



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

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FIFTY ONE NEW WATERFRONT PORCHES CREATED FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE

GROSSE ILE, MICHIGAN AND WINDSOR, ONTARIO—The Detroit-Windsor metropolitan area has long been known for its highly industrialized and urban landscape, and has often been referred to as part of the “rust belt.” This “rust belt” image is no longer accurate as the region is becoming a leader in restoring urban shoreline habitat, creating waterfront greenways, building the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, and celebrating North America’s only river system to receive both American and Canadian Heritage River designations.

What was once considered a “hard” shoreline is now becoming “soft.” In the past, as commerce and industry expanded in the region, 31 of the 32 miles of the U.S. mainland of the Detroit River shoreline were hardened with concrete or steel (hard shoreline engineering), providing no habitat for fish or wildlife. This shoreline hardening contributed to a 97% loss of coastal wetland habitats along the Detroit River. Today, communities and businesses see the benefit of turning the focus towards the river and creating waterfront porches for both wildlife and people. They are using ecological principles and practices to reduce erosion and achieve stability and safety of shorelines, while enhancing habitat, improving aesthetics, enhancing urban quality of life, increasing waterfront property values, and even saving money when compared to installing concrete breakwalls or steel sheet piling. Ecologists refer to this as soft shoreline engineering.

In the last two years, 13 new soft shoreline engineering projects have been completed or are underway in the watershed (for more information on these projects please visit: www.stateofthetriat.org). In total, 51 soft shoreline engineering projects have now been undertaken in the last 12 years. This re-engineering of shorelines is rehabilitating habitat for fish and wildlife, and helping change the face of the Detroit-Windsor metropolitan area. Much like the effort to recreate front porches on houses in cities to encourage a sense of community, soft engineered shorelines along waterfronts in urban areas can help recreate gathering places for both wildlife and people.

U.S. Congressman John Dingell, an avid outdoorsman and supporter of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, notes “I am proud to join in celebrating the completion of 51 soft shoreline projects along the international shores of the Detroit River. It is my strong belief that we do not inherit this earth from our ancestors, but we borrow it from future generations. These projects show a shift in paradigm and the prioritization of returning the Detroit River and our Great Lakes to a condition that will provide a healthier ecosystem for generations to come. I will continue to be supportive of such vital projects that restore our region’s natural environment and provide habitat for fish and other wildlife.”

Canadian Member of Parliament Jeff Watson, an advocate for cleanup and restoration of the watershed on a binational scale, states “Wildlife knows no boundaries. The Detroit River watershed is a precious resource we share between our two countries and this unites us in a collaborative effort. These soft shoreline engineering projects are a perfect example of how we work together to create a better environment for both wildlife and people.”

In 2001, the *Canada-U.S. Conservation Vision for the Lower Detroit River Ecosystem* called for the establishment of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Since this signing in 2001, Canadian and U.S. partners have worked on State of the Strait Conferences, a sturgeon spawning reef off Fighting Island that represented the first ever fish habitat restoration project in the Great Lakes funded with both U.S. and Canadian resources, 51 soft shoreline engineering projects, a ByWays to FlyWays bird driving tour map, an ecosystem indicator project, and more. U.S. partners work collaboratively under the direction of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Canadian partners work collaboratively under the Western Lake Erie Watersheds Priority Natural Area Initiative – Canada’s first such initiative which is led by Essex Region Conservation Authority. This Canada-U.S. partnership for North America’s only international wildlife refuge is one of the most unique transboundary conservation initiatives in the world.



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B.

Danvers Pond and Pebble Creek (Rouge River watershed) before dam removal and restoration (A) and after restoration (B)(photo credits: Alliance of Rouge Communities)

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