

# Friends of the ROUGE



2013-2014  
**ANNUAL REPORT**

THE MISSION OF FRIENDS OF THE ROUGE IS TO PROMOTE RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP OF THE ROUGE RIVER ECOSYSTEM THROUGH EDUCATION, CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT AND OTHER COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS, FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE PEOPLE, PLANTS, AND ANIMALS OF THE WATERSHED.

#### FROM THE PRESIDENT

It has been an active year for Friends of the Rouge, full of change and progress. FOTR started the year with the hiring of our new Executive Director, Aimee LaLonde-Norman. Aimee has brought a huge amount of energy and direction to the position and will be a leading force moving FOTR ahead. Throughout the year we have continued to provide the programs promoting and fulfilling our mission involving education, restoration, and stewardship of the watershed.

And finally, 2014 was the year that federal funding from the Rouge Program finally came to an end. While this loss of funding is an immediate and on-going challenge, it also presents a major opportunity for FOTR to change. While change can be a little scary, it also is necessary for life and growth. We don't know where these changes will lead yet, but we thank our membership and sponsors for your continued support. We look forward to the opportunities that 2015 will bring.

Thank you for being a "Friend of the Rouge."



Michael G. Darga | President, Board of Directors

#### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Friends of the Rouge enjoyed another great year celebrating successes, adapting to changes, and overcoming new challenges. Our unofficial but palpable theme for the year: transition and sustainability. Throughout the year, the organization prepared for the loss of a significant funding source (the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project), expanded volunteer monitoring efforts, incorporated new technology into the Rouge Education Project, changed the date for our renowned Rouge Rescue event, hired an Executive Director, launched the Explore the Rouge series, and celebrated our 28th anniversary.

In the midst of transition, board members and staff continued to manage quality education programs, organize meaningful volunteer opportunities, seek out and pursue new funding opportunities, and grow our fund development capacity. Volunteers, community partners, and watershed residents rallied around us and showed up in record numbers to participate in Bug Hunts, native gardening workshops, and the ever-popular Rouge Cruise. Thank you!

As we move into our 29th year of service to the Rouge River watershed, we remain committed to our mission—promoting restoration and lifelong stewardship of the Rouge River—and focused on sustainability; looking to the needs of the river and our watershed community for direction. Together, we will continue to enhance our programs and explore the possibilities for our future. I invite you to join us in 2015—as a member, volunteer, donor, participant, or sponsor—and *experience the Rouge*.



Aimee LaLonde-Norman | Executive Director



## ROUGE RESCUE

For the past 27 years Rouge Rescue was held on the first Saturday in June. This year we moved the event forward a couple of weeks to May 17, 2014, to meet deadlines for the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project Grant, which was the primary source of funding for the event.

Rouge Rescue 2014 engaged 1,514 people of all ages in cleaning up and restoring the Rouge River at 43 work sites in 22 communities in Southeast Michigan. Volunteers made great strides to keep the Rouge River flowing free from trash that had accumulated over the winter or had been illegally dumped. Volunteers cleared 344 acres of 133 cubic yard of trash – including 57 tires, 2 shopping carts, 2 mattresses, 2 large furniture items and 2 bicycles. That amount of trash would fill nearly 7 garbage trucks!

Volunteers also worked on activities to reduce the destructive impact stormwater runoff has on the Rouge River by planting over 3,600 native wildflowers and grasses and 75 trees and shrubs. The plantings will reduce sediments and pollutants from rain water as well as the amount of water flowing to the river. Three (3) rain gardens, 3 riparian buffers, 4 native demonstration gardens/prairie plantings, and 1 tree planting were installed or enhanced during Rouge Rescue.

Invasive plant removal continues to be an important Rouge Rescue activity. Ongoing invasive removal projects have made a big impact and have drastically reduced garlic mustard populations at many of the work sites. Several sites worked to control invasive honeysuckle and another invasive buckthorn species. Reducing non-native invasive plants helps to improve water quality and habitat in and out of the river. Nearly 1,200 cubic yards of invasive plants were removed from 68 acres during Rouge Rescue 2014—enough material to fill 59 garbage trucks!

Rouge Rescue would not be possible without our community partners who organize and lead work sites, corporate sponsors who provide critical funding to support the event, and the 1,500+ volunteers who help get all the work done! Thank you for helping to improve the Rouge River for us and future generations to enjoy!



## RIVER RESTORATION

FOTR's River Restoration Program teaches watershed residents how to care for the land to improve water quality and wildlife habitat through hands-on projects and educational events.

**PROJECTS:** In the 2013-2014 fiscal year Friends of the Rouge coordinated eight native restoration planting projects that engaged 119 volunteers in improving water quality and wildlife habitat. Two new projects replaced mowed lawn with 2,000 sq. ft. of native wildflowers and grasses to create a rain garden in Detroit and a pollinator planting in Superior Twp. One invasive control workday was organized to remove buckthorn shrubs in Redford Twp., where volunteers worked to remove 2,550 cubic yards of buckthorn from a three-acre area in Lola Valley Park. Five workdays were coordinated to maintain and enhance 35,220 square feet of existing restoration projects, which included three rain gardens (Detroit, Southfield, and Redford Twp.), one native prairie (Detroit) and one riparian buffer (Farmington).

**WORKSHOPS:** Friends of the Rouge coordinated five workshops in partnership with, and funded by, the Alliance of Rouge Communities. Four native garden design workshops were held in early 2014 to teach watershed homeowners how to incorporate native species into the home landscape to protect water quality. Workshops were held in Bloomfield Hills, Dearborn Heights, Livonia, and Novi. One Grow Zone Maintenance workshop was held in the fall of 2013. The workshops were very popular with 212 people in attendance throughout the year.

**OUTREACH:** Engaging and informing the public about threats to water quality and restoration practices they can implement at home are critical in our work to restore the Rouge River. FOTR was involved in many outreach activities throughout the year. Rain garden presentations were provided during three Green Your Neighborhood Forums organized by the Sierra Club Great Lakes Program (110 participants). Native landscaping presentations were given to garden clubs in Northville and Plymouth, the Grosse Isle Nature & Land Conservancy, and students at David Ellis Academy in Redford (210 participants). FOTR provided stormwater education utilizing a model landscape to demonstrate the impact of rain water on river systems during the City of Dearborn's three day Homecoming Festival (140,000 people) and presented to 5th grade classes during the Rouge River Water Festival held at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (120 students). FOTR also participated in a Green Infrastructure Task Force assembled by SEMCOG to create a Green Infrastructure Vision for Southeast Michigan.

## ROUGE EDUCATION PROJECT

The Rouge Education Project (REP) is FOTR's nationally recognized school-based environmental education program for grades K-12. Students learn about the condition of the river and are encouraged to help restore and protect the Rouge River and surrounding land area. They study the river's history, receive in-class lessons, and participate in a hands-on learning experience by taking a field trip and performing scientific tests that determine the current health of the river. Students and teachers are also challenged to transform their REP experience into more extensive service-learning projects for their local communities.



The 2013-2014 REP reached a total of 2,193 students and 71 teachers from 29 schools throughout Metro Detroit, including three schools new to the program. The success of the fall and spring monitoring events were largely due to volunteer support—24 college student and 10 corporate volunteers were trained in all of the water quality monitoring testing techniques and assisted schools on monitoring day, and 140 parents helped supervise and guide the students.

REP staff facilitated in-class lessons and taught over 200 students about aquatic insects or guided them through a watershed model-building activity. FOTR partner, Jeff Vallender, provided an in-class historical storytelling experience, "A Voyage in Time," for the second year. Multiple schools saw what a campsite from the 1760s might look like during the colonization of the Rouge River watershed and listened to stories about travel and conditions along the river system.

REP pre- and post- student surveys allow the program to collect information on participants' thoughts about science, nature, and school, as well as their knowledge of Rouge River-specific issues. During the 2013-14 academic year, these student surveys underwent significant revisions to more effectively present relevant and grade level appropriate material, and align more clearly with the mission of the program. This season marked the first-ever launch of electronic versions of the survey.

This year's report (available on FOTR's website) shows a general increase in number of scientific multiple choice questions answered correctly from the pre- to the post- REP survey. These results reflect the positive impact of bringing students into direct contact with their local waterway, an opportunity that often is precluded in southeast Michigan schools due to ever-increasing funding constraints.

The REP also purchased digital water quality testing probes using special grant funds from the Captain Planet Foundation. Piloting the testing probes with a small number of schools engaged students and teachers on a new level. Students were able to verify the results from their manual chemical assessments, and to view/handle equipment used by professional field scientists. This equipment will ultimately enhance the quality of the data we collect and expand the breadth and impact of the project in the Metro Detroit area.

Thank you to all REP Adopt-A-School sponsors, grantors and volunteers for another great year!



## VOLUNTEER MONITORING

**FISH MONITORING.** In 2013, FOTR partnered with UM-D faculty on a grant to monitor fish community responses to restoration activities, funded through the UM Water Center. UM-D student Robert Muller and Philip Kukulski have been conducting the surveys with the assistance of FOTR and volunteers who contributed 260 hours of time in 2013-14. The data is being used to assess the effect of the removal of the Wayne Road Dam in 2012 and to track the movement of the invasive round goby upstream. In 2013, this invasive fish moved 6.2 miles upstream.

The **FROG & TOAD SURVEY** is a listening survey in which volunteers track frog and toad presence through calling surveys. Due to the ending of the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project grant, the survey ended earlier than usual. As a result, participation was lower and data for the later calling species was abbreviated. In 2014, three training workshops were held in Livonia and Canton and Northville Townships

and 149 people attended. A total of 273 volunteers signed up to survey 245 blocks. Data was received for 193 blocks. To help volunteers practice their identification skills, one Group Listen was held in April at West Bloomfield Woods Nature Preserve. There were 44 attendees, 25 of which were surveyors.

**BENTHIC MACROINVERTEBRATE MONITORING** is a method of tracking stream health by assessing the type and abundance of aquatic insects, clams, snails, etc. that live in the streambed.

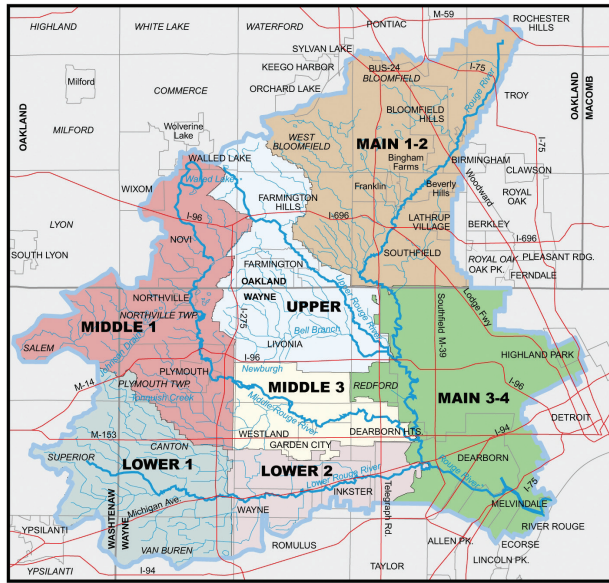
### FINDINGS

**2013 Fall Bug Hunt:** Most sites scored in the Fair (29) range. Of the 45 sites that have been sampled for three years or more, 64% were stable, 10% were improving, and 13% were declining. Long term trends show improving scores for the Middle 1, Middle 3 subwatersheds and Johnson Creek and declining scores in the Main 1/2 and Upper subwatersheds.

**2014 Winter Stonefly Search:** It was a great turnout for being the day that metro Detroit officially broke the record for the snowiest winter! Stoneflies were found at eleven of the 33 sites. All stoneflies found were slender winter stoneflies (Capniidae) with additional Perlodid stoneflies at one Fellows Creek site.

**2014 Spring Bug Hunt:** Most sites (58%) had Fair (27) scores. In comparison to past years, six sites scored above average and ten were below. Trend analysis showed Johnson Creek and the Middle 1 subwatershed with a positive trend in scores and no trend for other subwatersheds.

	2013 FALL BUG HUNT	2014 WINTER STONEFLY SEARCH	2014 SPRING BUG HUNT
NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS	98	81	120
BUG HUNT SITES SAMPLED	26	24	40
ADDITIONAL SITES SAMPLED	26	9	19
<b>TOTAL SITES SAMPLED</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>59</b>



## ROUGE RIVER WATER TRAIL

Paddling on the Rouge River grows in popularity every year! Friends of the Rouge is excited to be a part of the effort to develop the Rouge River Water Trail from Canton to the Detroit River and continues to offer two fall group paddles; the September 2013 industrial Rouge kayak trip had 29 paddlers and the October 2013 canoe trip, held in conjunction with the first Rouge-A-Palooza river celebration in Wayne, had 36 paddlers.

The effort to develop the Rouge River Water Trail is being lead by a group of interested organizations, communities, and individuals. A representative committee has been meeting regularly, an assets inventory has been completed, and individual communities are working on their own river stretch. The group is planning to develop a logo and a signage plan for the water trail as well as apply for grants for the installation of an accessible launch at Fort Street in conjunction with a new park there.

*Can't wait until fall to paddle the Rouge? Rental canoes are available on Newburgh Lake on summer weekends and are now being expanded to trips on the Lower Rouge.*

## 2013-14 FUNDRAISING EVENTS

- September 28, 2013: Run 4 the Rouge
- November 3, 2013: Rouge Brew
- May 12, 2014: Round Fore the Rouge Golf Outing
- July & August 2014: Phone-A-Thon
- August 5, 2014: Rouge Cruise  
narrated by Dr. Orin Gelderloos



**CONGRATULATIONS** to our 2014 Best Friend of the Rouge awardees!

**Alan Vankerckhove**, longtime FOTR volunteer, was chosen to receive the *Julie Rose Frentrup Outstanding Volunteer Award* because of his dedication and passion for teaching others about the Rouge River watershed.

The **Masco Corporation Foundation** has been a generous donor to Friends of the Rouge for the past three years, providing \$30,000 in support to the Rouge Education Project and impacting the lives of thousands of students.

Thank you, Al and Masco Corporation Foundation, for being “Best Friends” of the Rouge!

## ROUGE RIVER FACTS:

- THE ROUGE DRAINS APPROXIMATELY 467 SQUARE MILES OF LAND IN THE COUNTIES OF OAKLAND, WAYNE AND WASHTENAW IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN
- FOUR MAJOR BRANCHES WITH 126 RIVER MILES: MAIN, UPPER, MIDDLE, AND LOWER
- CONTAINS OVER 400 LAKES, IMPOUNDMENTS, AND PONDS IN 48 MUNICIPALITIES
- INHABITED BY 1.35 MILLION PEOPLE
- LAND USE: MORE THAN 50% URBANIZED, LESS THAN 25% REMAINING UNDEVELOPED

## OUR PARTNERS

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aaron Contracting</li> <li>Absolute Water Company</li> <li>Alliance of Rouge Communities</li> <li>Avalon International Bakery</li> <li>Bloomfield Township</li> <li>Botsford Commons Senior Community</li> <li>Canton Township</li> <li>Christ Episcopal Church</li> <li>City of Birmingham</li> <li>City of Dearborn</li> <li>City of Detroit</li> <li>City of Farmington</li> <li>City of Farmington Hills</li> <li>City of Livonia</li> <li>City of Novi</li> <li>City of Plymouth</li> <li>City of Southfield</li> <li>City of Wayne</li> <li>City of Westland</li> <li>Clinton River Watershed Council</li> <li>Coventry Gardens Improvement Association</li> <li>Cranbrook Institute of Science</li> <li>Dearborn Heights Watershed Stewards Commission</li> <li>DENSO International America</li> <li>Detroit Audubon Society</li> <li>Detroit Country Day Schools</li> <li>Earth Share of Michigan</li> <li>E.L. Johnson Nature Center</li> <li>Environmental Interpretive Center</li> <li>Environmental Protection Agency</li> <li>Ford Motor Company</li> <li>Friends of Eliza Howell Park</li> <li>Friends of Maybury State Park</li> <li>Friends of Rouge Park</li> <li>Friends of the Detroit River</li> <li>Heavner Canoe Rental / Jeff Vallender</li> <li>Henry Ford College</li> <li>Henry Ford Estate - Fair Lane</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holiday Nature Preserve Association</li> <li>Hoover Elementary School</li> <li>Huron River Watershed Council</li> <li>Liberty Street Brewing Company</li> <li>Michigan Department of Environmental Quality</li> <li>Michigan Department of Natural Resources</li> <li>National Park Service</li> <li>Northville Township</li> <li>Oakland Community College</li> <li>Oakland County Water Resources Commission</li> <li>Plymouth Township</li> <li>Pure Oakland Water</li> <li>Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI)</li> <li>Redford Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Detroit Campus</li> <li>Riverside Kayak Connection</li> <li>Robert Bosch, LLC</li> <li>Salem Township</li> <li>Schoolcraft College</li> <li>Sierra Club Great Lakes Program</li> <li>Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG)</li> <li>Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy</li> <li>St. Paul of the Cross Retreat &amp; Conference Center</li> <li>Stahelin Street Tigers Block Club</li> <li>Stewardship Network Lakeplain Cluster</li> <li>Superior Land Conservancy</li> <li>Superior Township</li> <li>Total Runner / David Howell</li> <li>University of Michigan Water Center</li> <li>University of Michigan-Dearborn</li> <li>Village of Beverly Hills</li> <li>Washtenaw County Parks &amp; Recreation Commission</li> <li>Wayne County Commissioner Laura Cox</li> <li>Wayne County Department of Public Services</li> <li>Wayne County Parks</li> <li>Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency</li> <li>West Bloomfield Parks &amp; Recreation</li> <li>Women's National Farm &amp; Garden Association</li> <li>Workman Elementary School</li> </ul> |
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**FISCAL YEAR 2013-2014**

SEPTEMBER 1, 2013 – AUGUST 31, 2014

**TOTAL REVENUES = \$376,591**



Revenue does not include \$45,000 of restricted funds released in this fiscal year that were accounted for in fiscal year 2012-2013. Investment income reflects unrealized gain on investments in fiscal year 2013-2014.

**TOTAL EXPENSES = \$421,580**



The difference of \$44,989 is largely attributed to the loss of the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project grant which ended on May 31, 2014. This grant has been a significant source of annual funding for Friends of the Rouge since 1995.

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