



Essex Region  
Conservation  
Authority



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## **FIGHTING ISLAND REEF EXPANSION SUCCESSFUL!**

*Windsor/Detroit* – The Fighting Island reef expansion completed last year in Ontario, Canada, was successful and is aiding in the recovery of lake sturgeon and other fish species in the Detroit River, according to 2014 monitoring data.

“Based on the success of the construction of the Fighting Island reef in 2008, scientists and resource managers expanded this fish spawning reef in 2013, nearly doubling the size of spawning habitat for the threatened lake sturgeon and other fish species,” said Richard Wyma, General Manager of the Essex Region Conservation Authority, one of the partners in this project.

The U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service based their findings on monitoring data collected in 2014.

“Our data show that viable lake whitefish eggs were present on the expanded reef bed in the fall of 2013 and that walleye, lake sturgeon and native sucker eggs were also present there in the spring of 2014,” said Edward Roseman, a biologist with the USGS Great Lakes Science Center. “We also found larval lake sturgeon downstream of the expanded reef, confirming that the reef is producing both lake sturgeon eggs and larvae.”

These scientific data confirming the success of the expanded Fighting Island reef is good news because the lake sturgeon population in the Detroit River is estimated to be about one percent of its former abundance. Over the past century, fish productivity in the Detroit River has been greatly reduced by channelization, loss of coastal wetlands, filling/armoring shorelines, water pollution and dredging of limestone bedrock that was spawning habitat for lake sturgeon and other native fish species. The new data confirm that the current restoration strategy is yielding positive ecosystem results, and that this small, remnant population of lake sturgeon may one day be restored to a higher level of abundance in the Detroit River.

The creation of the lake sturgeon spawning reef at Fighting Island, which is part of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) and the Western Lake Erie Priority Natural Area (PNA), demonstrates binational collaboration, partnership and stewardship of shared resources. The success of this fish habitat restoration strategy will help to strengthen and improve the fishery in the Detroit River and the entire Great Lakes. Credit for this successful project must also be given to the many project partners who include the Detroit River Canadian Cleanup, Environment Canada’s Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, DTE Energy and the Ontario Species at Risk Stewardship Fund.

The DRIWR represents a new model for conservation -- restoring habitats for wildlife in an urban area through public-private partnerships and becoming a blueprint for bringing conservation to cities across North America. The Western Lake Erie Watersheds PNA is the mechanism for Canadian federal, provincial and local partners to cooperatively work with United States partners on the DRIWR. The DRIWR focuses on conserving, protecting and restoring habitats for 30 species of waterfowl, 117 kinds of fish and more than 300 species of birds.

Unique habitats being managed include islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals and riverfront lands. To date, 3,797 acres of Essex Region Conservation Authority lands and 981 acres of City of Windsor lands have been added to the Canadian registry of lands for the refuge. In the U.S. (or Michigan), 7,897 acres of Michigan Department of Natural Resources lands have been added to the U.S. registry of lands, which already includes 5,787 acres of lands owned and/or cooperatively managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. When totaled between Canada and the U.S., 18,462 acres of land in southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan are now being managed collaboratively for conservation and outdoor recreation.



Dr. Trevor Pitcher and Jennifer Smith from the University of Windsor, Rich Drouin from OMNR and Justin Chiotti from USFWS.

Photo credit USFWS.

**For Further Information:** John H. Hartig, Refuge Manager  
Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge  
734-692-7608                      [john\\_hartig@fws.gov](mailto:john_hartig@fws.gov)

Richard Wyma, General Manager  
Essex Region Conservation Authority  
519-776-5209 ext. 353              [rwyma@erca.org](mailto:rwyma@erca.org)

Marisa Lubeck, Public Affairs Specialist  
U.S. Geological Survey  
303-202-4765                      [mlubeck@usgs.gov](mailto:mlubeck@usgs.gov)