

CHARTING THE COURSE

AN ASSESSMENT OF ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES ON THE LOWER DETROIT RIVER.



Ecorse Creek

Fighting Island

Grosse Ile

Huron River



Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative of METROPOLITAN AFFAIRS COALITION



IMPORTANCE OF THE LOWER DETROIT RIVER

LIFE IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN RELIES ON THE DETROIT RIVER'S VITALITY. ITS CONTINUOUS FLOW HAS FURNISHED DRINKABLE WATER TO MILLIONS OF PEOPLE OVER THOUSANDS OF YEARS; ITS RICH FISHERIES AND ABUNDANT GAME PROVIDED SUSTENANCE TO THE EARLIEST SETTLERS AND HUNDREDS OF SUBSEQUENT GENERATIONS. IN RECENT DECADES, RIVERFRONT INDUSTRIES PROVIDED GREAT WEALTH TO A WIDESPREAD REGION. TODAY, THE DETROIT RIVER REMAINS CENTRAL TO OUR BASIC LIFE NEEDS AND REPRESENTS A VALUABLE ASSET FOR A CHANGING ECONOMY.

OUR DETROIT RIVER SERVES A DISTINCTIVE ROLE WITHIN THE GREAT LAKES BASIN, THE LARGEST FRESHWATER BODY IN THE WORLD, BY FUNNELING WATER FROM COLD, DEEP NORTHERN LAKES TO A SHALLOWER LAKE ERIE. MARSHLANDS, BRIMMING WITH LIFE, STILL DOT THE RIVER'S BANKS, REMINISCENT OF THE EXPANSIVE WETLANDS THAT ONCE CRADLED THE ENTIRE WATERCOURSE. THE ENCHANTMENT OF THIS GREAT ESTUARY OF LIFE IS AS COMPELLING TODAY AS IT WAS TO PAST GENERATIONS.

OVER TIME, THE CLOSE BOND BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE RIVER DIMINISHED. MANY CONNECTIONS WERE LOST DURING THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND IN BUILDING OUR ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY DURING WORLD WAR II. NOW, WE ARE AGGRESSIVELY CHARTING A NEW COURSE TO RECONNECT PEOPLE TO THE RIVER AND ARE POISED TO REAP SUBSTANTIAL BENEFITS FROM NEW PLANS FOR GREENWAYS AND SUSTAINABLE WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT. THE LOWER DETROIT RIVER IS PART OF THE ONLY INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE RIVER SYSTEM AND THE ONLY INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IN NORTH AMERICA. OUR REGION IS BECOMING GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED FOR ITS PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES AND FOSTERING COMMUNITY PRIDE IN LOCAL CULTURAL RESOURCES. IN FACT, OUR DETROIT RIVER IS BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT IN ACHIEVING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES – PLAYING A PIVOTAL ROLE IN SUSTAINING OUR ECONOMY, ENHANCING OUR QUALITY OF LIFE, AND IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF EMPLOYEES AND BUSINESSES.

GREATER DETROIT AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVER INITIATIVE OF METROPOLITAN AFFAIRS COALITION

THE DETROIT RIVER IS ONE OF ONLY 14 RIVERS NATIONWIDE HONORED WITH A PRESIDENTIAL DESIGNATION AS AN AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVER (AHR). THE METROPOLITAN AFFAIRS COALITION (MAC), A REGIONAL PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP OF BUSINESS, LABOR AND GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS DEDICATED TO ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND ECONOMY IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN, HAS PROVIDED LEADERSHIP FOR THE GREATER DETROIT AHR INITIATIVE SINCE 1998. AHR ASSISTS COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESSES ON RIVER-RELATED PROJECTS THAT PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, FOSTER ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP, AND CELEBRATE HISTORY AND CULTURE.

AS PART OF AHR, MAC HAS UNDERTAKEN AN ASSESSMENT OF ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES ON THE LOWER DETROIT RIVER. THIS ASSESSMENT HAS INVOLVED IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR RIVERFRONT FEATURES, AMENITIES AND FACILITIES, AS WELL AS POTENTIAL FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE AMBASSADOR BRIDGE TO LAKE ERIE ON THE UNITED STATES SIDE. THIS WILL HELP PROVIDE DIRECTION FOR FUTURE EFFORTS AND DRAW ATTENTION TO THE ONGOING REVITALIZATION OF THE LOWER RIVERFRONT IN A WAY THAT ENCOURAGES COOPERATIVE PROJECTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE ENTIRE REGION.

"The area is so temperate, so fertile, and so beautiful that it may justly be called the earthly paradise of North America"
 –Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac



A SURVEY OF THE RIVER DETROIT, FROM LAKE ERIE TO LAKE ST. CLAIR BY CAPT. W.F. OWEN AND ASSISTANTS, IN 1815. PUBLISHED AT THE HYDROGRAPHICAL OFFICE OF THE BRITISH ADMIRALTY IN LONDON, ENGLAND, 1828.

HISTORIC ACCOUNT

The Detroit River and its unique geographic character offered a distinct advantage to past economies of this region. Highly prosperous eras of beaver trapping followed by shipbuilding and steel making led North America into the Industrial Revolution. Steel rails manufactured in Wyandotte by the world's first Bessemer steel mill were used to construct the Transcontinental Railroad. In the early 20th Century, a fledgling automobile industry took root on the river's banks that eventually changed the face of our world. New economic opportunities involving recreation and interpretation of our wondrous past are now abundant as today's industry transitions to "green" sustainable practices, and higher value is placed on environmental quality. Capturing the potential of these opportunities will perpetuate the high quality of life experienced in this region throughout time.



Native American Heritage

Lands surrounding the Lower Detroit River have been home to indigenous people for approximately 10,000 years. Agricultural goods were transported and people moved on the river in early times; soon the river became the region's heart of commerce and survival. Innumerable resources provided native peoples with a high quality of life. European discovery of the area escalated demand for these resources. Native people celebrated the land as sacred and preserved its resources for thousands of years.



Trade

Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac established a military outpost in 1701 on the banks of the river and called the area "Le Detroit". Although initially established for military purposes, it soon stimulated and controlled commerce, especially the fur trade. Detroit became the North American center for collecting, processing and exporting fur. Hundreds of thousands of beaver skins were exported annually at the height of the fur trade era. Increased commerce and population dramatically changed the riverbanks as fill roads were constructed to provide easy waterfront access. In the 1800s, steamboats moved along the river. This important development greatly increased transportation efficiency in subsequent years.



Ship Building

Growth and development in the Great Lakes Basin created a tremendous demand for passenger and material transport. To meet that demand, the Lower Detroit River area emerged as one of the leading ship building regions in the United States. An Act of Congress in 1819 declared the Detroit River a public highway. More ships were built along the Lower Detroit River in the 1800s than anywhere in America, and more passengers traveled from Detroit during this time than anywhere else in the world.



Steel Making

The pioneer industrialist, Eber B. Ward, invented the first inexpensive process for mass-producing steel and founded Eureka Iron Works on the Lower Detroit River banks in 1854. The first steel ingots were produced in 1864 using the Bessemer steel process. Iron ore from Upper Michigan was smelted into iron in blast furnaces, and lumber from the surrounding forests fueled the fires. The Eureka Iron Works ceased operations in 1892 when more modern steel making plants were established upstream.



Industrial Expansion

The emergence of the American industrial economy led to a huge economic boom for Lower Detroit River communities with the river providing a natural competitive advantage. The river served as a convenient means of transporting goods and raw materials to and from the world markets. Iron and steel related industries greatly expanded in the 1800s and supported suppliers of specialized engine parts and tool makers. The preponderance of late 19th Century machining operations allowed the automobile industry to bloom. Today, automotive industries remain vital components of Greater Detroit's economic stability.



Sustainable Development

Our understanding of and appreciation for the Detroit River has come full circle. Native Americans believed that the river's water was the lifeblood of the earth and deserved special care. Today, communities and individuals, as well as business and industry, have rediscovered the river's value and are working together to help protect and enhance our region's most valuable natural asset. Recent pollution prevention and clean-up initiatives, wildlife habitat enhancement efforts, and greenways and park development are transforming the riverfront. At the same time, our industrial economy is undergoing a significant transition, based upon sustainable design and manufacturing and cutting-edge technologies. Preserving natural resources and insuring a healthy environment are essential to sustaining a vital economy and high quality of life. Our area's businesses are now leading the way in demonstrating how sustainable development can be the cornerstone for future prosperity. (Ford's new Dearborn Truck Plant – shown above – includes the world's largest living roof.)

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DEARBORN

DETROIT

MELVINDALE

RIVER ROUGE

ECORSE

LINCOLN PARK

WYANDOTTE

DETROIT RIVER

CANADA

RIVERVIEW

TRENTON

GROSSE ILE

GIBRALTAR

BROWNSTOWN TOWNSHIP

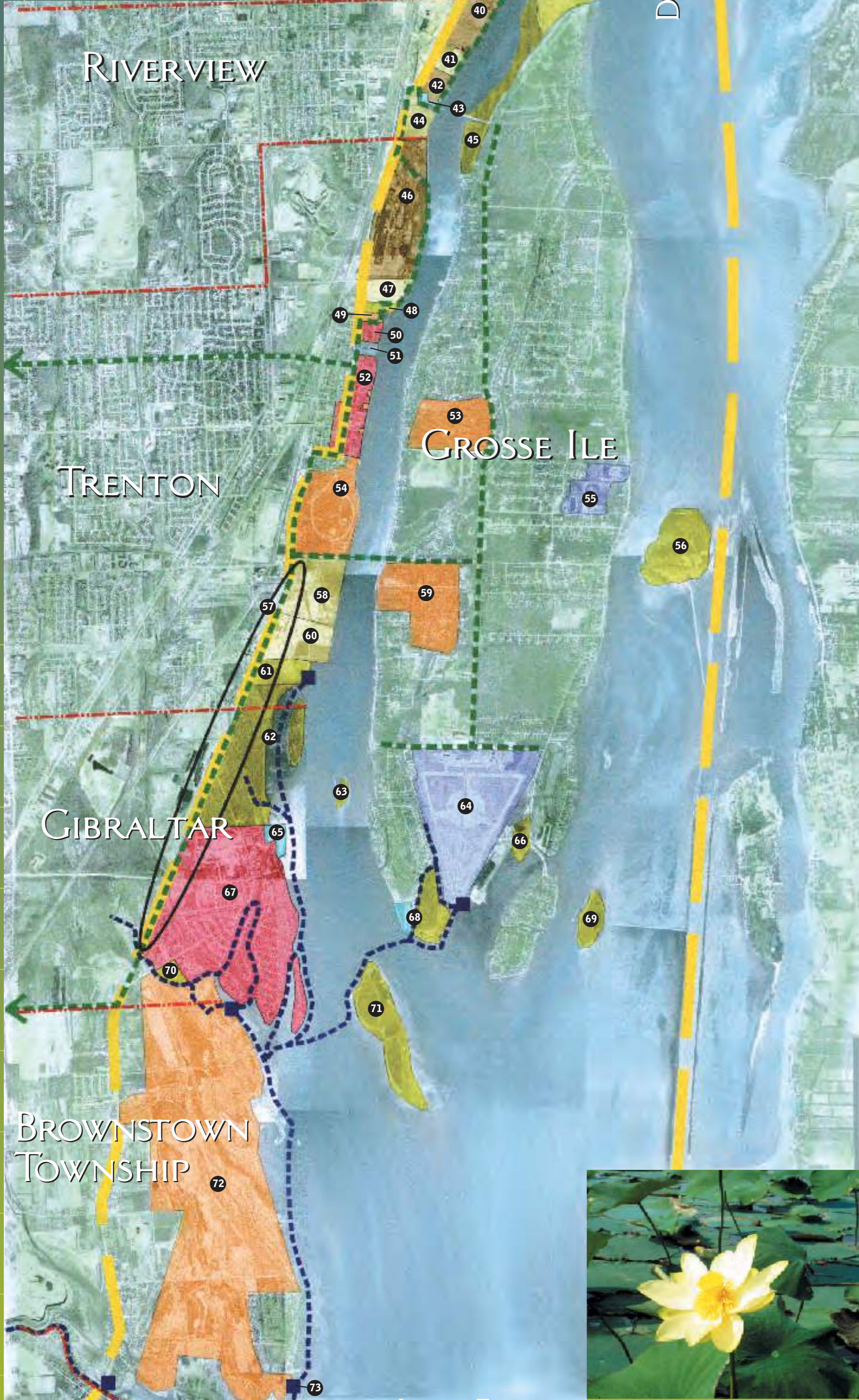
LAKE ERIE

MAP LEGEND

- Residential / Commercial
- Public / Quasi-Public
- Recreational Water Use
- Recreation / Parks
- Natural Areas / Open Space
- Inactive Industrial
- Active Industrial

Colors above represent existing land use

- Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Boundary
- Municipal Boundaries
- Greenways
- Conceptual Water Trail



- Riverside Park Promenade** Riverside Park offers one of the prime locations to address shipping traffic serving the Great Lakes. The park, home to the Detroit Fire Department's Fire Boat, the J.W. Westcott, better known as the "mail boat", and a large public boat launch, has undergone major renovations. Opportunities exist to make greenway connections to other southwest Detroit parks, Historic Fort Wayne, and downtown Detroit's east and west planned riverfronts.
- Detroit News Warehouse** This site is being used for newspaper storage. Opportunity exists for its transition to become part of the riverfront greenway.
- Detroit / Wayne County Port Authority (DWCPA)** The vision of the Port of Detroit project is the creation of a district that would be home to various transportation (port-related) services including packaging firms, logistics companies, and warehouses, while incorporating the goals of the community. The project requires transferring the rights and property of the adjacent Detroit Marine Terminal from the City of Detroit to the DWCPA.
- Clark Street Properties**
- Motor City Intermodal Terminal** One hundred and thirty thousand tons of lumber pass through this terminal annually.
- Mistersky Power Plant**
- Baby Creek Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Control Facility / Patton Park Improvements** Proposed development of a shared-use path through an existing utility easement will create a neighborhood link from Patton Park to the Rouge River. The new screening and disinfection facility in Patton Park will improve water quality in the Rouge and Detroit Rivers.
- Dearborn Truck Plant and Rouge Visitor Center, Ford Motor Company** With the construction of these facilities, Ford Motor Company has demonstrated a commitment to 21st Century sustainable manufacturing and innovative environmental rehabilitation.
- Revere Copper and Brass** This vacant brownfield property, a former industrial site, is ready for redevelopment. Possibilities include a maritime research center or museum. There is also opportunity for acquisition by the adjacent Historic Fort Wayne.
- Historic Fort Wayne** A nexus for history, culture and economic development, Historic Fort Wayne is one of the few public access sites along Detroit's working waterfront. Proposed improvements to the historic site include soft shoreline engineering, riverfront greenway, and the creation of a 125-slip marina. Buildings could be leased to businesses and/or nonprofit groups.
- Fordson Island** Marathon Oil Company, the island's primary property owner, has removed their operations and would like to donate their property for public purposes. A variety of recreational and conservation opportunities are possible at this site.
- Springwells Subdivision** Recent initiatives by Detroit Economic Growth Corporation are promoting industrial reuse of this site.
- Delray Boat Launch** This DTE Energy site has a public access boat launch ramp, public parking, and dedicated shoreline fishing areas. DTE Energy hosts an annual Family Fun Day at the Delray fishing area.
- Oakwood Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Control Facility and Pump Station** This new screening and disinfection facility is being planned by Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to improve water quality in the Rouge and Detroit Rivers.
- Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant** This plant is the largest in the Great Lakes Basin. Public tours and educational opportunities are proposed.
- U.S. Steel at Zug Island** This steel manufacturing plant is under new ownership by U.S. Steel. Opportunities exist to further enhance the shoreline using soft engineering techniques.
- Rouge River Power Plant-DTE Energy** Recent environmental initiatives by DTE Energy have rehabilitated the shoreline and enhanced habitat for the peregrine falcon and osprey.
- Belanger Park** Belanger Park offers a waterfront vista, gazebo, picnic pavilion, play area, and walking path. Mariner's Memorial Lighthouse has been constructed and approved by the U.S. Coast Guard as an aid to navigation. Greenway opportunities exist to link Belanger Park with a proposed marina at the former site of the Great Lakes Engineering Works. The greenway trail could also promote River Rouge's unique role in steel production and ship building.
- Edmund Fitzgerald Park** Creation of the Edmund Fitzgerald Park would commemorate the birthplace of the SS Edmund Fitzgerald and hundreds of other freighters. Proposed improvements include increased waterfront access, interpretive displays, improved shoreline, and additional marina space.
- Nicholson Terminal & Dock Company** Nicholson Terminal & Dock has 47 acres of dock area and offers cargo handling, stevedoring, truck, rail car and barge loading and unloading, warehousing, and vessel repair services.
- U.S. Steel at Ecorse** U.S. Steel could demonstrate soft engineering of the Detroit River shoreline at its plant in Ecorse. Opportunities also exist to partner on the regional greenway trail system.
- U.S. Steel Training Center**
- John D. Dingell Park** Major improvements include upgrading the boardwalk and play area, park entry and additional landscaping, and a new rowing facility. Opportunities exist to create greenway connections to neighborhoods in Ecorse and Lincoln Park.
- Mud Island** Island is owned by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Public access could be provided from Ecorse's Dingell Park.
- Council Point Park** Greenway linkages could be created to the Detroit River.
- Former Michigan Steel** A brownfield site owned by U.S. Steel could become available for new development.
- Ecorse Boat Launch and Marina**
- Residential Wyandotte**
- Wyandotte Marina District**
- Grassy Island** This island was used for disposal of contaminated sediment from the Rouge River. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is pursuing ecological rehabilitation.
- Fighting Island** BASF has created both a corporate conference center and a wildlife sanctuary on the island. Recently, it received Wildlife Habitat Council certification. Opportunities exist to expand conservation and educational efforts.
- BASF Wyandotte** BASF is an international leader in pollution prevention and environmental management. Its Estabrook Plant was the first facility in the world to receive joint ISO 14001/Responsible Care Certification.
- Henry Ford Wyandotte Hospital**
- Wyandotte Municipal Electric, Water and Cable TV Systems**
- Bishop Park** Bishop Park is presently included in the new Wyandotte Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Master Plan. A specific plan for the park will be developed in a later phase of the planning process. The park is a key element in the current business district's efforts to create an exciting commercial marketplace and entertainment venue.
- Downtown Wyandotte** Plans have been made to revitalize Wyandotte's central business district as an exciting commercial marketplace and entertainment venue.
- Wyandotte Marina District**
- BASF Park and Wyandotte Shores Golf Course** BASF has converted the former Wyandotte Chemical's South Works site into a 9-hole golf course, 25-acre park, boardwalk, and world-class rowing facility.
- Point Hennepin** Environmental remediation was completed on this site by BASF, and vegetation has been allowed to grow naturally. Sinkholes were filled, and soft shore engineering was used to prevent erosion of the shore and provide additional fish habitat.
- Atofina Chemical** This chemical plant has some vacant waterfront brownfield property ready for environmental cleanup with redevelopment potential.
- Materials Processing Inc. Warehouse**
- BASF Riverview** BASF has recently launched a major environmental remediation initiative for this site. It could become Riverview's first waterfront park.
- Riverview Boat Launch** Existing public access point to the Detroit River.
- Riverview Trenton Railroad** This business focuses on rail and trucking operations. Opportunities exist for partnering on greenways.
- Hennepin Marsh** Acquisition of the South Hennepin Marsh would allow for construction of a boardwalk, educational kiosk, and observation platform. Shoreline soft engineering methods could be used to protect the marsh from further erosion.
- Detroit Steel Corporation (DSC)** This site is in transition. Opportunities exist to incorporate a riverfront greenway and mixed use redevelopment consistent with Trenton's riverfront redevelopment plan.
- Levy Trucking** The future of this site is closely tied to the adjacent property owned by DSC. In the event that steel making ceases on the adjacent DSC site, this site could become available for riverfront residential development as depicted in Trenton's redevelopment plan.
- Howard Elias Trust** This site was included in the redevelopment plan for the Trenton riverfront and is slated for medium density residential development.
- Meyer Elias Park / Black Lagoon** Proposed enhancements to the park include a linked riverfront greenway that will extend from Meyer Elias Park south to Elizabeth Park. At the shoreline of Meyer Elias Park is Black Lagoon, an exposed cove that acts as a settling basin for contaminants and debris. Sediment remediation will begin in 2004 followed by shoreline habitat rehabilitation. The ultimate plan for this area includes a riverfront marina.
- Residential Trenton**
- Former Riverside Osteopathic Hospital** Adaptive reuse of the former hospital as a 100-unit condominium development and offices is proposed. A conservation easement has been granted for a riverfront greenway.
- Downtown Trenton / Linked Riverfront Parks** Several new pocket parks were created on city property at street ends along the Detroit River. These pocket parks are being linked to downtown to further economic development and enhance community pride.
- West Shore Golf and Country Club**
- Elizabeth Park** The Elizabeth Park Southshore Riverwalk and Northpointe Riverwalk Projects include creation of a promenade, shoreline stabilization, fish habitat enhancement, and connection to Trenton's Linked Riverfront Parks and the Downriver Linked Greenways North-South Connector.
- Grosse Ile Middle School** Existing school on the Detroit River has environmental education opportunities.
- Stony Island** Island is owned by Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Opportunities exist to expand conservation and educational efforts.
- North-South Connector - Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative** The North-South Connector of the Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative, located along Jefferson Avenue in Trenton and Gibraltar, will be the second link of the greenway master plan to be constructed. It is a critical section in the larger regional trail system connecting Elizabeth Park with Lake Erie Metropark.
- Trenton Channel Power Plant-DTE Energy** DTE Energy has created a butterfly garden outside the main entrance of their plant that has received ISO 14001 and Wildlife Habitat Council Certification. Opportunities exist to partner on the Downriver Linked Greenways North-South Connector.
- Grosse Ile Golf and Country Club**
- Solutia** Solutia has rehabilitated 25 acres of waterfront property for wildlife habitat and restored shoreline using soft engineering techniques. Opportunities exist to partner on the Downriver Linked Greenways North-South Connector.
- International Wildlife Refuge Headquarters** The establishment of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and increased focus on conservation in and alongside the Detroit River are major sources of community pride in the downriver area. A visitor and education center is being planned by Wayne County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and many other stakeholders. A master plan will be developed for this gateway to the refuge.
- Humbug Island and Marsh** The Trust for Public Land will convey property rights for Humbug Island and Marsh to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The USFWS will hold the land as part of the International Wildlife Refuge. Trails and other recreational and educational opportunities could be planned concurrently with the International Wildlife Refuge Headquarters.
- Calf Island** Island is owned by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Shoreline protection measures are needed.
- Grosse Ile Airport**
- Humbug Marina, Inc.**
- Grosse Ile Nature Area** Creation of a natural shoreline is currently underway. Environmental education programs in this area can be expanded.
- Residential Gibraltar**
- Ford Yacht Club / Round Island** A conservation easement or cooperative agreement could help preserve Round Island for conservation and habitat purposes.
- Sugar Island** Island is privately owned. Opportunities exist for private development or acquisition of island by public agency for conservation purposes.
- Six Points** This site is privately owned but should be preserved because it is a Native American burial ground and an important ecological area. It could become a unique destination along the greenway.
- DeLeon Island** Island is owned by Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Shoreline protection measures are needed.
- Lake Erie Metropark** Lake Erie Metropark is a 1,607-acre recreational facility operated by the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority. It features three miles of Lake Erie shoreline and is a top bird-watching and fishing site. An abundance of wildlife and waterfowl inhabit the meadows, marshes, and bays. Park features include a wave-action swimming pool, an 18-hole regulation golf course, a museum and nature center, boat launches and a marina. Recent developments in the park include a three-mile hiking and biking trail linking Lake Erie Metropark and the City of Gibraltar.
- Heritage Water Trail** The development of the first phase of a canoe and kayak trail is proposed for the lower Huron and lower Detroit Rivers.



Photos Courtesy of:
Austin M. Verhey, 3rd Michigan Peregrine Coordinator
Wyandotte Historical Museum
DTE Energy
Grosse Ile Nature and Land Conservancy
David Stimer
Mike Bartley, Downriver Waikie Federation
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Woodhaven Parks and Recreation
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GREATER DETROIT AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVER INITIATIVE

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