

This photo, taken in 1993, of 1,500-acre Fighting Island in the Detroit River, shows the result of 50 years of disposal of alkaline byproducts, primarily from the manufacture of soda ash and other lime-based products. *BASF Corporation Photo*



## Heritage Preserved Along Detroit River

This photo shows Fighting Island in 2003 after rehabilitation efforts that earned BASF Corporation the 2004 Environmental Achievement Award of the Michigan Environmental Management Association. *BASF Corporation Photo*



Did you know that people from all over North America come to the Detroit metropolitan area to fish, hunt, sail, and go birding? Some examples:

- The Detroit River hosts national walleye tournaments offering \$350,000 in prize money. The largest walleye (13.2 pounds) ever caught in a Professional Walleye Trail tournament came from the river.

- The annual Pointe Mouillee Waterfowl Festival attracts thousands of people each fall to pursue their passion of hunting and wildlife art.

- More than 1,000 sailboat races and rowing regattas are held in the area each year.

- The lower Detroit River hosts an annual Hawk Fest because it is one of the three best spots to watch hawks in North America and the premier site east of the Mississippi River.

The Detroit River is North America's only International Heritage River system and is now home to the continent's only international wildlife refuge. The area offers world-class water, wildlife, heritage, and recreational opportunities, and is a major source of community pride.

The area is becoming an international model for preserving and enhancing the quality of life, which helps businesses achieve competitive advantage because they can offer employees opportunities available in few other places.

"The Detroit River is a beautiful ecological mosaic, made up of hundreds of species of plants and animals and many unique habitats," said David Howell, chairman of the Friends of the Detroit River. "Today, the Detroit River mosaic shines a little brighter because we have preserved Humbug Island and Marsh, the last mile of natural shoreline

on the U.S. mainland of the Detroit River, for future generations."

The Detroit River/Lake Erie area is the intersection of two major North American flyways. Waterfowl and other birds come to rest, nest, and feed along the shoreline of the many islands and marshes. Indeed, 27 species of waterfowl, 17 species of raptors (hawks, owls, and eagles), 48 species of other non-raptors (loons, warblers, and neotropical shorebirds), and 117 species of fish are found in or migrate through the Detroit River.

The Detroit River has been recognized for its biodiversity in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network, and the Biodiversity Investment Area Program of Environment Canada and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

These unique attributes of the Detroit River led U.S. Rep. John Dingell, D-Michigan, to write legislation that created the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in December 2001. In barely three years, so much has happened.

Mud Island was donated by National Steel Corporation (now U.S. Steel) to the refuge. Calf Island was

# International wildlife refuge at heart of historic waterway's rebirth.

By JOHN H. HARTIG Refuge Manager, Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

acquired for the refuge. Forty-four acres of waterfront property on the lower Detroit River in Trenton was acquired by Wayne County from DaimlerChrysler Corporation to serve as the gateway to the refuge, including trails, a visitors center, administrative offices for the refuge, outdoor classroom, wildlife viewings stations, and more.

Humbug Island and Marsh have been preserved for recreational and conservation purposes as a result of efforts by a citizens coalition that included the Friends of the Detroit River and Michigan United Conservation Clubs. In May, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm formally agreed to have the federal government purchase the 409½-acre marsh as part of the wildlife refuge.

Funds that hunters contribute by buying federal duck stamps are used

by the federal Migratory Bird Conservation Commission to conserve important lands as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

In addition, BASF Corporation has made significant ecological improvements to the 1,500-acre Fighting Island, another mid-river landmark, in an award-winning program certified by the Wildlife Habitat Council. BASF also helped to convert a former brownfield in Wyandotte into a park with a nationally recognized rowing facility, trails, and a golf course.

DTE Energy has signed a cooperative management agreement for 600 acres of land at its Fermi Power Plant, helped develop greenway trails, enhanced habitat at its facilities, and helped plant more than a million trees. Solutia, Inc., a chemical company, has rehabilitated 25 acres of waterfront property for wildlife habitat and

## Find Out More

<http://www.mac-web.org/GreaterDetroitAHR/DiscoverOurWildSide.htm>

<http://www.tellusnews.com/ahr/>

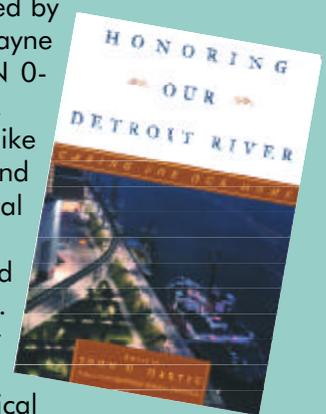
## Book Review

**HONORING OUR DETROIT RIVER: CARING FOR OUR HOME** edited by John H. Hartig, published by Cranbrook Institute of Science, Distributed by Wayne State University Press (1-800/WSU-READ or <http://wsupress.wayne.edu>). ISBN 0-87737-044-3, \$29.95. Paperback, 234 pages, black and white photographs.

*Honoring Our Detroit River* gives a comprehensive look at the Detroit River like none ever given before. It tells the story of the relationship between the river and the people of Michigan from the days of Native American trade, to commercial exploitation and pollution, to current projects to bring it back to life.

The collection contains essays by a group of 19 scientists, administrators, and academics and provides a wealth of pictures, charts, and tables to reference. The editor, Hartig writes, "Dramatic improvements have occurred in the Detroit River, and it is now an invaluable, multi-faceted resource that serves as the foundation of local economies, provides numerous recreational and historical opportunities and ecological values, and enhances 'quality of life...' To fully comprehend and appreciate the significance of a place and our relationship to it, we must learn about it, understand it, respect it, honor it, and eventually care for it as our home."

For anyone who calls Southeast Michigan home or for anyone who is just interested in keeping our waters healthy, this book is well worth the read.—MW



enhanced aquatic habitat along its shoreline.

Ford Motor Company has rebuilt its Rouge Plant in Dearborn, including installing the world's largest living roof that will save millions of dollars in maintenance, replacement, and water-quality compliance costs. This world-class example of sustainable manufacturing is now open for public tours.

And the list goes on.

Southeast Michigan is now being recognized internationally for its public-private partnerships for conservation. Businesses are making major investments in their home in an effort to enhance the quality of life, remain competitive, and help attract and retain the next generation of employees.

U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Gail Norton, in a September 27 speech along the Detroit River, noted that "this refuge is an outstanding model for promoting partnerships" for the entire national wildlife refuge system. "It's a great example of everyone working together," she said.

Coupled with these efforts to rehabilitate and enhance habitats has been the effort to build a regional greenway trail system to improve access to the river and refuge and to provide more recreational opportunities. The vision is to have an interconnected greenway trail system from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie, up tributaries such as the Rouge, Ecorse, and Huron rivers, and across to Canada.

In the last four years, 20 greenway projects have either been completed or are under construction, including the once-in-300-year opportunity to build the 3.5-mile Detroit RiverWalk between Joe Louis Arena in Detroit and the Belle Isle Bridge.

The Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan has established a five-year, \$25 million GreenWays Initiative, the only one of its kind in the country, to help communities realize this regional greenways vision.

So have you seen it? Major things are happening in Detroit and downriver to reconnect people to water resources, promote outdoor recreational opportunities, and enhance the quality of life. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is building



**This 13.2-pound walleye from the Detroit River was the largest ever caught in a Professional Walleye Trail fishing tournament. Photo by Mike Barkley, Downriver Walleye Federation**

the Detroit RiverWalk with seed money of over \$500 million. It is to be completed in time for the 2006 SuperBowl.

The gateway to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge is being built on the waterfront in Trenton adjacent to Humbug Island and Marsh. Visitors and residents will be able to canoe or kayak through the refuge or around Belle Isle.

Southeast Michigan was labeled as part of the Rust Belt in the 1970s when the country's industrial heartland became noted for abandoned factories, high unemployment, and overall decline. Most rivers and lakes in the Rust Belt were polluted, and southeast Michigan's were no exception. During the 1960s, the Rouge River became infamous as one of three Great Lakes tributaries to catch on fire. The others also were "working rivers"—the Cuyahoga at Cleveland in Ohio and the Buffalo in New York. Also during the 1960s, pollution of Lake Erie was on the front cover of several national magazines.

As a result of dramatic improvements on the Detroit River, its tributaries, and Lake Erie, bald eagles have returned to the Detroit River and sturgeon successfully spawn there after decades of absence. ■

\*\*\*

*The author was recently appointed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as manager of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. He previously was the American Heritage River navigator assigned to the Detroit River.*