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News Release



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REFUGE EVENT CELEBRATES WORLD WETLANDS DAY AT GIBRALTAR CARLSON HIGH SCHOOL

GROSSE ILE, MICHIGAN – The 3rd Annual celebration of World Wetlands Day will take place on Thursday, February 2nd at Gibraltar Carlson High School from 8:30am to 3:00pm. The event will feature a Wetlands Exposition that will showcase over 20 displays dedicated to wetland conservation from a number of environmental organizations. In addition, students and visitors will be treated to a World Wetlands Day program, slated to begin at 12:30pm, which will include an appearance by U.S. National Ramsar Committee Chairperson, Suzanne Pittenger-Slear. In addition, Monroe Power Plant Manager Brian Rice will speak on behalf of DTE Energy, Kathy Klein will speak in representation of Waste Management, and special guest, Humbug Marsha, will make her public debut and share wetland adventures with program participants. A short celebration for the Refuge's 10th birthday with the National Wildlife Refuge System mascot Puddles the Blue Goose will follow. The World Wetlands Day event will be open to the public from 12:30pm – 3:00pm.

Since its inception in 1997, World Wetlands Day has been observed worldwide each year on February 2nd in recognition of the date the international treaty for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands was signed at the Ramsar Convention in 1971. The Ramsar Convention maintains a list of wetlands across the globe that have been deemed worthy of international importance; a list totaling nearly 2,000 sites.

In many ways, the commemoration of such a monumental event is an appropriate thing to do here in Michigan, a state that, in many ways, is defined by its environment and natural resources. The designation of Humbug Marsh, a unit of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, as Michigan's only "Wetland of International Importance" in 2010 makes the decision to commemorate the holiday locally even more fitting.

Once the decision had been made to host a World Wetlands Day celebration, choosing a location for the event was easy. The collaboration between the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and Gibraltar Carlson High School began initially because of the school's proximity to Refuge lands, but today the relationship goes much deeper than that. As one of the few schools in southeastern Michigan to offer curriculum rooted in environmental education, and in particular wetland ecology, Gibraltar Carlson HS is ahead of the game in the conservation arena. School staff and administration work with the Refuge to coordinate research projects, design schoolyard habitat and aid in the restoration of the Refuge Gateway, future site of the Refuge Visitor Center. The partnership is truly exceptional and has garnered attention from many, including Congressman John D. Dingell.

“I am excited that on February 2nd we will be celebrating World Wetlands Day at Gibraltar Carlson High School with nearly 2,000 Downriver high school students,” notes Congressman John D. Dingell. “It pleases me to know that we are one of 160 countries around the world celebrating such a wonderful natural resource. Humbug Marsh is Michigan’s first and only ‘Wetland of National Importance’ designated under the Ramsar Convention, and I’m very proud of the work being done to protect and preserve Humbug. World Wetlands Day provides an ideal opportunity to teach our children about the many valuable benefits of wetlands and the importance of wetlands stewardship.”

The theme of this year’s World Wetlands Day is Wetlands and Tourism. Ramsar sites all over the world will be observing the benefits of wetland tourism, both locally and nationally for people and wildlife – benefits such as stronger economies, sustainable livelihoods, healthy people, and thriving ecosystems.

Chair of the U.S. National Ramsar Committee, Suzanne Pittenger-Slear acknowledges the international significance of the event and the ramifications of the celebration on the home front; “I am honored to be part of the 2012 World Wetlands Day celebration in Gibraltar, Michigan. Over 160 countries will be celebrating wetlands and tourism on this important day. I am so impressed with the public-private partnerships for wetland conservation established through the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Indeed, these partnerships are a model for the nation.”

On a national level, this World Wetlands Day event is also in recognition of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors Initiative that has established a community-based, 21st century agenda for conservation, recreation, and reconnecting Americans to the outdoors. In Michigan, priority is being placed on engaging urban youth in conservation.

Gibraltar Carlson High School Principal, Bill Stevenson notes, “We work hard to ensure that our students learn the value of wetlands, both locally and globally, and make the connection between healthy wetland ecosystems and human health. Our hope is that by instilling this knowledge in our students, we will contribute to the health of the world’s wetlands and the long-term benefits that wetlands provide to people, wildlife, economics, and biodiversity.”

Others are also excited about this international celebration. “World Wetlands Day is a terrific opportunity for the educational community to focus on the importance of wetland conservation,” notes Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Visitor Services Manager Jamie Lanier. “Renowned sites such as Australia’s Kakadu National Park, South Africa’s Mekong Delta, and even Florida’s Everglades have traditionally been the go-to examples used to teach students about the significance of the world’s wetlands. Now, with the designation of Michigan’s own Humbug Marsh, we have the chance to teach about these remarkable habitats with local examples in our own backyard. The sky is the limit!”

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge incorporates more than 5,700 acres along 48 miles of 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. It is the first international refuge in North America and one of the few urban ones in the nation. Unique habitats being managed within the Refuge include islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals and waterfront lands.

The World Wetlands Day Celebration is sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, Gibraltar Carlson High School, DTE Energy, Waste Management, and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. This event is subject to cancellation in the event of inclement weather. If necessary, the alternate weather date is Feb. 9. Please contact Gibraltar Carlson HS Principal Bill Stevenson for event status at 734.379.7100.

For more information about this and other Refuge events, contact the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge at 734.692.7649, or visit: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/detroitriver/index.html>.

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