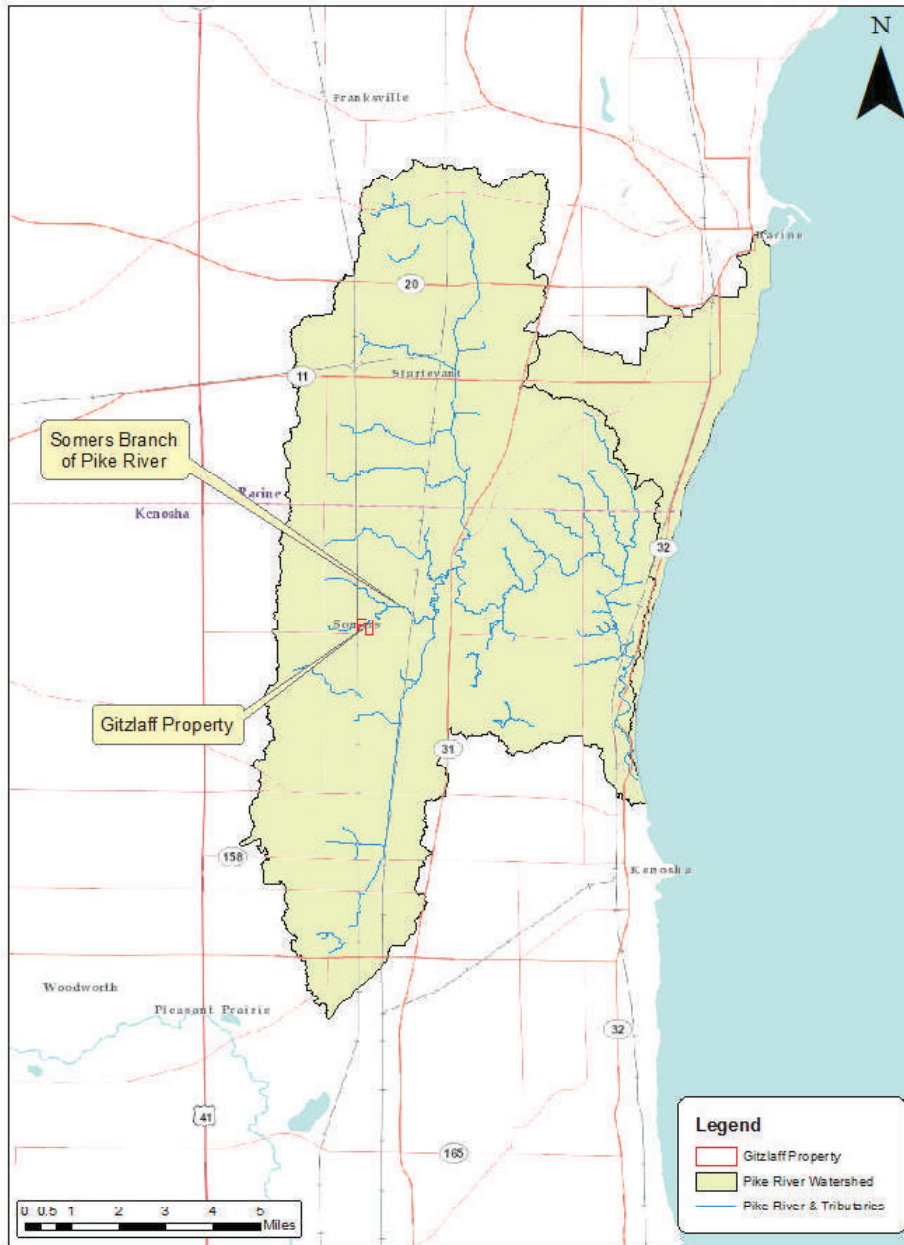
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Appendix 1 - Figures

Gitzlaff Park Stewardship Plan

Figure 1) Pike River Watershed



Service Layer Credits: Sources: Esri, DeLorme, USGS, NPS
Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA

