



Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan: Advancing Water Quality and Access in Hyde Park

Niagara River Greenway Commission Consultation and Review Form
Submitted 1/21/2026 on behalf of Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper



Project Registration Number (office use only):

Niagara River Greenway Commission Consultation and Review Form

Type of Review Required: **Mandatory Consultation**

PROJECT SPONSOR INFORMATION

Name: **Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper**

Mailing Address: **721 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14203**

Federal ID#: **22-2993054**

Charities Registration #: **04-91-05**

PROJECT TYPE

Check all that apply: **Environmental** Cultural/Heritage. Land or Water Access
 Cultural Trail Educational/Interpretive Signage
 Waterfront or Landbased Development Recreational
 Other

Funding Committee Request: **Host Community Standing Committee**

Total Amount Requested: **\$313,800**

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name: **Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan: Advancing Water Quality and Access in Hyde Park**

Location: **Hyde Park**

Site Address: **3200 Pine Avenue, Niagara Falls, NY 14301**

Minor Civil Division:

County: **Niagara**

Project Proponent Property Interest: **Owned by City of Niagara Falls**

AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL

Name: **Robert Restaino** Title: **Mayor**
Business Address: **743 Main Street, Niagara Falls, NY 14301**
Telephone Number: **716.286.4477**
Cell Phone: **716.804.4610**
Email Address: Robert.restaino@niagarafallsny.gov

Project Point of Contact

Name: **Katherine Winkler**
Title: **Senior Program Manager**
Organization: **Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper**
Mailing Address: **721 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14203**
Telephone Number: **716-852-7483 Ext: 15**
Email Address: kwinkler@bnwaterkeeper.org

Project Narrative

In a brief paragraph, describe the project and its purpose, how and when it will be accomplished, and why it is important.

The **Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan: Advancing Water Quality and Access in Hyde Park** will complete a comprehensive watershed-scale assessment and develop a coordinated Healthy Waters Plan for Gill Creek and Hyde Park Lake, a 7.6-mile tributary system to the Upper Niagara River located in the City of Niagara Falls. Recurring Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) documented by Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper (BNW) since 2017, have impaired water quality, restricted safe public recreation, and raised public health concerns within this environmental justice community.

The project will include targeted field data collection, hydrologic and water quality modeling, and stakeholder engagement to identify the causes of HABs and establish a prioritized, data-driven strategy to reduce nutrient loading, improve water quality, and restore safe access to Hyde Park Lake. This effort is critically important because no comprehensive HAB-focused watershed assessment has previously been completed for Gill Creek. The resulting plan will guide future restoration investments that strengthen ecological resilience, protect public health, and advance the Niagara River Greenway vision.

Recent intensive HAB monitoring conducted by Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper in Hyde Park Lake has resulted in repeated public health advisories and reinforced the City of Niagara Falls' need for a comprehensive, data-driven watershed strategy to protect residents and guide future investments.

Referring to the Niagara River Greenway Plan, clearly document and describe how the proposed project will advance the Niagara River Greenway vision, including the goals, principles, and criteria that define that vision.

The Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan directly advances the Niagara River Greenway vision by supporting its goals, principles, and evaluation criteria through integrated watershed science, community engagement, and long-term planning.

Goals

Improve Access

This project addresses water quality conditions that currently restrict safe use of Hyde Park Lake, allowing improved access to water-based recreation and park amenities.

Promote Long-Term Sustainability

The plan will establish a framework for managing nutrients, hydrology, and HABs which will support long-term management of the Gill Creek corridor.

Make Connections

By combining watershed science, community priorities, and regional planning efforts, the project creates connections between local neighborhoods, natural resources, and the Niagara River watershed.

Protect and Restore Environmental Systems

The project directly targets impaired aquatic systems by identifying restoration and management actions that will improve water quality, habitat, and ecosystem function.

Celebrate History and Heritage

Gill Creek and Hyde Park are longstanding community resources and restoring their health helps preserve their historical and cultural significance.

Spark Revitalization and Renewal

Improved environmental conditions will enhance park use, neighborhood strength, and tourism in the City of Niagara Falls.

Principles

Excellence

The project applies field-based data collection and technical modeling to develop a thorough, sound watershed plan that meets state and regional standards for water quality and HAB management.

Restoration

By identifying the sources and drivers of harmful algal blooms and water quality impairments, the project will establish a clear path for future ecological restoration and habitat enhancements within Gill Creek and Hyde Park Lake.

Sustainability

The Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan will promote long-term, sustainable water quality improvements by addressing root causes of impairment rather than short-term or reactive management actions.

Authenticity

The project is grounded in the unique environmental, hydrologic, and community context of Gill Creek by incorporating local data, historical conditions, and stakeholder knowledge to develop place-based solutions.

Accessibility

Improving water quality and reducing HABs will restore safe and reliable public access to Hyde Park Lake and surrounding parkland to support fishing, paddle sports, and other passive recreation.

Celebration

The project supports renewed community engagement with Hyde Park, which is the City's largest urban park, and strengthens the value of Gill Creek as a community and environmental asset.

Ecological Integrity

The project prioritizes the protection and restoration of natural processes to improve overall ecological function within the Gill Creek watershed and its connection to the Niagara River system.

Partnerships

The project is built on longstanding partnerships between Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, the City of Niagara Falls, regional stakeholders, and technical consultants.

Public Well-Being

Reducing HABs directly benefits public health by lowering exposure risks to toxins and improving access to safe outdoor recreation in an environmental justice community.

Community-Based

Stakeholder and community engagement are key components of the project which will ensure that the plan reflects local priorities and supports equitable outcomes.

Connectivity

Gill Creek is a direct tributary to the Upper Niagara River. Improving its water quality enhances ecological connectivity and strengthens the broader Niagara River Greenway corridor.

Criteria

Consistency with Greenway Principles

The project aligns with Greenway principles by prioritizing environmental restoration, public access, stewardship, and community benefit.

Economic Viability

By reducing recurring HAB-related impacts and enabling future restoration investments, the project supports long-term economic benefits tied to recreation and tourism.

Priority Status

Gill Creek lies within the Niagara River Greenway boundary, the Niagara River Area of Concern, and a designated environmental justice community which elevates the project's regional importance.

Availability of Local Sponsor or Partner

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper serves as the project sponsor in close partnership with the City of Niagara Falls and other regional stakeholders.

Focus Area

The project is located entirely within the Niagara River Greenway corridor and directly affects a major tributary to the Niagara River.

Ability to Match or Leverage Funds

Completion of the Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan will position the City and partners to leverage future state, federal, and local funding for implementation.

Environmental Soundness

The project relies on science-based assessment, modeling, and regulatory-aligned methodologies to ensure sound environmental outcomes.

Consideration of Other Planning Efforts

The project complements the City of Niagara Falls Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, regional restoration initiatives, and ongoing Niagara River Area of Concern efforts.

Implementable

The plan will produce a prioritized, actionable implementation strategy that clearly identifies next steps, responsibilities, and funding opportunities.

Clear Benefits

The project delivers clear public, ecological, and community benefits by improving water quality, protecting public health, restoring recreation, and strengthening the Niagara River system.

Identify all sources of funding and the amount of funding expected from each source. Identify and quantify funds that are already on hand or have been allocated for the proposed project. Explain how the project will be operated and maintained.

Total Project Budget: \$313,800

Budget Breakdown:

- Planning: \$313,800

Detailed Budget:

- Personnel: \$114,380
- Travel: \$1,920
- Supplies/Program Expenses (outreach and water quality sampling): \$1,500
- Consultant Services: \$196,000

Operations and Maintenance:

This project is a planning and assessment effort and does not involve construction or capital improvements requiring ongoing operations or maintenance. The resulting Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan will, however, include recommendations for future projects that may require long-term maintenance strategies to be addressed during subsequent implementation phases.

Describe the measures taken at the local level to gain community and government support for this project. If this project has been cited or described in a local planning document or some equivalent thereof, attach copies of that documentation highlighting the sections that are relevant to the proposed project. Describe the role of municipal agencies, stakeholder groups, consultants, volunteers, or others who will be involved in the proposed project.

BNW has a long-standing partnership with the City of Niagara Falls and has collaborated on more than a decade of restoration, stormwater management, and green infrastructure projects within the Gill Creek corridor. The proposed project builds directly on these efforts and responds to community concerns regarding water quality, HABs, and access to Hyde Park Lake.

Community engagement will be incorporated through stakeholder meetings, including targeted outreach to key watershed stakeholders such as municipal departments, the Hyde Park Golf Course, and other landowners and institutional partners. The project area lies within the City's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan boundary and aligns with ongoing regional and municipal planning initiatives focused on ecological restoration, public access, and waterfront revitalization. Additionally, the project advances the work completed through the 2023 Gill Creek Conceptual Restoration Plan.

In 2025, BNW conducted intensive, weekly HAB monitoring, testing, and tracking within Hyde Park Lake. This effort resulted in the positive identification of multiple harmful algal species and informed the issuance of public health advisories to protect community members. These findings heightened concern among City of Niagara Falls leadership and reinforced the need for improved understanding of the watershed conditions contributing to recurring blooms.

BNW is actively engaged in ongoing discussions with the City of Niagara Falls, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), New York Power Authority (NYPA), the Hyde Park golf course, and technical consultants to share existing data, identify remaining uncertainties, and evaluate potential long-term solutions. Through these conversations, a clear consensus has emerged that critical data and system-level analysis are still needed to inform future management decisions and capital investments. The proposed Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan is designed to address these gaps by providing the science-based information necessary to guide effective, coordinated action.

Describe and document the environmental setting and existing conditions at the proposed project site.

Gill Creek drains a 13.9-square-mile watershed spanning the Tuscarora Nation, Town of Lewiston, Town of Niagara, and the City of Niagara Falls before discharging to the Upper Niagara River. The watershed has been heavily altered by historic and modern infrastructure, including dams, channelization, culverts, and stormwater inputs. Hyde Park Lake, a 484-acre impoundment formed by a dam in the 1920s, suffers from impaired water quality, sediment accumulation, altered hydrology, and recurring harmful algal blooms (HABs) nearly every year since 2017, as documented by Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper's Riverwatch Program.

According to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's Waterbody Inventory/Priority Waterbodies List, "aquatic life support and recreational uses in Gill

Creek are impaired and aesthetics are significantly impacted by various toxic and other contaminants from historic/past discharges, contaminated sediments, municipal/industrial inputs, and other urban nonpoint sources” (2014). HABs, nutrient loading, and other pollutants harm aquatic life, restrict recreation, and impact economic development, while posing potential human health risks.

Restoring the health of Gill Creek and the nearshore area of Hyde Park Lake is critical to protecting ecosystem services that support fish and wildlife, clean water, community health, recreation, and a vibrant local economy.

If you are not the owner of the property, include a letter(s) or resolution(s) evidencing support for the project by the owner. BNW is coordinating closely with the City of Niagara Falls, the property owner, on implementation of this proposed project. A formal letter of support from the City is forthcoming and will be submitted upon receipt.

Describe how your project will comply with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). The existence of wetlands, significant upland and aquatic habitats, and plant or animal species that are classified as rare, threatened, or endangered should be noted. Explain how such natural resources will be protected and/or enhanced. Cite any relevant project-related studies.

This project is a planning and assessment effort only and does not include construction, ground disturbance, or physical alterations to the project site. As such, no changes to existing site conditions are proposed as part of this phase. **Photographs of existing conditions within the Gill Creek corridor and Hyde Park Lake are provided in the appendix for context.** Conceptual plans and drawings to illustrate potential future improvements will be developed at a high, illustrative level within the Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan but will not constitute final designs or proposed actions.

Because the project is limited to data collection, analysis, modeling, and planning, it is anticipated to be classified as a Type II or Unlisted action under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). Any future implementation projects resulting from this plan will undergo separate and appropriate SEQRA review prior to construction.

The planning process will document existing environmental conditions, including wetlands, aquatic habitat, and any known rare, threatened, or endangered species, using available data and field observations. Recommendations developed through the plan will prioritize the protection and enhancement of natural resources and ecological functions. Relevant project-related studies, including NYSDEC assessments and Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper monitoring data, will be referenced and incorporated as appropriate.

Please attach the proposed project timeline, identify any relevant milestones, and provide an estimated date for project completion/opening. If funded, it is expected that the project sponsor or point of contact will notify the Commission of the project opening date as it nears completion.

March – April 2026: Execute contract with City of Niagara Falls; receive funding

April–May 2026: Select consultant and execute consultant contract; develop Quality Assurance Project Plan

May–November 2026: Conduct sampling, data collection, modeling, and stakeholder engagement

December 2026–May 2027: Finalize Gill Creek Healthy Waters Plan and implementation strategy

June 2027: Grant closeout

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper will inform the Niagara River Greenway Commission as the project approaches completion and again upon release of the final plan.

Appendix



Duck Island (North): 07/01/2025



Duck Island (South): 07/01/2025



Porter Road (South): 08/05/2025



Grab Sample from Duck Island (North): 08/12/2025



Duck Island (North): 8/12/2025



Duck Island (North): 8/12/2025



Signage at Hyde Park Lake