

# News Release



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Celebrates Groundbreaking of Refuge Gateway Visitor Center**

The National Wildlife Refuge System Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative is taking a huge step forward today with the groundbreaking of the 11,800 square-foot Gateway Visitor Center at Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe, Congressman John Dingell, and other partners from the U.S. and Canada marked the culmination of more than 10 years of restoration work today in Trenton, Michigan.

The visitor center is located on property known as the Refuge Gateway, adjacent to the Humbug Marsh Unit of Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge – Michigan’s only “Wetland of International Importance” identified through the international Ramsar Convention. This 44-acre industrial brownfield was once home to the Chrysler automotive brake and paint plant.

For more than a decade, Wayne County, Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and an array of partners have been cleaning up, restoring, and enhancing the site to prepare for this new visitor center. This project has transformed Metropolitan Detroit from industrial brownfield to ecological buffer.

“Now, key species like the lake sturgeon, bald eagle, osprey, and mayflies have come back to the area in abundance. Because of the hard work and cooperation of our partners, this area has truly become a gateway for wildlife and people,” said Director Ashe.

Further, this transformation is helping change the perception of the Detroit River from that of a polluted “rust belt” river to an international recreation destination that connects people to nature, improves quality of life, showcases sustainable redevelopment, and enhances community pride.

“As a young boy growing up in Southeast Michigan, I have many fond memories of hunting and fishing along the shores of the Detroit River and Lake Erie with my dear old dad. The banks of the River looked a lot different than they do now. There was less concrete and more trees, less brick and mortar and more wetlands. This groundbreaking is yet another step in preserving and protecting land so important to our region and so dear to my heart. The visitor’s center will open the doors to all kinds of people to learn and appreciate the great outdoors as I have all my life here on the banks of the Detroit River and Lake Erie,” said Congressman John Dingell.

More than 80 percent of Americans live in urban or suburban communities and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service values the role that urban refuges play in providing innovative education programming and volunteer opportunities.

In the last 200 years, the Detroit River and surrounding area has undergone extreme changes from shipping, industrialization, and pollution, yet has been restored as a conservation centerpiece. Nearly 6 million people live in the metropolitan areas surrounding the river and it is a key source of relaxation, recreation, and renewal.

Gateway Visitor Center Timeline -

- Building contract awarded Fall 2013
- Groundbreaking Fall 2013
- Grand opening expected in Fall 2015

The construction of this visitor center is also one of the 2013 priorities of President Obama's America's Great Outdoors Initiative to develop a 21<sup>st</sup> Century conservation and recreation agenda. America's Great Outdoors builds on our nation's long history of actions taken to conserve our natural heritage. This Initiative takes as its premise that lasting conservation solutions should rise from the American people.

In 2001, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge was established as a result of binational efforts from politicians, conservation leaders, and local communities to build a sustainable future for the Detroit River and western Lake Erie ecosystems. The refuge consists of nearly 6,000 acres of islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals, and waterfront lands.

For more information about Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and the Gateway Visitor Center project, visit

[http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Detroit\\_River/refuge\\_units/refuge\\_gateway.html](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Detroit_River/refuge_units/refuge_gateway.html).

For more information on the Midwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service visit

<http://midwest.fws.gov>.

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