



## News Release

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### **DWSD, Detroit Zoo, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and its International Wildlife Refuge Join To Restore Habitat For State-Threatened Common Tern**

#### **Volunteers from Detroit and Southgate High Schools to Help Prepare Site Nov. 22**

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD), Detroit Zoological Society (DZS), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (U.S. FWS) have partnered to restore nesting habitat on Belle Isle for the common tern, a threatened migratory species restricted to small breeding populations in Trenton, Mich. The selected site on Belle Isle was a popular area for as many as 1,200 nesting pairs of terns in the early 1960s.

The common tern is a signature species of the Detroit River. With its buoyant flight and acrobatic maneuvers, it catches small minnows chased to the water's surface by bigger fish. The birds spend most of the year along the shores of southern Peru, but return to the northern latitudes for its long summer days, milder climate, and abundance of food.

Although not reduced in sufficient numbers to be classified as an endangered species, the common tern is considered *threatened* in Michigan, as well as in many other U.S. states. While recent improvements in the water quality of the Detroit River have meant an increased availability of food for the terns, these birds are still threatened by predation from foxes, raccoons, dogs, and other animals.

The most significant factor in the decline of the species has been the loss of suitable nesting areas for the tern, which prefers sparsely vegetated, open areas near water.

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The goals of this project are to, 1) increase common tern nesting habitat on Belle Isle in an area historically known for successful reproduction, 2) minimize potential predation, 3) provide wildlife viewing opportunities, and 4) create a unique educational opportunity for children. The project will include the preparation of a sand and limestone area for nesting on property owned by DWSD on the northern tip of the island. Tern calls and decoys will be used to attract terns to this site next spring, when the birds return from their winter grounds in South America. If this site is successfully colonized, DZS and the U.S. FWS will monitor reproductive success of the colony, and any limiting factors that may affect success.

“The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department is pleased to be a part of this unique project to further restore our Detroit River,” said DWSD’s Interim Director Pamela Turner. “We have witnessed dramatic improvements in the water quality of the Detroit River, which have laid the foundation for the recovery of declining populations of bald eagles, peregrine falcons, lake whitefish, lake sturgeon, walleye, and mayflies. We now look forward to restoring the common tern habitat, and further enhancing our river’s reputation as one of the most dramatic ecological recovery stories in North America.”

On Saturday, November 22, Detroit students volunteering for Detroiters for Environmental Justice and students from Southgate Anderson High School will participate in a workday event to prepare the site for the arrival of the terns next spring. Following site preparation, members of the public are invited to a presentation at 2:00 p.m. at the Belle Isle Nature Zoo by biologists from the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, and the Detroit Zoological Society.

The U.S. FWS’s Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and DZS have led efforts to understand how to help the declining population of common terns in the Detroit River and restore and protect this species and its nesting habitat for the benefit of generations to come. DWSD looks forward to the return of the terns to their historical nesting home on Belle Isle. The U.S. FWS and Belle Isle Nature Zoo staff will work with the Detroit Recreation Department to provide viewing opportunities near the Blue Heron Lagoon and enhance educational opportunities for children. Restoration of common tern habitat is consistent with the goal of the Belle Isle Master Plan to restore native species.

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge spans 48 miles of shoreline along the Detroit River and western Lake Erie (<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/detroitriver/>). The Refuge focuses on conserving, protecting and restoring habitat for 29 species of waterfowl, 65 kinds of fish, and 300 species of migratory birds. It is the first international refuge in North America. The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is, in concert with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

DWSD supplies high-quality drinking water to 4.3 million people who live and work in Detroit and 125 other communities in southeast Michigan. The Department provides wastewater services to three million people who live and work in Detroit and 76 other southeast Michigan communities.

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