

Summer 2021

# THE WILDSIDE

A newsletter for the supporters of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance & The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge



**WE'RE OPEN!**  
**Upcoming Events**  
**Mindfulness in Nature:**  
**Yoga, Meditation Hikes,**  
**Ranger Led Nature Hikes**



Cover photo: Susan White



**The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR)** is located along the lower Detroit River and western shoreline of Lake Erie. Established in 2001 as the first International Wildlife Refuge in North America, it includes islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals, and waterfront lands along 48 miles of shoreline. Its unique location in a large urban area allow significant opportunities for the public to experience fish, wildlife and plants in their natural habitat.

The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA ) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization- a “Friends” organization that works to support the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in the development of the DRIWR. We invite you to become a supporter of IWRA .

Visit [iwralliance.org](http://iwralliance.org), [www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit\\_river](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river) and [www.drhawkwatch.org](http://www.drhawkwatch.org) for more periodic updates.

**IWRA Email:** [iwr\\_alliance@yahoo.com](mailto:iwr_alliance@yahoo.com)  
**IWRA Temporary Phone** 734-755-0490  
**International Wildlife Refuge Alliance**  
 5437 W. Jefferson Avenue  
 Trenton, MI 48183  
**General Information:** 734-365-0219

**DRIWR & IWRA Staff**

Susan White, Refuge Administrator  
 Steve Dushane, Deputy Refuge Manager

**ADMINISTRATION**

Jason Blake

**BIOLOGY**

Jessica Fletcher, Wildlife Biologist  
 Tyler Dolin, Lead Biological Technician  
 Alexa Blankenship, Biological Technician  
 Michala Burke, Biological Technician

**IWRA**

Joann Van Aken, Executive Director  
 Nicole LaFleur, Engagement Assistant / Nature Store Manager  
 Shannon Nelson, Outreach & Operations Coordinator

**LAW ENFORCEMENT**


Doug Briggs, Patrol Captain  
 Clayton Hamilton, Federal Wildlife Officer

**MAINTENANCE**

John Nicely, Maintenance Mechanic  
 David DeMeyere, Maintenance Apprentice

**VISITOR SERVICES**

Jody DeMeyere, Visitor Services Manager  
 Todd Weston, Park Ranger  
 Jazmyn Bernard, Park Ranger

 [www.facebook.com/DetroitRiverIWR](http://www.facebook.com/DetroitRiverIWR)  
[www.facebook.com/IWRA](http://www.facebook.com/IWRA)

**About the cover:**

Friends visit us from everywhere including the Singleton family from Flint, MI. As summer ramps up, be on the lookout for our cameras and you may just make the cover of the Wildside!

**A Message from the Alliance Chair**

Where do we go from here? The last time we were able to gather for an annual benefit dinner was two years ago on April 6, 2019 at The Bentley in Wyandotte.

That seems like eons ago. Now, ready or not, we will assemble once again at Silver Shores this time on September 9, 2021 for the 15th annual event! We hope you will consider joining us for this outdoor seating event to celebrate the opening of the DRIWR Refuge Gateway and soon-to-open John D. Dingell, Jr. Visitor Center.

There is more to come. Get ready!

**Richard Micka, Chair**  
 International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board



**Why no waste baskets on the refuge?**

We ask everyone to leave with everything you brought in, and invite you to pick-up trash if you see it around, too.

It is a common question. Here are two thoughts to start to explain why there are no trash cans at the Refuge. First, as children we are taught to throw trash into its proper receptacle; then it is taken away. It can be easy to forget about the amount of trash we each produce and not think about what becomes of it after it is tossed into a can. According to the EPA, the average American produces nearly 6 lbs of trash per day, and only 1.51 lbs of it is recycled.

That means we each contribute more than 4 lbs of trash per day into landfills -- that's A LOT of trash! Trash not only goes to landfills, it also finds its way to our waterways, it's ugly, and can injure and kill wildlife and hurt people. Because part of the Refuge mission is to enhance awareness of environmental issues and education, by taking your trash we are all becoming more aware of the issue. And, awareness is an important step in tackling issues to protecting our environment. Second, the Refuge staff is currently a small team, without facilities to properly deal with the high amount of trash currently generated. This beautiful space belongs to everyone and we believe – and ask – that everyone can share in its care. So, please take your trash with you – or better yet, plan your day using reusable items like water bottles, bring fewer single-use items that become trash, and dispose of broken fishing line in the tubes at the pier. **Working together, we can all make a difference!**



**HOW LONG UNTIL IT'S GONE?**

Estimated Decomposition Rates Of Common Marine Debris Items

Apple Core	2 months
Waxed Carton	3 months
Foamed Buoy	50 years
Newspaper	6 weeks
Plastic Grocery Bag	10-20 years
Cardboard Box	2 months
Plywood	1-3 years
Disposable Diaper	450 years
Cigarette Butt	1-5 years
Paper Towel	2-4 weeks
Aluminum Can	200 years
Cotton Shirt	2-5 months
Glass Bottle	undetermined
Plastic Bottle	450 years
Plastic Beverage Holder	400 years
Photo-degradable Beverage Holder	6 months
Tin Can	50 years
Fishing Line	600 years
Styrofoam Cup	50 years
Wool Socks	1-5 years



## Manager Musings From the Refuge Administrator Susan White

**Opening.** It's a dream come true – decades in the making! As a community, you've watched and waited...and waited...and waited, patiently. Then we readied for a Grand Opening in 2020 – a celebration that would throw open the site in all its glory – with planned festivities with partners and you, the patient community of friends who envisioned and fought for this amazing green space. Mother Nature had other plans as the biology of a virus took over, inflicting the global pandemic and we all hunkered down for safety of our families, and loved ones, and the frontline workers.

After months of staying home, October 2020 was a welcome milestone as we safely opened the grounds of Humbug Marsh and the Refuge Gateway to 4-days per week. Opening them 7-days a week on April 1, 2021 offered an additional welcome reprieve to get outside every day to enjoy the beauty surrounding us at the river. Spring has brought a wonderful level of visitation to Downriver to enjoy the fishing and beautiful river and all her gifts. Folks are visiting from throughout Metro Detroit, Lansing, Ann Arbor, throughout Ohio, and as far away as Russia! Once the fishing rush started, the Refuge and IWRA team were out regularly at the fishing pier, welcoming visitors, sharing stories, and talking about the history of the site and the shared stewardship we all have for the Refuge. To be out with visitors having fun in nature is a pure delight for us all. The Refuge is now realizing its vision as a joyful place where everyone is welcome. Like many in the community, our staff are now also working more regularly outside of our homes; moving into our offices for work required onsite; and getting out into the field for biological surveys, maintenance, and environmental education programs. It feels good to be at the Refuge.

Now, the phased opening of the 12,500 square foot John D. Dingell Jr. Visitor Center are the last steps in a string of events to share this amazing place. Covid safety measures such as plexi barriers and air purifiers are in place to maximize safety. Numbers of visitors inside will be limited. We hope you come by to take a look at the displays that introduce explorers that "You Can Be a Conservation Rock Star" and tricks to help find the wildlife that is all around us. Come check out the Mosaic Mural, where hundreds of people created art that together, form an engaging image of the Refuge activities.



Explore the architectural details that highlight wildlife of southeast Michigan and local artists, and learn about the environmentally sustainable construction that earned us a LEED-gold certification by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). Pick-up information and brochures from our new crew of volunteers at the front desk and don't forget to stop by the "Canvasback Corner Nature Store". Here you can buy a reusable water bottle, Refuge t-shirt, field guide identification book, or other souvenir. The objective of the Nature Store is to enhance the education experience for Refuge visitors; and proceeds from purchases can provide funds to support the Refuge's mission! The Store committee is dedicated to offering products that support the Refuge's education and outreach objectives, feature a local theme, are factual and accurate, or enhance environmental responsibility or knowledge of local species. Whatever you choose to do, we hope you continue to come out and enjoy your Refuge. Keep an eye on the Refuge website's calendar of events for the evolving lists of programs and happenings. See you at the Refuge!

Susan White, Refuge Administrator  
Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR)

As we reopen, we would like to introduce you to new friends, staff and our Board of Directors

# WELCOME TO THE TABLE



## Fishing Pier makes Splash with Anglers

The fishing pier at the Refuge Gateway has been attracting visitors from near and far. It quickly became a favorite fishing location for many local anglers. More surprisingly, are the visitors walking the pier while on a layover at the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport. Thanks to the Route 160 SMART bus, visitors from all over southeast Michigan are able to experience the refuge and the pier.

Unfortunately, with all the extra visitation litter is quickly becoming a major issue. Please remember to pack all your litter home with you (pack in, pack out). Trash cans are not provided at the site.

Photo Credits: Tyler Woodring and Mario Fini



**Our Staff:**  
 Susan White, Refuge Manager  
 Steve Dushane, Deputy Refuge Manager  
 Joann Van Aken, IWRA Executive Director  
 Nicole LaFleur, IWRA Nature Store Manager  
 Jessica Fletcher, DRIWR Wildlife Biologist  
 Jazmyn Bernard, DRIWR Park Ranger

**Middle row:**  
 Tyler Dolin, CWMA Strike Team Leader  
 Michala Burke, CWMA Strike Team

**Front left to right:**  
 Todd Weston, DRIWR Park Ranger  
 David DeMeyere, Maintenance Apprentice  
 Jody DeMeyere, DRIWR Visitor Services Manager  
 Alexa Blankenship, CWMA Strike Team

**Missing:**  
 Jason Blake, DRIWR Administrative Assistant  
 John Nicely, DRIWR Maintenance Mechanic  
 Doug Briggs, FWS Patrol Captain  
 Clayton Hamilton, FWS Law Enforcement Officer



## Refuge Kayak Launch is Ready for You

Visitors to the Refuge Gateway may have noticed a new addition to the recreational amenities on the site, an accessible kayak launch. The launch allows visitors access into Humbug Marsh, Michigan's only 'Wetland of International Importance.' This area supports a rich diversity of wildlife and world-class fishing opportunities. The location will become a stopping point on the 33-mile Detroit Heritage Water Trail and will allow paddlers, even those with a disability, to paddle an area of river with slow current and shallow water. Experienced paddlers can use the launch in conjunction with other launches to extend their on-the-water experience.

Please remember, Humbug Island may look like an enticing place to stop for a rest break. However, the island is closed to visitor use to protect nesting birds and wildlife. Please stay off the island. Motorboat mooring to the kayak launch is also not permitted.



From Left to Right:

Dick Skoglund  
 Joann Gonyea  
 Mary Bohling  
 Kristen LeForce  
 Joann Van Aken  
 Michael Dunlap  
 Dick Micka  
 John Cullen  
 Gary Kirsh

Missing:

Roberta Urbani  
 Tim Bowman  
 Marika Diamond  
 Elizabeth Iszler  
 Bruce Ross  
 Don Skidmore  
 Dick Whitwam

**Our Board of Directors:**



## The Biological Staff



Images of DR-WLE CWMA Technician, Michala Burke, and USFWS staff, Jessie Fletcher and Steve Dushane, frost seeding Refuge Gateway on a chilly February morning.

At the end of February, the DR-WLE CWMA and USFWS staff braced the tail end of winter to frost seed areas of Refuge Gateway. One area that was seeded is planned to be a future native pollinator garden, while other areas were seeded for prairie habitat. Some plant species seeded in the pollinator garden include wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), sand coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*), wild bergamont (*Monarda fistulosa*), yellow coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), and many more! Over 30 native plant species were seeded for areas designated for prairie. Some of these species include Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), marsh blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), giant ironweed (*Vernonia gigantea*), New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*), and white wild indigo (*Baptisia alba*). Frost seeding exposes seed to multiple freeze and thaw cycles, in addition to early spring showers. When the water present in the soil's surface layer freezes, ice forms and expands upwards, bringing soil up with it. These processes allow the seed to make its way into the soil surface and establish good seed-soil contact!

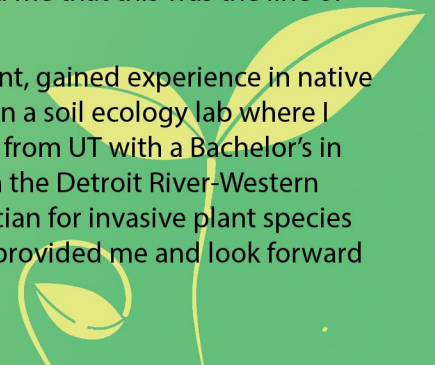


*Michala*

### Meet Michala Burke Strike Team Technician

I was born and raised in southeast Michigan. Since I was a young girl, I have always had a passion for animals and the outdoors. Growing up, my heart was set on becoming a large animal veterinarian. After graduating high school, I enrolled at Henry Ford Community College to take pre-requisites while I narrowed in on what university I wanted to transfer to. While looking into universities, I discovered Environmental Science degrees and other related programs which really caught my attention. After two years at Henry Ford, I transferred to the University of Toledo. Sparking my interests, I took coursework in conservation biology, aquatic ecology, and environmental policy. Knowing the current and future work I would be doing would also be improving the quality of our environment and wildlife reassured me that this was the line of work I wanted to pursue.

During my time at UT, I regularly volunteered with the Environmental Science Department, gained experience in native plantings, invasive plant species removal, and was even able to work as a lab technician in a soil ecology lab where I helped other graduate/undergraduate students with their research projects. I graduated from UT with a Bachelor's in Environmental Science in the spring of 2019. In May 2020, I was fortunate enough to join the Detroit River-Western Lake Erie Cooperative Weed Management Area (DR-WLE CWMA) as a Strike Team Technician for invasive plant species management. I am extremely appreciative of the hands-on experience this position has provided me and look forward to applying it to my professional endeavors.



# The CALENDAR

## What's Happening at the REFUGE!

### Roving trails

Refuge Park Rangers, Jazmyn and Todd, routinely walk the refuge trails. If you see them say hi, ask them a question, or just join them on their walk.

### Note about programming listed below:

Programs dates and times may change. Space is limited due to COVID restrictions. Pre-registration is mandatory. Check the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge website or Facebook page to register. Please cancel if your plans change so others will be allowed to join.

### Please note:

- All participants will be required to wear face coverings for the duration of the event.
- Participants should bring their own water, snacks, and sunscreen.
- All programs are open to all skill and comfort levels.
- Portable toilets are available on-site.

#### Mindfulness in Nature: Meditation Hike

The refuge has partnered with Transform Network to teach our community about being mindful in nature through guided meditation hikes. Sign up today to melt some stress away! Hikes will take place from 11:00 am – 12:30 pm. Some hikes will be held on partner lands, so look carefully when registering.

June 26, 2021

July 10, 17, 24, and 31, 2021

August 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2021



#### Mindfulness in Nature: Yoga

The refuge has partnered with Wider Circle to teach our community about being mindful in nature through guided yoga classes. Sign up today to connect to your inner self and nature!

Yoga takes place from 8:00 – 9:30 am.

June 23 and 30, 2021

July 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2021

August 4, 11, 18, and 25, 2021

#### Ranger Lead Nature Hikes

The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge has some amazing habitat and wildlife. Ranger Todd wants to explore it with you! Join him each weekend as he unveils the wonders of nature on the refuge trail system. Hikes take place from 9:00 – 11:00 am and 1:00 – 3:00 pm. Check the web site for specifics.

May 22, 2021

May 23 and 29, 2021

June 12, 13, 26, and 27, 2021

July 10, 11, 24, and 25, 2021

August 7th, 8th, 21st, & 22nd from 9-11am and 1-3pm



## JOHN D. DINGELL JR VISITOR CENTER



### We are proud to introduce:

**Todd Weston**, DRIWR Park Ranger  
aka Volunteer Coordinator

Did you hear the volunteer program is restarting at the Refuge? Trainings for the varying positions began in May and others will be available throughout the summer. For more information contact the volunteer coordinator, Todd Weston, [atdriwr\\_volunteer@fws.gov](mailto:atdriwr_volunteer@fws.gov).

**Jazmyn Bernard**, DRIWR Park Ranger and  
education programmer.

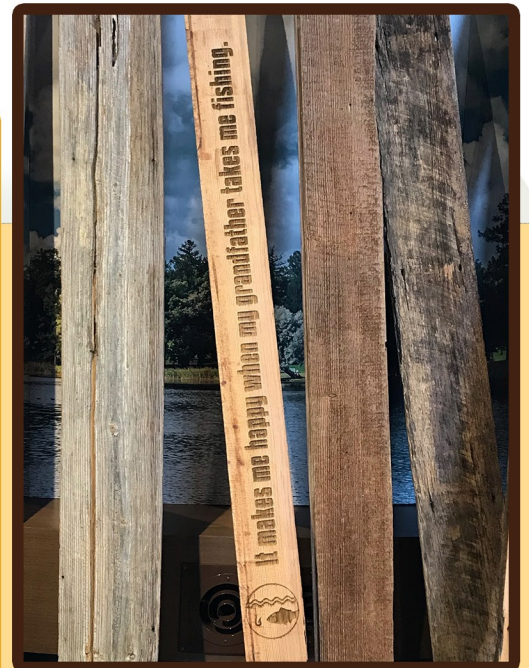
Have any questions about the upcoming programming at the Refuge? Jazmyn can help!





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Nonprofit  
Organization  
Permit #153  
Wyandotte, MI



## What's IN there?

You've looked! You've peered! You've marked up the glass with your noseprints to figure out what's in our brand new Visitor Center! We can't wait to share it with you, and we promise, it won't be long now! **See you soon!**