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Gibraltar Bay Unit Added to Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

GROSSE ILE, MICHIGAN, Grosse Ile Township, the Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (U.S. FWS), and the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance announce the addition of Gibraltar Bay Unit to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The Gibraltar Bay Unit is a 40-acre tract off the southern tip of Grosse Ile and includes coastal wetland, meadow, prairie, and upland habitats. Gibraltar Bay provides important spawning and nursery habitat for many species of fish and the uplands provide critical stopover habitat for birds. The Unit is well known to island residents as it previously served as a Navy Seaplane base dating back to 1927 and a Nike Missile base during 1954-1963. The property was transferred from the U.S. Navy to the U.S. EPA in 1972 to become part of its Large Lakes Research Station. The U.S. EPA has stewarded and protected the property for over 35 years and has developed effective partnerships with Grosse Ile Township, the Grosse Ile Land and Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. FWS and its Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Site structures were removed and the site remediated during 1991-1993. Numerous studies and investigations were undertaken and two risk assessments were performed by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, and the U.S. FWS to address environmental concerns. By 2008 all regulatory requirements had been met, laying the foundation for the 2009 transfer to the U.S. FWS to become part of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The federal legislation making this possible was championed by Senator Carl Levin and Congressman John Dingell. The property is now preserved in perpetuity for wildlife and wildlife-compatible public uses. The U.S. FWS, the Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy, Grosse Ile Township, and the Grosse Ile Municipal Airport have signed a memorandum of understanding for public use and stewardship of the Gibraltar Bay Unit.

“I am honored to have played a part in the cleanup and preservation of this site, and I’m thankful that it is now under the stewardship of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge,” said Senator Carl Levin. “This is a big day for Grosse Ile, the Detroit River and the entire Great Lakes region. I join those celebrating the inclusion of this land into this unique wildlife refuge.”

“I want to especially thank Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy, Grosse Ile Township, Grosse Ile Municipal Airport, and each of the agencies for all their hard work and dedicated service that made this refuge acquisition possible,” notes Congressman John Dingell. “The addition of this beautiful gem to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge will allow families and wildlife to enjoy this site for many years to come.”

“The Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy is pleased that the Gibraltar Bay Unit has become a part of North America’s only International Wildlife Refuge, notes Liz Hugel, Conservancy President. “With the Conservancy’s long history of commitment to restoration work at this unique site, we look forward to working closely with the U.S. FWS on public use and stewardship activities there.”

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge incorporates more than 5,700 acres along a 48-mile stretch of shoreline on the lower Detroit River and western Lake Erie. The Refuge focuses on conserving, protecting, and restoring habitat for 29 species of waterfowl, 23 species of raptors, 31 species of shorebirds, over 100 species of fish, and over 300 species of birds. The Refuge is the first international refuge in North America and one of only a few urban ones in the nation. Unique habitats being managed within the Refuge include islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals and waterfront lands.

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.

More information about the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge is available at: www.fws.gov/midwest/DetroitRiver/

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