



**John D. Dingell Friend of the Refuge Awards and the
IWRA Annual Benefit Dinner in support of the
Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge**

For Immediate Release: April 17, 2018

WYANDOTTE, MICHIGAN – The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) is celebrating the continued support for the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) with its annual benefit dinner Saturday, April 21st. This year’s sold out event will be held in the Refuge community of Wyandotte at the Bentley Banquet and Conference Center.

On Tuesday, April 17th at Gibraltar City Hall, two **John D. Dingell Friend of the Refuge Awards** were given in recognition of leadership and dedication to conservation on the Detroit River and western Lake Erie Basin. This year’s honorees were:

Richard E. Mills (Individual Award)

Richard Mills is a native of California and moved to Michigan in 1969, where he now lives with his wife, Cheryl. Mr. Mills is well known in the Downriver area for his fencing and woodworking skills, with a career spanning over 40 years. Prior to his retirement, Richard owned and operated Custom Wood & Vinyl Fencing in Riverview. He also established Logs to Lumber & Beyond, which provided a portable sawmill service and artistic furniture building. Richard has built award-winning furniture, including a custom rocking chair for former Congressman John D. Dingell.

Richard has been active with Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) for over ten years, beginning with building the short boardwalk near the Humbug Marsh Education Shelter. Since then, his contributions include helping build two observation decks at the Gibraltar Bay Unit, the Walnut Grove observation deck at Humbug Marsh, the eagle nest observation platform at Humbug Marsh, and several benches for the Humbug Marsh Education Shelter. He has also provided materials and expertise for many other projects, and donated beautiful furniture pieces for the silent auction at IWRA’s Annual Benefit Dinner. Some of his furniture will also be featured in the observation room of the new Visitor Center. Richard is always available to share his knowledge and brainstorm ideas to ensure a project is successful. Richard Mills has helped to make the Refuge a more welcoming and accessible destination for all. DRIWR and IWRA are pleased to call him a partner, but more importantly, a friend!



IWRA Chair Richard Micka, Deputy District Director Michael Klotz (representing Congresswoman Debbie Dingell and John Dingell), Richard and Cheryl Mills, and IWRA Executive Director Joann Van Aken. The 2018 Friend of the Refuge- Individual Award was presented to Mr. Richard Mills on Tuesday, April 17 at Gibraltar City Hall. Photo: Mark Messer

The Nature Conservancy (Non-Profit Award)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was founded in 1951 as a global conservation non-profit organization. The mission of TNC is to “conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.” Their efforts impact conservation in all 50 states and 72 countries around the world. The Nature Conservancy works with landowners and other partners to protect natural areas all over, and manages 20 preserves in Michigan, including Erie Marsh Preserve.

Erie Marsh Preserve is one of the southernmost units within the DRIWR acquisition boundary, where it is cooperatively managed by TNC, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and other partners. Erie Marsh Preserve contains 11% of the wetlands in Southeast Michigan. It is critical habitat for migratory birds, and two state-threatened plants: American lotus and swamp rose-mallow. The unit is currently part of a large wetland construction and restoration project that will restore hydrologic connection to Lake Erie and improve water management capabilities. This project will increase biodiversity, provide better habitat for wildlife, and aid in management of invasive species.

The Nature Conservancy is also a partner in the Detroit River-Western Lake Erie Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA)- a team of 13 organizations including DRIWR and IWRA that work together to effectively manage invasive plants in natural areas. TNC Restoration Director Chris May is the CWMA chair and has been crucial to the success of this program in advising, grant writing, and sharing resources. TNC provided financial and technical support to the Refuge, leading to more land acquisitions and habitat restoration. Without TNC's involvement, DRIWR would struggle to fund biological technicians, have fewer resources to combat invasive species, and have fewer acres of protected land.



IWRA Chair Richard Micka, Deputy District Director Michael Klotz (representing Congresswoman Debbie Dingell and John Dingell), TNC Restoration Director Chris May, IWRA Executive Director Joann Van Aken, and TNC Associate State Director Patrick Doran. The 2018 Friend of the Refuge- Non-Profit Award was presented to The Nature Conservancy on Tuesday, April 17 at Gibraltar City Hall. Photo: Mark Messer