

2024 Marketing & Community Engagement Report

Hello Friend,

Thank you for being a special partner for a healthier Rouge River!

Thanks to Aaron Contracting's support, 2024 was a wonderful year for engaging Metro Detroit residents in hands-on action and education to create a better Rouge River.

Friends of the Rouge (FOTR) continued to expand engagement with community with a record reach of 20,000+ local residents and community partners. It was a year of leadership transition and FOTR was thrilled to name Ashley Flintoff as the new Executive Director. Ashley brings 11 years of experience at Wayne State—most recently as the Director of Planning and Space Management—and an exuberance to strategically grow the organization to meet the evolving needs of the community and Rouge River.



Image: (on left) new FOTR Executive Director, Ashley Flintoff, jumps in the action, summer 2024.

New in 2025, FOTR begins the strategic planning process, paused during the leadership transition, to grow on strengths and leverage its budget of \$12.7M and a staff of 18 to better serve the mission.

Reasons to cheer in 2024 included:

- 824 Rouge River outreach, action & education events
- 8,245 hours of river and environmental education provided
- \$667K to combat climate change with green infrastructure solutions in the City of Dearborn
- completion of the most comprehensive salt study for the Rouge River system
- \$5.4M in funding to support new trails along the Lower Rouge River
- juvenile redbreast dace (endangered fish) sighted by FOTR fish team in Johnson Creek

Your valued partnership and committed investment make this good work possible. You are warmly invited to explore your impact in the pages that follow. Then, let us know how we can better serve you to meet your organization's goals.

With gratitude,

Lara Edwards

Lara Edwards, Development Director

**Friends
of
the ROUGE**

Engaging Community—Action, Advocacy & Education



Over 20,000 Friends from across Metro Detroit engaged with Friends of the Rouge in 2024 in action, advocacy, and education. With your partnership, we will continue to create solutions for a more vibrant River community: hands-on education for more informed River stewards; river monitoring to measure the River’s health and the efficacy of river improvements; rain gardens and trees for less flooding, less impervious surface, cleaner air, cleaner water and healthier wildlife habitat; and trails to enhance equitable access to your Rouge River. Added up, with you, we can build a future that you want to live in. One you are proud to share with the next generation.

Images: (top right) volunteers find Stoneflies in Farmington Hills; (bottom left to right) student summer interns search for invasive crawfish in Novi, new rain garden gets planted in Southwest Detroit, paddler at the Black Pack Paddle Trip in Dearborn.



New Website Launched!

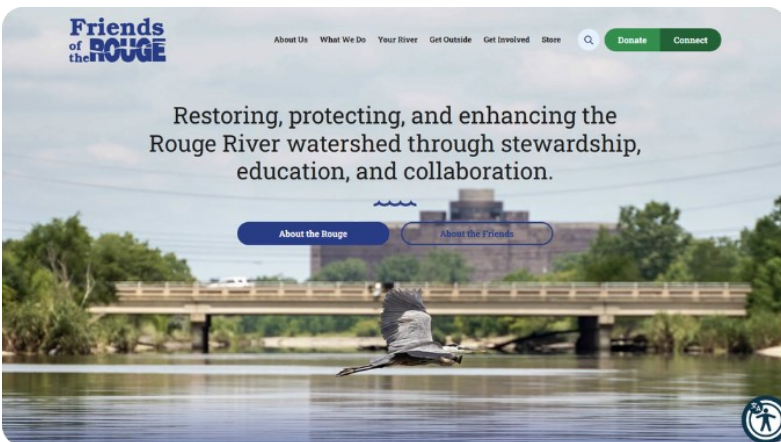
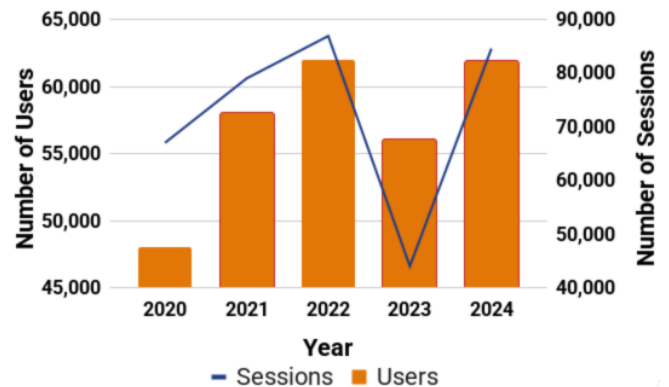


Image: the new landing page for therouge.org. The redesigned website launched in January, 2025.



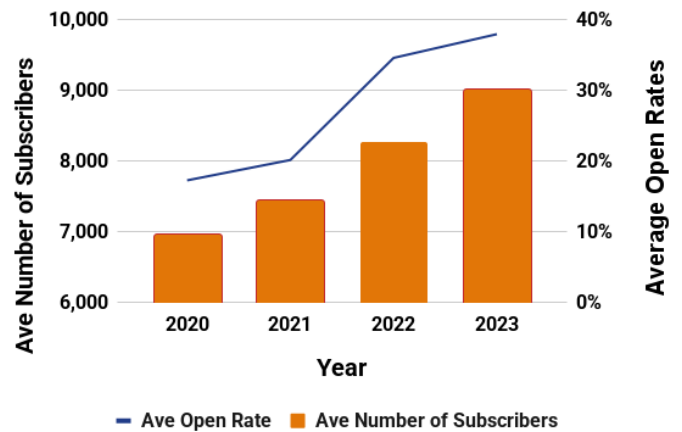
Graph: website users and sessions from 2020 to 2024. 2024 metrics based on “old” website only.

In 2024, the FOTR website metrics returned to 2022 levels. Users reached 61,900—a growth of 30% over 5 years. Sessions increased to 84,567—a growth of 26% over the same period. **New in 2025—the launch of the redesigned website, www.therouge.org.** The new site was designed to optimize usability, enhance aesthetics, lower bounce rates, and provide clearer calls to action!

The "Rouge Rundown" e-newsletter Connects Friends



Your logo belongs in the "Rouge Rundown"! The average number of subscribers for FOTR's bi-weekly e-newsletter grew to 9,164 in 2024 and by 32% over the 5 year period shown in the graph below. Likewise, the average **Rouge Rundown** open rate increased to 39% in 2024—and more than doubled from 17% in 2020. The e-news remains FOTR's most effective tool to engage Friends in action.



Images: The Rouge Rundown shares impact opportunities, State and local River news, community-science findings, and highlights Friends, partners, and supporters.

Graph: Rundown average subscribers and average open rates over time.

Rouge River Watershed Report

The Rouge River has come a long way from the nearly lifeless river it was in the 1980's. With great successes to celebrate, there is still vital work to be done to realize the vision of a clean and vibrant hometown Rouge River. **Released in 2024, the Rouge River Watershed Report Card, created by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Sciences in partnership with FOTR and funded by the Erb Family Foundation, gave the watershed an overall grade of D+.** This grade was determined by data across 33 indicators in water, economy, recreation, infrastructure, human health and ecosystems. Bird Diversity ranked as the watershed's only A (very good). Impervious Surfaces, Sewer Overflows, and Flooding received some of the watershed's F grades (very poor).

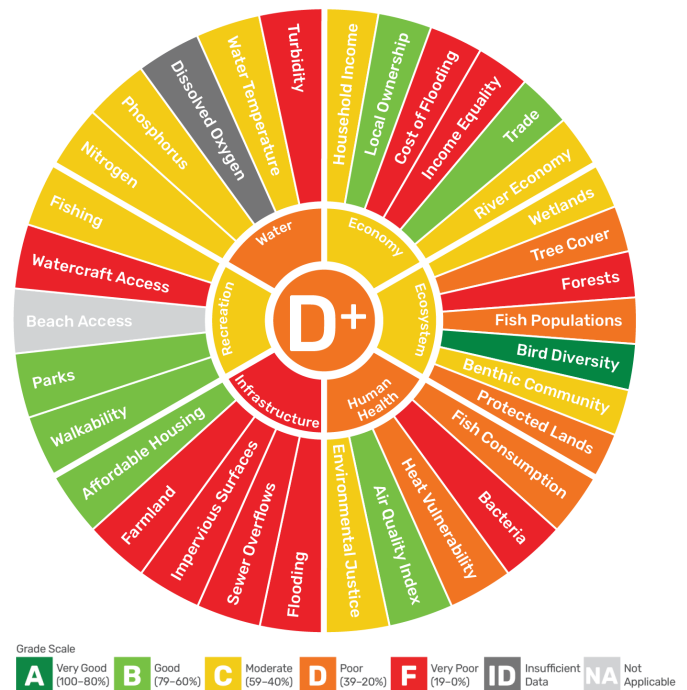
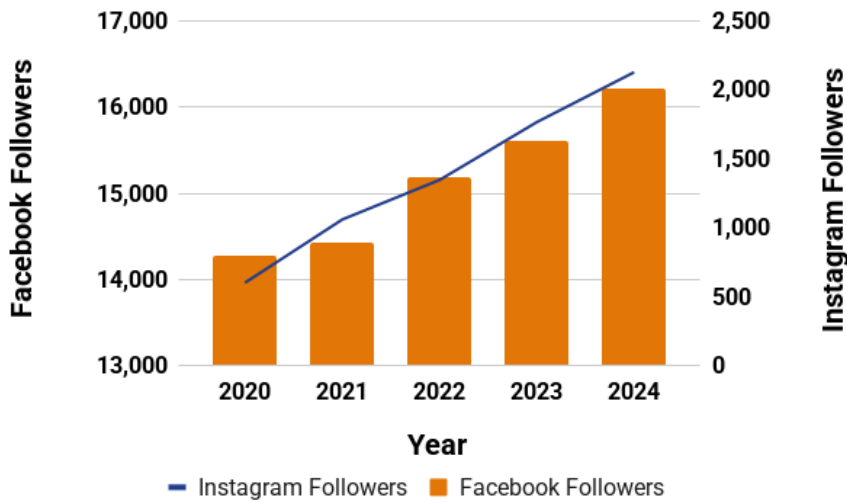


Image: Grades for multiple indicators, from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Sciences' Rouge River Watershed report card.

Engaging Community via Social Media

FOTR leveraged social media to share event information, fun memes with a Rouge River twist, news stories, event recaps, impact stories, fundraisers, River facts, and sponsor recognition.

FOTR “followers” grew on Instagram and Facebook. The largest social media audience continues to engage via Facebook—with 16,220 followers, an estimated 57% of whom are age 55 and older. **Over five years, the number of Facebook followers has grown by 28%. Over the same period, the number of Instagram followers has grown by 254%,** with 2,128 Instagram followers in 2024. Instagram captures a younger demographic—62% of whom are between the ages of 25-44. Combined, these platforms reach a broad audience of Friends.



Boost

Fall Friends Fest is here! Come on down to Ford Field Park ...
 October 19, 2024, 11:40 AM
 ID: 953801776788074

Interactions
 23 reactions 0 comments 1 share

Overview Performance Feed preview

Views	Reach
14,177	12,252
Interactions	Link clicks
24	--

Views
 Followers vs. non-followers

9% Followers 91% Non-followers

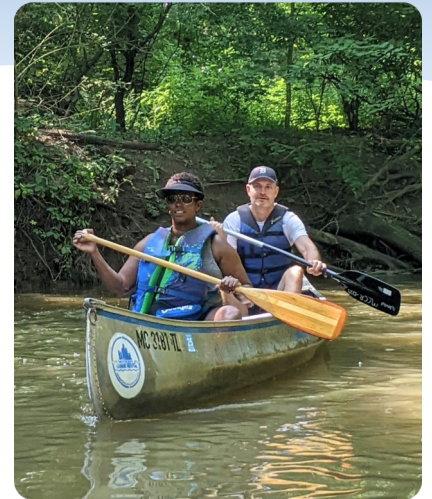


Top left graph Facebook & Instagram followers over time since 2020. Middle and bottom left: Fall Friends Fest Facebook post generates “buzz” with strong views and reach. Images on right (Instagram posts) from top to bottom: rain garden planting day; hands-on crayfish experience in Dearborn sparks wonder; fall bug hunt at Rouge Park, Detroit.

Partners in Advocacy and Boots-on-the-ground Solutions

A better River takes a community. **In 2024, Friends of the Rouge collaborated with over 250 community partners.** From universities, state agencies, national nonprofits, and neighborhood block clubs, the work of building a more vibrant future is complex and done best with a wide net of community participation, reflective of the most diverse and populated watershed in the State.

Images: (top) Detroit Mobile Kayak and Motor City Canoe partner with FOTR to provide livery services for paddling events; (bottom left) UM Seas Marshall Weinberg Fellow Lian Anderson finds the big one; (bottom middle) Patrick Ertel of MDNR (center top) leads training for FOTR with MDOT, Canton Township, UM Seas; (bottom right) Redford Schools partner with FOTR for more trees at schools adjacent to I-96.



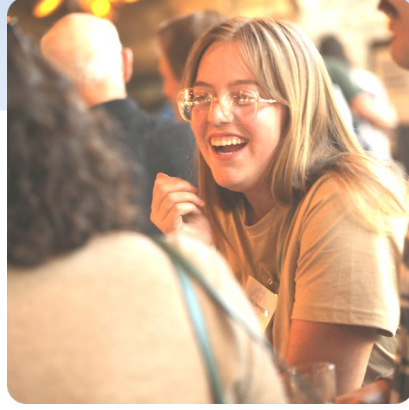
Impact Spotlight: New Trail Realizes Vision of Rouge Connection

2024 heralded big wins for Rouge River access and connectivity. Most notably, the **Rouge Gateway Greenway has been revitalized.** FOTR will lead the construction of a 1.9 mile asphalt trail, including two pedestrian bridges, to connect The Henry Ford and UM Dearborn **thanks to \$4.6M from Wayne County Economic Development and \$2.7M from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr., Foundation.** In partnership with The Henry Ford, Ford Land, City of Dearborn, UM Dearborn, Wayne County Parks, and Friends of the Detroit River, this project realizes a trail last iterated in the 2005 Rouge Gateway Greenway Masterplan—and a decades old community dream.



Images: (left) Phase II trail of the Rouge Gateway Greenway connects Phase I of the trail, near the former Andiamos off Michigan Avenue in Dearborn, to the land behind The Henry Ford. (Right) Trails Manager Herman Jenkins, Jr. and Executive Director Ashley Flintoff at the site of the Rouge Gateway Greenway Phase II.

Heart of the Rouge



It was an fundraiser with heart at the 2024 Heart of the Rouge at HopCat Livonia! The biennial fundraiser featured perfect weather, interactive River tents (bottom left & right), live music, a live fish and stream survey demonstration, nature-themed art auction (bottom middle) great food and beverages, and a gathering of 350 community partners, elected officials, supporters, and Friends!



2024 News Coverage: Select Highlights

November 4, 2024

Great Lakes Now: Great Lakes Moment: Sacred Grounds

October 25, 2024

WXYZ Detroit: Dearborn Mayor spotlights policies to combat climate issues with federal funding

October 20, 2024

The News Herald: Brownstown Community Center, Friends of Rouge get millions for development projects

September 18, 2024

Great Lakes Now: Who is working to preserve and restore wetlands in Metro Detroit?

September 1, 2024

Dearborn Press & Guide: More green space coming to Dearborn Salina campus

July 29, 2024

The Detroit News: DNR, MSU look to control invasive red swamp crayfish in Michigan



Image WXYZ Detroit: FOTR Executive Director Ashley Flintoff participates in a press conference with Dearborn Mayor Hammoud on policies to combat climate change, October 24, 2024.

2024 News Coverage: Select Highlights continued

August 16, 2024

Dearborn Press & Guide: Allegria Village seniors set up rain garden in Dearborn

July 25, 2024

C & G Newspapers: Rouge River oil spill could impact 30 miles of waterway

July 4, 2024

Fox2Detroit: Friends of the Rouge names new executive director

July 1, 2024

Michigan Public Radio: Green infrastructure job trainings aim to support growing field

June 10, 2024

Michigan Public Radio: Watershed councils collaborate to change infrastructure from gray to green

May 8, 2024

Great Lakes Now: Meet the man who has been cleaning the Rouge River for 35 years

May 8, 2024

Click on Detroit: Middle School students use science to collect data from Rouge River in Metro Detroit

May 3, 2024

Planet Detroit: Webinar: How to fix Metro Detroit's ailing watersheds

April 20, 2024

Fox 2 Detroit: Earth Day Events with Friends of the Rouge

April 17, 2024

DBusiness: Report: Grades for Stormwater Management in Southeast Michigan Range From C to D+

March 17, 2024

MLive: 'Irresponsible' or 'the right thing?' Proposed wastewater plant divides Michigan townships

February 28, 2024

CBS News Detroit: Help The Friends of the Rouge find out this weekend

January 31, 2024

WXYZ Detroit: Road salt can be toxic for the environment. Here's how you can help

January 2, 2024

Great Lakes Now: PFAS News Roundup

January 1, 2024

Oakland County Times: Jan 20 – Help Search for Stoneflies in the Rouge River



Image WXYZ Detroit: WXYZ reporter Ali Hoxie and FOTR Salt Specialist Sarah Avery discuss road salt pollution in the Rouge River, January 31, 2024.



Image CBS News Detroit: FOTR Monitoring Manager talks frogs and toads with Kris Laudien, February 28,

Thank you! See you on the River in 2025!