



For Immediate Release: Saturday, April 19, 2008

## **\$178,000 SECURED FOR BUILDING A LAKE STURGEON SPAWNING REEF OFF FIGHTING ISLAND IN DETROIT RIVER**

### ***First Ever Fish Habitat Restoration Project in the Great Lakes Undertaken with Canadian and U.S. Funding***

***Fighting Island, LaSalle, Ontario, Canada*** – U.S. and Canadian partners announce \$178,000 in funding to construct a lake sturgeon spawning reef off Fighting Island in the Detroit River. Funding for reef construction has been provided from:

- Canada-Ontario Agreement – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (\$65,000)
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Bring Back the Natives Program (\$45,000)
- Michigan Wildlife Conservancy (\$30,000)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Coastal and Challenge Cost Share Grants (\$23,000)
- Environment Canada's Great Lakes Sustainability Fund (\$15,000)

Both BASF and DTE Energy will provide in kind construction support to this project. We are also working with our partners for additional funding to advance this important initiative.

Phase 1 of this project, Pre-Construction Assessment, was completed in 2007 with \$34,500 from Environment Canada's Great Lakes Sustainability Fund and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Phase 2, Reef Construction, will be undertaken in 2008-2009. Following reef construction, Post-Construction Assessment will be undertaken in 2009-2010, including a public education and outreach component.

"This is the first time both Canadian and U.S. money is being pooled for a common fish habitat rehabilitation project in the Great Lakes," notes U.S. Congressman John Dingell. "This sturgeon reef construction project is precedent setting and shows the strength of our U.S.-Canada partnership for the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge."

"We are proud to be contributing to the first-ever fish habitat rehabilitation project in the Great Lakes," said Canadian Member of Parliament Jeff Watson. "Canada's government is committed to restoring the health of our lakes and waterways. Today's announcement builds upon the significant financial commitment we have already made to help restore this important water system, and demonstrates our commitment to the residents who rely on the watersheds of Lake St. Clair, Lake Erie and the connecting Detroit River."

The lake sturgeon is a remnant of the dinosaur age and can grow to over eight feet in length and weigh over 200 pounds. It is listed as either threatened or endangered in 19 of 20 states within its original range in the U.S. In Canada, it has been identified as threatened by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife. Lake sturgeon is endemic to the Great Lakes and, historically, the Huron-Erie Corridor was one of the most productive waters for lake sturgeon in North America.

In 2001, lake sturgeon spawning was documented in the Detroit River for the first time in over 20 years, but their numbers are estimated to be only 1% of their original population. Scientists have

now determined that lack of spawning habitat is one of the factors limiting lake sturgeon population growth. Over the past six years, lake sturgeon spawning habitat has been constructed off Belle Isle in Detroit, off McKee Park in Windsor, and off Fort Malden in Amherstburg to increase available spawning habitat for lake sturgeon and other native fish. Historically, the area surrounding Fighting Island was well known as an important spawning and nursery area for lake sturgeon and thus was targeted as a potential habitat construction site. Recent research by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey has shown that water velocity and depth characteristics off the northeast corner of Fighting Island are ideal for spawning and the river bed can support a constructed reef. In addition, scientists have caught juvenile lake sturgeon just downstream of the proposed Fighting Island reef site, providing further justification for building the reef in this location.

Current partners in the project include: Environment Canada, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Essex Region Conservation Authority, U.S. Geological Survey-Great Lakes Science Center, Michigan Wildlife Conservancy, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Detroit River Canadian Cleanup, BASF Corporation, DTE Energy, Landmark Engineers Inc., International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Sea Grant, and Wildlife Habitat Council.

The Detroit River has the distinction of being the only International Wildlife Refuge in North America and the only river system in North America to hold both American Heritage River and Canadian Heritage River designations. This project is being undertaken in direct response to the sturgeon spawning habitat restoration objective in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

Contact persons: Dr. John Hartig, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (734.692.7608), Mr. Matthew Child, Essex Region Conservation Authority (519.776.5209 ext. 368); Dr. Patrick Rusz or Mr. Dennis Fijalkowski, Michigan Wildlife Conservancy (517.641.7677), or Ms. Sandra Morrison, U.S. Geological Survey-Great Lakes Science Center (734.214.9393).

### **Funding Organizations**

**The Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA) is the federal-provincial agreement that supports the restoration, protection, and conservation of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem.**

**The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is a nonprofit organization established by U.S. Congress in 1984 to sustain, restore, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats.**

**The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the restoration of Michigan's diverse habitats.**

**The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.**

**Environment Canada's Great Lakes Sustainability Fund is set up to work in partnership with other agencies and local community stakeholders to advance Remedial Action Plans for each of Canada's Great Lakes Areas of Concern.**