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## Area companies share in waterway conservation award

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CHESTERTON, Ind. -- It's just 700 feet of meandering creek. But it's already making a difference.

Returning just that much of Dunes Creek to its natural state already is reducing the levels of fecal coliform found at the adjacent Indiana Dunes State Park beach.

The project is different enough to win the Award of Excellence from the National Association of Conservation Engineers.

The award went to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, The Troyer Group of Mishawaka, J.F. New of Walkerton and Gariup Construction Co. of Gary.

The problem was that the last 1,300 feet of Dunes Creek, just before it empties into Lake Michigan, was put underground in 1929. It flowed through pipes under the parking lot to the beach at the park.

A few years ago, fecal coliform levels were going up during the summer, sometimes closing the beach.

State and federal agencies studied the problem for years, finally deciding that the coliform levels came from water running off woods and parking lots and other things into the creek during a heavy



**From left, Indiana Dunes State Park Property Manager Brandt Baughman, Dustin New, of J.F. New, and Darla Aldred, of the Troyer Group, stand in front of an award-winning creek restoration project at Indiana Dunes State Park.**

Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

rain.

Darla Aldred, a landscape architect with The Troyer Group, said the project removed more than two acres of parking lot. Then, 500 feet of pipes were replaced by the 700 feet of meandering stream.

The native vegetation planted around it helps clean out impurities in the water.

The work was finished in February, and Brandt Baughman, property manager at the park, said the fecal coliform level was down later in the summer, especially late on individual days.

"We expect it to improve as the vegetation establishes itself," he said.

The designers had to be particularly careful not to cause erosion on the two dunes the creek runs between. They put in erosion control fabric to help hold things in place as the vegetation grew.

It worked.

"There have been some pretty good rains during the summer," said Dustin New, of J.F. New. "It has been tested."

The new stream also prevents flooding that occasionally used to cover the main road to the beach.

Aldred said the stream may shift a little on its own. That's what natural creeks do.

The area also looks better than it did as a decaying parking lot.

The main trail from the camping area used to go through that parking lot. It now goes along the newly restored creek.

"We've had nothing but positive comments from the public," Baughman said.

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