



Friends of the Rouge • 4901 Evergreen Road, APC • Dearborn, MI 48128
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Promoting restoration and stewardship of the Rouge River since 1986

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rouge River Water Trail Strategic Plan and Signage Design Funded for 2018

Erb Family Foundation Funds Friends of the Rouge to spearhead a comprehensive planning process for the 25 mile Lower Rouge River Water Trail

Metro Detroit, Mich. – **Good news for outdoor recreation in Southeast Michigan: The Rouge River will offer kayakers and canoeists new opportunities to paddle the lower branch.** The Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation approved a generous grant to Friends of the Rouge in the amount of \$76,660 to support Phase II implementation of the 25-mile Rouge River Water Trail on the lower branch.

Paddlers will travel through picturesque sections of river resonating an “up north” feel, through city centers like downtown Wayne and Dearborn, and finally through a dense urban landscape of humbling industrial monoliths and sea-faring barges. Few other water trails in Michigan offer the visual variety or historic significance of the lower Rouge River Water Trail.

“The Rouge River Water Trail will enable residents of southeast Michigan to reap the recreational, cultural, and economic benefits of our local rivers,” shared John Erb, President and Board Chair of The Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation, “We’re proud to support Friends of the Rouge in these efforts and hope that the process will reconnect Michiganders with their local waterways for generations to come.”

These funds will help the existing Rouge River Water Trail Committee with leadership from Friends of the Rouge and Wayne County Parks develop a comprehensive five-year strategic plan, meet and form agreements with all communities and partners who touch the lower Rouge River, host a professionally led woody debris management training and complete a design concept for the Rouge River Water Trail signage that connects the trail to the greenway work and aims to be inclusive of Spanish and Arabic speaking populations in the watershed.

“For the past twelve years, the Friends of the Rouge have been bringing the public back to the Rouge River for recreational enjoyment,” stated Marie McCormick, Friends of the Rouge Executive Director, “We started offering organized trips on the Rouge River in 2003 and currently offer two annual public canoe/kayak trips and one motor powered cruise up the lower Rouge – called the Rouge Cruise.”



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After exploring routes on the navigable branches of the Rouge, Friends of the Rouge determined that the lower branch had consistent enough water levels to support a trail. In 2012, Friends of the Rouge partnered with the communities along the route, two local liveries, the National Park Service and interested paddlers to begin developing a Rouge River Water Trail.

Since the 1970's, the Rouge River underwent a historic transformation from a toxic dead-zone, to a river that has returned to life. Dissolved oxygen levels improving so much that fish and macroinvertebrates are returning to stretches of the river once devoid of life. This cleaner river now offers a unique, urban recreational opportunity for locals and visitors to enjoy in their own backyard (without having to go to Huron River, the Clinton River or to the many rivers up north).

"Recreational paddling is at an all-time high around the country yet the Rouge River remains underutilized due to its past reputation and lack of knowledge about where to safely paddle" continued McCormick, "Many people respond to the idea of paddling on the Rouge River with comments like one local publication recently stated, "Are you freakin' crazy?" Friends of the Rouge has begun to change that perception and with many thanks to the Erb Family Foundation, this program will greatly expand those efforts."

The Friends of the Rouge is a local, community driven nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1986 to raise awareness about the need to clean up the Rouge River in southeast Michigan. To learn more about the Rouge River Water Trail, visit us at www.therouge.org

The Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation's mission is to nurture environmentally healthy and culturally vibrant communities in Metropolitan Detroit, consistent with sustainable business models, and to support initiatives to restore the Great Lakes Ecosystem. Since its inception in 2009, the Foundation has awarded a total of \$79 million, including \$3.5 million to watershed organizations in southeast Michigan. For more information, visit www.erbff.org.

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