



# Friends of the **ROUGE**

2019- 2023

## Strategic Plan

PROMOTING RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP OF  
THE ROUGE RIVER ECOSYSTEM SINCE 1986



# About Friends of the Rouge

Friends of the Rouge is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that was founded in 1986 to raise awareness about the need to clean up the Rouge River in southeast Michigan. Since that time, we have worked together with landowners, volunteers, neighborhood groups, public and private partners, and our members and donors to restore, protect, and celebrate the 126 miles of the Rouge River, and the 467 square miles of land and the 400 lakes, impoundments and ponds that comprise its watershed.

Over 1.35 million people live within Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties and call our watershed home. We care deeply about the ecology of this place, and about the history and future of the river. We care about the health and vitality of our community, and about the connections and relationship people have with this place where we live, work, and play. Our mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the Rouge River watershed through stewardship, education, and collaboration.

The Friends of the Rouge are working to make an impact on critical challenges and threats facing people and nature in our community: flooding and streambank erosion, combined sewer overflows, illicit and illegal discharges, loss of wildlife habitat, and invasive species.

We envision a future where a clean and vibrant Rouge River is the center of our community. A future where individual and community actions protect and improve the health of the Rouge River and assure that the river's natural, economic, and recreational values and the quality of life of the ecosystem is enhanced.

# Our Values

- Integrity
- Stewardship
- Education
- Evidence-based decision making
- Community collaboration
- Quality of life
- Diversity, equity, and involvement

Friends of the Rouge is motivated by the core values of integrity; stewardship; education; evidence-based decision making; community collaboration; quality of life; and diversity, equity, and involvement.

**Integrity:** We ensure public trust by acting with honesty, transparency, ethicality and fiscal responsibility in all actions regarding the watershed and our community.

**Stewardship:** We commit to protecting and enhancing the watershed and improving the lives of the community through their interaction with the river. Our focus is on enhancing, monitoring and conserving the ecological health of the watershed for the benefit of all members of the community and future generations.



**Education:** We encourage protection and restoration of the Rouge River by providing opportunities that offer hands-on-immersive learning opportunities. We involve the public and promote engaged and educated stakeholders in the Rouge River watershed.

**Evidence-based decision making:** We provide and utilize evidence-based decision making in our promotion of Rouge River restoration and stewardship. We deliver reliable and verified information to watershed stakeholders in order to evaluate the watershed, determine priorities and prioritize restoration efforts.

**Community collaboration:** We team with individuals, businesses, government, non-profits, citizen groups, and other community organizations for the creation of a strong network of champions.

**Quality of life:** We provide communities with the ability to personally, economically, and ecologically benefit from the Rouge River by transforming how the river is perceived, accessed, and appreciated.

**Diversity-Equity-Involvement :** We strive to recruit and retain membership, leadership and staff who reflect the diversity of the communities in which we serve. We believe that the entire community benefits when everyone has equal access to information, programs, services and activities.

This plan outlines our goals and action steps for each of these aspects of our work for 2019-2021. The plan was developed by the staff and board of the organization and was informed by interviews with long-time supporters, partners, and stakeholders, and by a survey that invited community feedback regarding challenges, opportunities and priority needs.

## Board Members



### **President**

Michael G. Darga PE, Giffels Webster Engineers, Inc.

### **Vice President**

Alice Bailey, Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc.

### **Secretary**

Susan Thompson, Wayne County Department of Environment

### **Treasurer**

Andrew Hoffman, Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP

Paul Draus, Ph.D., University of Michigan

Orin G. Gelderloos, University of Michigan

John Kelly, Kelly & Kelly Law

Scot Martin, University Prep Academy

Mike McNulty, ITC

Dave Norwood, City of Dearborn

Betsy Palazzola, City of Detroit Housing & Revitalization  
Department

Mike Rudell, Carhartt, Inc.

Brandy Siedlaczek, City of Southfield

Al VanKerckhove, DWSD (retired)

Laura Wagner, Ford Motor Company

## Staff Members

Marie McCormick  
*Executive Director*

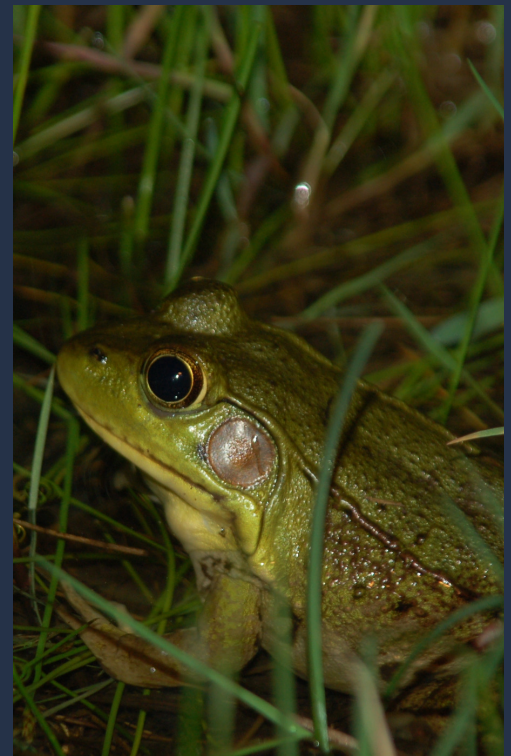
Karen Hanna  
*Operations Director*

Sally Petrella  
*Volunteer Monitoring Program Manager*

Cyndi Ross  
*River Restoration Program Manager*

Erin Cassidy  
*Rouge Education Project (REP) Program Manager*

Matthew Bertrand, ASLA  
*Rain Smart Coordinator | Landscape Designer*



# Strategic Plan Summary and Overview

This strategic plan will guide the way Friends of the Rouge will allocate time, energy, and resources over the next five years in order to accomplish our mission and vision and live out our values.

In order to create this plan, the board and staff worked with the support of an independent consultant team to gather data and assessed trends; solicit input from members, volunteers, supporters and the community; evaluate strengths, challenges and opportunities; clarify desired goals and impacts; and identify priorities and action steps.

From 2019 – 2023, the organization will focus on the following strategic areas:

- Restoration & Stewardship
- Education & Monitoring
- Enhancing Access & Connecting People with the River
- Operational Excellence
- Membership & Funding
- Communications & Community Engagement
- Partnerships

As we implement activities, we will track data, measure our progress and impacts, and report to our members at our Annual Meeting.

We are grateful for the passion, commitment, and engagement of those in the Friends of the Rouge community who helped create this strategy and set this direction. We look forward to accomplishing this work and these impacts together.



# Restoration & Stewardship Goals

## Rouge Rescue

Friends of the Rouge will continue to celebrate and improve the health of the river through hosting this event. Staff and board members will deepen relationships with existing and recurring volunteers and members who participate in this event, and will also work to attract new members and donors. Staff will consider ways to connect this program to other programs in order to increase participation and amplify impacts. Staff and board members will continue to secure sponsorships to support this event and its impacts on the river's health.

## Rain Gardens to the Rescue

Friends of the Rouge staff will continue to support water quality protection by helping institutions, churches and small businesses impacted by the stormwater drainage fee. This work will also support the creation of green collar jobs.

Measurements of Success:

- Staff will develop 13 rain gardens per year through a competitive selection process engaging community leaders and volunteers in urban and lower-income communities.
- Staff will formalize maintenance agreements and contracts for public spaces and gardens.
- Staff will create a business plan along with partners for a new fee-for-service workforce development program.
- The organization will invest in short-term staffing and administrative support for this program.
- The organization will add a new staff position in 2021.

## Land + Water Works Coalition

Staff will work with members of the Land + Water Works Coalition to foster relationships and support our community's workforce development goals. Through programs and outreach, staff will work to expand residents' awareness of how to use rain gardens to manage stormwater. Staff will continue to evaluate whether or not to participate in this program after grant funding is ended and will consider ways to continue to provide this service under a different revenue model that is not grant-funded.

Measurements of Success:

- Staff will work with three sites in the community per year.



# Restoration & Stewardship Goals, cont.

## Master Rain Gardener Program

Through this program, staff will create advocates for rain gardens and positively impact water quality. Staff will continue to serve communities already served by this program, and expand it to include a broader geographic focus, including in Livonia and Southfield.

Staff will integrate the program with Rain Gardens to the Rescue. Staff will also work directly with units of government and the Alliance of Rouge Communities in order to sustain and grow the program and connect it with the stormwater permit process.

Measurements of Success:

- Over time, 50% of trained graduates will install rain gardens at home.
- Staff will track or install 100 rain gardens per year. (Staff)
- Staff will track 1,000 new rain gardens by 2025 in alignment with the goals of the watershed management plan.
- By 2019, staff will integrate the program with Rain Gardens to the Rescue.
- By 2023, the program will be aligned with the community's stormwater education process.



## Green Your Neighborhood

Staff will continue to host this community forum and opportunity for neighbors to learn about practical tools and tactics for the “green” management of their homes and businesses.

## RainSmart Program

Staff will continue to offer site-based and digital consulting services to assist homeowners with solving problems with icy sidewalks or flooded basements, while helping stop pollution.



# Education & Monitoring Goals

## Rouge Education Program

Staff will continue to educate and raise awareness about water quality by working with students and teachers, and will collect data to monitor river health. Staff will also explore cross-program messages and promotion, including with Rain Gardens to the Rescue. The organization will continue to invest in this program, and will explore more community-based revenue support for program in order to phase out public grant dollars.

### Measurements of Success:

- Staff will teach an average of 2,500 people per year.
- Staff will serve an average of 30 schools annually.
- Staff and board identify alternative revenue sources and integrate action steps into the organization's fundraising plan.
- Data are collected to monitor river health.
- High teacher satisfaction related to experience and curriculum alignment is maintained.
- By 2022, the organization will add in-field education support in the future, in addition to current Program Manager position.

## Frog and Toad Program

Through this program, staff will continue to connect adults, children, and families directly to a place in the outdoors, close to their homes. The organization will sustain this program, with changes, and will continue to explore the cost-benefit of the program and will establish a "tipping point" for the correct scale and approach. Staff will find a home for the data to be used, and will benchmark learning outcomes of participants via survey. Staff will explore cross-watershed collaborations with other groups such as the Clinton River Watershed Council and the Friends of the Detroit River who have indicated interest in developing a similar program.

Staff will also explore the possibilities of using same data gathering protocol across three watersheds. In 2019, staff will explore creating a certification program and integrating it with the Master Rain Gardener Program. In 2020, staff will explore "packaging" this program under the Rouge Education Program brand.

### Measurements of Success:

- Staff will coordinate and oversee surveys for 150 sites per year.
- Staff will host one workshop in 2019.
- Learning outcomes and reviewed and inform the future of the program.
- Implementing a relatively low cost and high impact program.





# Education & Monitoring Goals, cont.

## Benthic Monitoring

Through this program, staff will continue to assess the health of the watershed. Staff will maintain high quality control on data, and will provide data to be used by counties, townships, state and federal agencies and university students. Staff will continue to coordinate with Wayne County and Schoolcraft College to host events and manage data. In the future, staff will plan and budget over a three-year timeframe for this program. Staff will collaborate across the organization to package programs and apply for grants or approach offering services for communities as opposed to individual programs.

### Measurements of Success:

- Staff will train volunteers to train other volunteers to gather data regarding streams. 40-120 volunteers per year via up to three events.
- Staff will monitor 20-30 sites per event.
- Staff will ensure and document high data quality.
- Staff will prepare three-year program plans and budgets.

## Fish Program

Staff will continue to work with volunteers to monitor fish and assess water quality via data, with particular attention to Areas of Concern projects. Staff will recruit and train volunteers for deep knowledge and deep impact. Staff and volunteers will document the types of fish found and their sensitivities.

### Measurements of Success:

- Staff will recruit and train two additional volunteers to conduct fish surveys and learn from existing leaders as mentors.
- Staff will increase wages for contractors supervising the work of volunteers in 2019, with another increase per hour in 2020.
- Knowledgeable volunteers are recruited, trained, and retained.



# Enhancing Access & Connecting People with the River Goals

## Water Trail Program

Through this program, the organization will serve and create new outdoor recreation experiences close to home for a population of 1.3 million people, will connect with outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and will get more people on the river.

Over the next five years, the organization will plan for this program's growth and will invest time, energy, and resources in additional planning, program coordination and management, partnership development, and river accessibility. Staff will develop messages and communicate how this program intersects with larger-scale green or grey infrastructure projects the organization and others in the community are doing.

### Measurements of Success:

- Staff will complete strategic and management plan, including an operations plan and revenue model, for water trail by 2020. The plan will include goals for safety and water quality, map access sites and their amenities and assess priorities for access sites and management.
- Staff will apply for additional funding for the initial phase of the program by 2020.
- Staff will get signatures on the Memorandum of Understanding from 11 communities by the end of 2020.
- Staff will engage 10 communities, plus Wayne County Parks, as access site owners.
- Staff will work with communities to develop one launch site every two miles or less by 2029.
- The organization will phase the Executive Director out of a leadership role in this program once the initiation phase is complete in 2020.
- The program will have dedicated part-time to full-time staff to lead and coordinate this program, including partnerships, assisting communities with site development, overseeing woody debris management, program and partner facilitation, leveraging the trail to increase river restoration, and overseeing and managing contracts and raising funding by 2020. This would be a new position and the person would have other program responsibilities.
- Staff will contract out physical infrastructure development and maintenance roles.
- The river is more accessible to all of the people who live and work and play in our watershed.
- More people learn about Friends of the Rouge and become supporters, volunteers, members, and donors as a result of the program.
- There is adequate and diverse representation on the board and on committees where decisions are being made about the water trail.



# Operational Excellence Goals

## Staffing

The Executive Director will write a job description for the new Development Coordinator position, and get buy-in and identify shared expectations about the position, its role, and its impacts with the board.

The Executive Director will refine other staff job descriptions as appropriate to reflect how this addition changes roles and responsibilities within existing positions.

Measurements of Success:

- The Executive Director will recruit and hire a Development Coordinator by 2019.
- By 2020, the Executive Director will develop a succession and business continuity plan for key staff positions.
- By 2020, the Executive Director will develop a program manager transition booklet to ensure programmatic sustainability and document institutional knowledge. Use transition model used by Rouge Education Program.
- The Executive Director will update the Employee Handbook by 2020.
- Continue to invest in staff growth and learning by having the Executive Director and any other direct supervisors conduct formal feedback and check-in processes with staff. (2019 - ongoing)
- Evaluate our staffing model for programs as needed. (Executive Director)
- Develop job description, recruit and hire a coordinator for the water trail program. (2020)

## Board Governance and Operational Oversight

The board will recruit and develop a board that reflects the community's demographic composition and supports the mission and goals of the organization and who have diverse skills, strengths, experiences and talents. The board will measure the progress of programs and the impacts and outcomes of organizational activities. The board and Executive Director will continue to invest in a strong relationship by encouraging consistent and proactive communication as well as conducting a formal annual evaluation process.

Measurements of Success:

- By the end of 2019, the board will develop and use a matrix that assesses the board's skills, experiences and networks and will evaluate the board's strengths and gaps relative to achieving its goals and organizational leadership and governance responsibilities.
- Beginning in 2019 and continuing annually, the board will develop an annual board work plan that reflects the actions and activities to be led and implemented by the board of directors and board committees.
- Beginning in 2019 and continuing annually, the Executive Director and program directors will create a scorecard for each program to benchmark and track progress.



# Membership and Funding Goals

## Membership and Fundraising

By 2020, Executive Director and Fund Development Committee the organization will complete a fundraising plan and establish metrics for different types of gifts and relationships.

One goal of the plan will be to develop a strategy that will diversify sources of operational and programmatic funding to become less reliant on major public grants or foundation gifts. The fundraising plan will include clear roles and responsibilities for staff members and board members. The board will explore a menu of fundraising activities and individually commit on an annual basis to specific tasks in support of fundraising goals.

Board, with limited staff support, will lead more Explore the Rouge tours, including site, paddling and walking tours. Staff, board, and volunteers will use events to increase membership, and will encourage all event participants and volunteers to become members and donors.

Staff will develop an elevator speech/scripts that staff, board, and volunteers can use to share the story of why membership and donations are important and their impact. Staff will also identify touch points to share this information with current and prospective members and donors. Staff will look for more multi-year sources of funding. The board and Executive Director will consider parameters for the use of reserve funds. Staff will consolidate donor and funding data into one database to be used by all staff.

### Measurements of Success:

- The membership and fundraising plan is developed.
- The membership and fundraising plan is implemented.
- Funding policies are established and monitored.
- Data are managed effectively.



# Communications and Community Engagement Goals

## Communications and Community Engagement

The board and staff will continue to maintain a positive and trusted reputation and visible position in the community. In the short-term, the Executive Director will assign a single staff person responsibility for key communication and marketing activities, including branding, website updates, social media, newsletters, media engagement. The Executive Director will ensure that all staff are comfortable and confident sharing key organizational messages with external audiences, and will identify the staff points of contact for specific issues, programs, or subject areas.

Staff will continue to participate in educational events and implement education activities to connect with diverse audiences including K-12 schools, scientists, university-based researchers, environmental professionals, those responsible for stormwater permittees at the state and national level.

Staff will continue to host programs and volunteer-focused events, and will set specific goals and targets annually and related to each specific event related to the number of volunteers and types of volunteers needed to complete goals and programs.

In 2020, staff will work with a consultant to prepare a written communications and marketing plan, including the identification of target audiences, goals and measurements of success.

From 2019 – 2023, the Executive Director will assess whether staff assigned to specific communication tasks have the appropriate skills and competencies to do the work required, and will invest in training as needed.

The Executive Director will also hire additional contractors and staff as needed to prepare and implement the communications and marketing plan and activities.

## Partnership Goals

### Partnership

Staff will develop and nurture reciprocal partnerships with public and private entities in order to create high impacts in communities. Staff will work internally across program areas to determine the most efficient and effective and high-impact ways to leverage resources, connect with people, and serve communities. In order to accomplish this, staff will develop criteria regarding what Friends of the Rouge wants to give and get from partnerships. The organization will use these criteria to guide staff's decisions about when to develop and invest and prioritize partnerships related to programs and services.

Staff will continue to engage directly with local units of government to explore successful collaborations and partnership programs and efforts. The staff and board will continue to work positively and proactively with Alliance of Rouge Communities. The Executive Director will annually evaluate programs and how the organizations can work together to serve communities.

