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CONSERVATION EFFORTS ARE GOOD FOR DETROIT-WINDSOR ECONOMIES

Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario -- As the Detroit Metropolitan Area and the Windsor-Essex Region join hands across the river in transboundary conservation to build the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, leaders are discovering that such conservation programs are powerful economic engines. On November 5, 2013 a new major economic study titled *Banking on Nature* was released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service documenting that the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System:

- generates \$2.4 billion in annual sales and economic output;
- welcomes 46.5 million visitors annually;
- returns on average \$4.87 to a local economy for every \$1 spent by government to run the system;
- creates 35,000 jobs annually;
- produces \$792.7 million in job income for local communities;
- generates \$342.9 million in local, county, state and federal tax revenue; and
- brings tourists from around the nation and world.

This is particularly good news for our combined bioregion that our shared world-class natural resources return substantial economic benefits from exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities.

“Most people know that the Ambassador Bridge that connects Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan is the single busiest international land border crossing in North America, accounting for 25% of the Canada-U.S. merchandise trade or \$154 billion in 2012,” noted Larry Alexander, President and CEO of the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Most people also know that Windsor and Detroit have long collaborated on events that promote our combined region as a two-nation tourist destination, including our international fireworks, the 2006 Super Bowl, Red Bull Air Races, the Belle Isle Grand Prix, and the upcoming 2016 FINA World Swimming Championships. But few people fully recognize how important our world-class natural resources are to the economic health of our region. Our Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge is a great opportunity to promote outdoor recreation to the nearly 16 million visitors that come to Metropolitan Detroit each year.”

“Such economic benefits of our shared natural resources and associated outdoor recreational opportunities are very important in our efforts to achieve long-term sustainability of the communities and economies,” notes Gordon Orr, CEO of Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island. “This will also help us achieve competitive advantage in the future by being part of North America’s only international wildlife refuge.”

“As the Detroit River and Lake Erie are shared natural resources, it makes good sense to manage them collaboratively,” said Richard Wyma, General Manager to the Essex Region Conservation Authority. “Wise management will ensure the ecological and economical sustainability of these resources for generations to come.”

“The economic benefits quantified in this new *Banking on Nature* report provide compelling rationale to further invest in conservation of our natural capital to help achieve competitive advantage for our region, to improve quality of life for our residents, and to help attract and retain employees for our businesses,” said Dr. John Hartig, Refuge Manager of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

In 2001, Canada and the U.S. signed a “Conservation Vision for the Lower Detroit River Ecosystem” that called for the establishment of an international wildlife refuge that was codified in U.S. law through the 2001 Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act. In Canada, federal, provincial, and local partners have worked through existing laws and signed a Memorandum of Collaboration Agreement for the Western Lake Erie Watersheds Priority Natural Area to work more closely with U.S. partners on the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and other related initiatives. One outcome of these collaborative efforts is the establishment of Canadian and U.S. registries of lands that are being stewarded in the spirit and intent of the 2001 Canada-U.S. Conservation Vision and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The U.S. registry of lands includes 7,897 acres of lands owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and 5,787 acres of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands, totaling 13,684 acres. Both Michigan Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still maintain full management authority of their respective lands, but work collaboratively to create efficiencies and greater effectiveness on things like hunting, monitoring, cooperative weed management, research, outreach activities like Pointe Mouillee Waterfowl Festival and Hawk Fest, and more. In Canada, Essex Region Conservation Authority has placed 3,797 acres of conservation lands and open spaces (under their control) on the Canadian registry of lands and the City of Windsor has added 981 acres. When totaled between Canada and U.S. that means that 18,462 acres of land in southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan are now being managed collaboratively in the spirit and intent of the 2001 Conservation Vision and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. With the potential for continued growth, it is possible that our two countries could reach 25,000 acres of lands cooperatively managed for conservation and outdoor recreation in the next 5-10 years.

These collaborative arrangements might not, at face value, seem very significant, but indeed they are historic in transboundary conservation of shared natural resources between two countries and bring millions of dollars into our tourism and outdoor recreational economies. Some good examples of outdoor recreational activities that result from our transboundary conservation efforts include:

- Promotion of world-class birding opportunities through a bird driving tour map called ByWays to FlyWays that promotes 27 exceptional birding sites in southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan;

- Celebration of the Festival of Hawks at Holiday Beach in Ontario, Hawk Fest at Lake Erie Metropark in Michigan, and Festival of Birds at Point Pelee National Park in Ontario.;
- Celebration of International Migratory Bird Day and World Wetlands Day in both the U.S. and Canada;
- Sponsorship of international fishing tournaments offering up to \$1.5 million in prize money;
- Promotion of world-class waterfowl hunting opportunities in our shared urban area that has been identified by Ducks Unlimited as one of the top ten areas for waterfowl hunting in the U.S.; and
- Enjoyment of urban walking, biking, and jogging on hundreds of miles of the Chrysler Canada Greenway trail, Windsor's trail system, and southeast Michigan's greenway trails.

For more information on this economic study visit: <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/about/refugereports/>

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is, working with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Since 1973, the Essex Region Conservation Authority has served as a community-based organization dedicated to protecting, restoring and managing the natural resources of the Essex Region.

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