

Spring 2020

THE WILDSIDE

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



In This Issue:
Welcome to the Refuge Gateway
of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge!
We Unveil A Brand New Look



JOHN D. DINGELL JR.
VISITOR CENTER



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WILDLIFE
REFUGE ALLIANCE

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April 30, 2020

Dear Friends,

All of us here with the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance and the staff of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, are hoping this letter finds you and yours well and doing what you can to keep your loved ones safe during these trying times.

Like you, we are all very anxious to be out on the trails exploring Humbug Marsh, or enjoying the warmth of the sun on the Refuge Gateway fishing pier. However, due to the Executive Stay at Home Order we are unable to complete the work and remain closed at this time. The Refuge Gateway remains a construction site and as soon as we can we will have the crews back on location. **We want to open what we can, as soon as we can, when it's ready, while ensuring everyone's safety.** We have all been experiencing patience like we have never before, but we will get through this.

We hope you enjoy this Spring edition of the WILDSIDE newsletter. Take a few minutes with a coffee on your patio and enjoy the nature that surrounds you. And know that soon, we will be able to enjoy that warmth of the summer sunshine together.

To learn of any updates and upcoming announcements, please forward your preferred email to us at: iwr_alliance@yahoo.com. We want to be sure you hear the news of when we are clear to open! Visiting our websites will also keep you informed: www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river and www.iwralliance.org.

We hope you will consider joining us for the 15th annual benefit dinner, our date for this has moved as well. We are currently set for Saturday, June 13. Please keep an eye on your email as this date may be pushed into later August. For any questions, feel free to reach out at iwr_alliance@yahoo.com or 734-755-0490.

Your Friend in Nature,

Joann Van Aken, Executive Director
International Wildlife Refuge Alliance



A Message from the Alliance Chair

As we anticipate the opening of the Refuge Visitor Center this year, let's remember those who made this possible. In particular, the Honorable John D. Dingell, Jr. who almost single handedly legislated an Act of Congress to create the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

One year ago, on February 7, 2019, we lost a great Friend. On that same date in 1795, the 11th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ratified, affirmed the power of the States. Now, that's something Mr. Dingell would tell you about in detail. He had a keen intellect and could measure you up in a heart-beat.

Every inch of ground we stand on in the Refuge and every drop of water that flows through it has his mark on it. Now, it's our turn. The torch is passed!

Richard Micka, Chair
International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board



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, www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river and detroitriverhawkwatch.org for more periodic updates.

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Joann Van Aken • Executive Director
Nicole LaFleur • Engagement Assistant, Nature Store Manager
Shannon Nelson • Volunteer Coordinator

Volunteer Trainings Beginning Soon!



Volunteers are essential to the future of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance.

However, to be effective, volunteers need to be properly trained, know key messaging, and be ready to answer an assortment of visitors' questions. In order to ensure high quality volunteers, the Volunteer Coordinator, Shannon Nelson, will begin hosting Volunteer Foundation training sessions beginning soon.

If you are interested in joining the volunteer team, check out a number of the available positions at:
www.fws.gov/refuge/Detroit_River/what_we_do/get_involved.html.



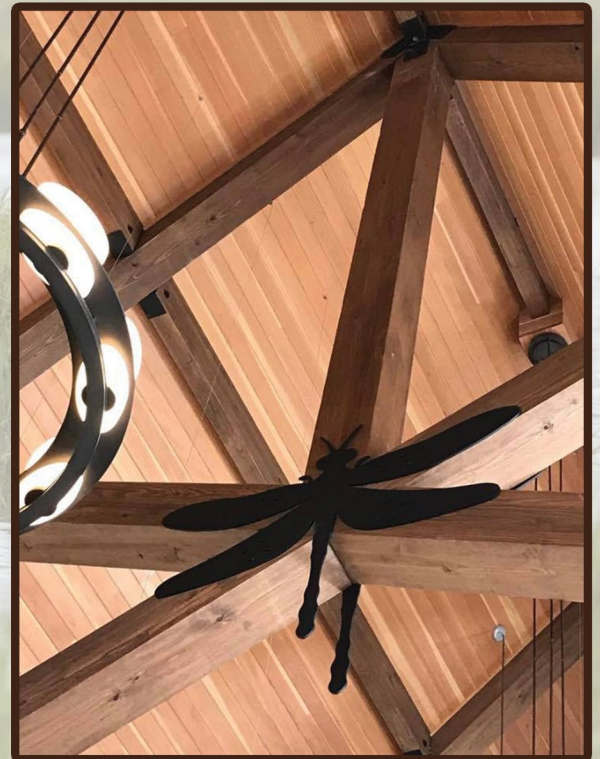
From the Refuge Administrator Susan White



This dragonfly is one of my favorite customized-touches in the new John D. Dingell Jr Visitor Center. You will soon see that the Center is a building full of custom design elements highlighting wildlife and the pride of southeast Michigan.

In addition, dragonflies make me smile. They are resilient creatures of water and land whose iridescent flashes energize the spring and summer ecosystems. When I'm outside, the dragonfly draws me in to the wetland as it flits from reed to reed across the water, inspecting territory for mosquitoes and gnats to eat. Dragonflies are dynamic and agile fliers, capable of migrating great distances, moving in any direction, and can change direction in an instant. The adult dragonfly can fly in any direction: up, down, forward, backward, left and right! The epitome of control and poise.

Dragonflies also have deep cultural symbolism around the world. In almost every part of the world, the dragonfly symbolizes change and a change in self-awareness or perspective that comes with maturity and understanding. As a creature that spends most of the years of its life as a nymph submerged in water, only to metamorphose into an aerial acrobat for a short time to reproduce before death; this symbolism isn't too fanciful. Some cultures develop the symbolism further and describe the powerful dragonfly flight as representing the possibilities of 'going beyond what is on the surface' and looking deeper at life's associations.



Perhaps this is why I'm drawn to our aerial dragonfly in the Visitor Center. Along the beautiful river, we are all creatures of land and water, sure; but the Refuge Gateway has also undergone a remarkable transformation of possibilities. This place has changed from an industrial brownfield to a showcase greenspace where families will connect with those lands and waters. It is recognition of the importance we place on a healthy environment for our well-being and the well-being of the planet. I also see the dragonfly's powerful and agile flight representing our visionaries and neighbors, who more than a decade ago challenged us to look beyond the surface and see the possibilities. The Refuge Gateway proves that you accepted that challenge and saw the deeper implications of what the community represents along the river. You fought hard to save it and patiently waited with poise while the vision slowly emerged to reality.

When we open these gates and doors for the first time and invite everyone in, I think you'll see that vision here too. First, I challenge you to find the dragonfly, and then know the symbols, the design, the pride of place, the fun, and the joy of a dream realized is all here too. The Refuge Gateway and nature of Humbug Marsh are full of them. Just breathe deep and stop, listen, look, smell, feel the possibilities of what can happen when you 'go beyond what is on the surface'. It surrounds us! I hope you enjoy this 'sneak peek' into your new Refuge Gateway. I look forward to seeing you at the Grand Opening and throughout the coming year. Let the celebration begin!

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





Progress over the years with the Refuge Gateway of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge . . .

The Road to a Grand Opening!



It was a beautiful, yet cold day for 2013 Visitor Center Groundbreaking Ceremony with leaders from near and far!



The digging begins, Spring 2014



2015 The walls go up!



The visitor center in the Refuge Gateway as seen from space!



June 2016 – it's taking shape!



November 2016 – looking good . . .



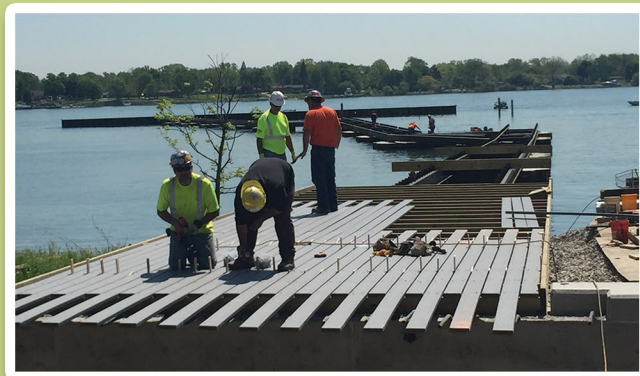
Welcome to the John D. Dingell, Jr. Visitor Center



12.17.15 Pouring Aggregate Preparation for the fishing pier begins



3.30.2016 Reaching 700' into the channel of the Detroit River



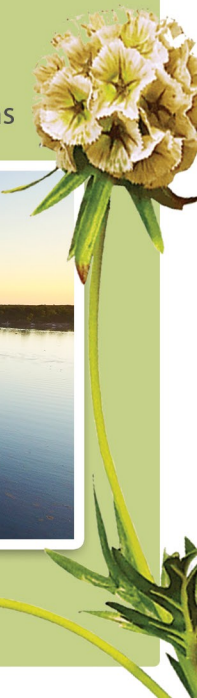
5.23.16 Decking Really taking shape



2017 The pier length is 200'



Photo credit USFWS/Tandem



\$1.9 Million Donation for Downriver Communities Towards Recreation and Trails

During a sunny morning last May at John D. Dingell Park in the City of Ecorse, elected officials, community members, non-profits, and governmental organizations met to celebrate the generous donation of \$1.9 million to the Downriver communities to call towards trails, recreation and placemaking. Anita Twardesky and Mary Bohling, of the Downriver Linked Greenways (DLGI) spear headed the ceremony and, along with the Friends of the Detroit River as the fiduciary, will oversee the use of the funds over the course of the next few years.

The money will be used on multiple projects to not only enhance the trail systems in the Downriver region, but also promote recreational opportunities close to the Detroit metropolitan area. Specifically, funds will be used to:

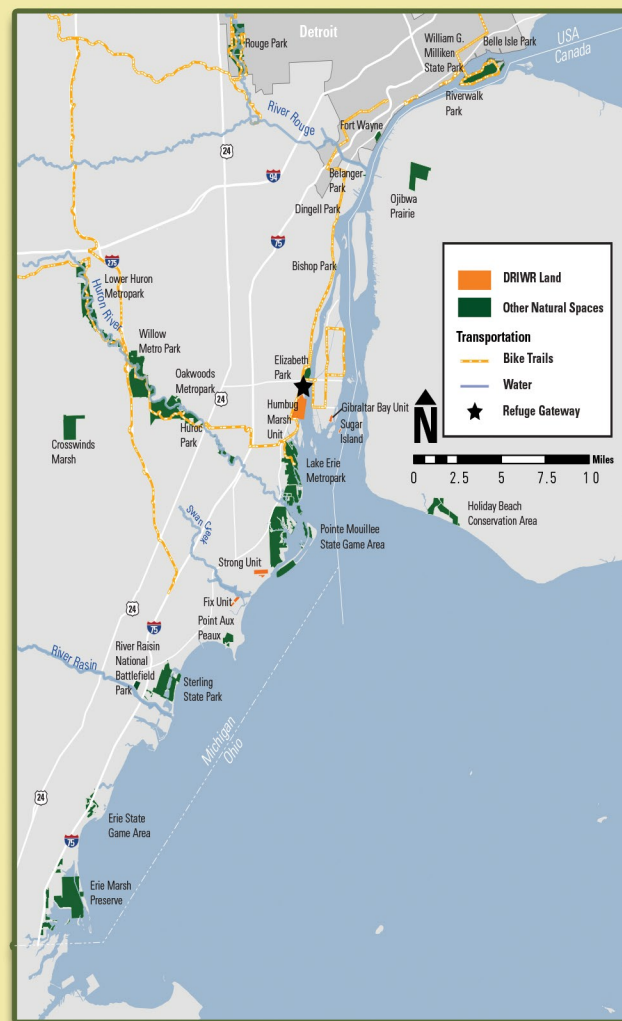
- Create design and construction plans for 17 major intersection crossings on the Downriver Linked Greenways Trails, and create construction designs to address gaps in the trail system;
- Develop a Hines Park-River Rouge Connection Trail Framework plan;
- Create two 'gateways' to the Downriver communities in Flat Rock, and at the Fort-Rouge Gateway (FRoG) Park in Detroit;
- Help fund Phase 1 of the FRoG Park;
- Fund a marking campaign for Destination Downriver, the Downriver Promotional Collation, to showcase the recreational opportunities and livability of the Downriver region;
- Build capacity to support these, and future, projects; and
- To leverage funds towards future grants to center on construction and implementation of these projects.

As more state and local organizations focus on attracting more visitors and younger families to their areas, grants such as these can make large waves towards the economic health and vitality to our gateway communities.

Anita and Mary are also on the Board of Directors of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance.



**Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Grant Announcement for
Downriver Linked Greenways**
Friends of the Detroit River
Mary Bohling, Anita Twardesky, David Howell



Another Migration for the Books!

It may be hard to believe, but the Detroit River Hawk Watch has completed its 37th consecutive year of monitoring raptor migration at the Lake Erie Metropark Boat Launch. This year, our seasoned hawk-spotting volunteers and professional counter, Kevin Georg, spent over 550 hours with their eyes on the skies in 2019.

Between September 1st and November 30th, a whopping 128,131 different individual birds were counted while migrating from their breeding grounds in eastern Canada to their overwintering grounds in Mexico. Species identified in 2019 included turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, peregrine falcons, osprey, northern harriers, sharp-shinned hawks, bald eagles, Cooper's hawks, rough-legged hawks, northern goshawks, golden eagles, merlin, American kestrels, and the birds that make the site famous: broad-winged hawks.

September is the traditional month signifying the end of summer. The summer's hot weather activities usually end with a final flourish on the long Labor Day weekend while schools resume classes and college football season begins. September means one thing for devotees of raptor migration at Lake Erie Metropark: broad-winged hawks. Although well documented that this species will pass through the general vicinity around mid-September, the actual dates are variable and dependent on factors beyond the control of hawks and the people that watch them while both await the arrival of northerly winds on the leading edge of a high-pressure system.

October, like September, has a specific bird attached to it. *Cathartes aura*, the turkey vulture, migrates to more southern climes and most of them pass in this month. Their numbers rival that of the broad-winged hawk for season totals. These birds are one of the most distinctive flyers with their black presence, unusual posture, and rocking motion. While not the most attractive of birds, they are great flying machines. Some of the most mesmerizing scenes at the watch are those of turkey vultures effortlessly floating overhead in large bomber-like formations and evoking strains of Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries in one's head. These birds love to fly in high winds and seem to delight in being tossed about in the turbulence. Of the 52,459 season total turkey vultures, 47,717 of them came through in October, but they were still moving on the last day in November.

Although November might sound like a potentially barren month, four species recorded the majority of their numbers in this month: red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, rough-legged hawk, and golden eagle. At this time of year, these special birds can make the day of the counters since they are fairly rare. Still, with nearly 130,000 total birds counted, it has to be considered a good season and a job well done.

The Detroit River Hawk Watch Advisory Committee and the Refuge Biologist publish a comprehensive season summary report after every year to compare each year's effort with the previous years and long-term trends. To read the full 2019 season summary, please to <http://detroitriverhawkwatch.org>

and, keep looking up!





NATURE COMING TO A PLACE NEAR YOU!

Thanks to the generous support from the Community Foundation of Monroe County, DTE Energy Foundation, and the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, the Refuge is now the owner of the graphic Recreational Activity Trailer! We plan to use the trailer to bring nature-based programming to local communities.

In addition to the trailer, a Community Connections Intern has been hired to lead these recreational activities thanks to funds from our partners at the Colina Foundation, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, the Community Foundation of Monroe County, and the Monroe County Community College. For ten months beginning in February 2020, this intern will use the trailer to help people make meaningful connections to nature including archery and fishing.

If you have suggestions on places for the trailer to visit, contact Visitor Services Manager, Jody DeMeyere, at jody_demeyere@fws.gov or Michael Solomon at iwra.intern@gmail.com.



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