

Nurturing Southeast Michigan's URBAN RIVER ECOSYSTEM

By Rosina Newton

Photos Provided By Rosina Newton, Friends of the Rouge

No matter where you go, you are in a watershed! Since 1986, Friends of the Rouge has been working to improve the health of the Rouge River, its surrounding watershed, and the community members who call this place "home." This includes Plymouth Township!

In January's Charity Spotlight, deAndra Fountain reported on Friends of the Rouge projects that are furthering this mission of clean water. She shared some of the scope and history: the Rouge River watershed covers 467 square miles and is home to 1.35 million people. In the late 1960's, the River was so polluted from industrial waste that it caught on fire. The good news is, thanks to the Clean Water Act of 1972, this "point source pollution" is no longer the huge problem it once was. In addition, after decades of Friends of the Rouge hosting Rouge Rescue cleanups, much of the more visible pollution has been removed. However, the River still needs protection from "non-point source (NPS) pollution."

NPS pollution comes from everywhere: rooftops, oil and gas residue washing off of pavement, runoff of lawn and garden chemicals, road salts, and combined sewer overflows (CSOs). In fact, forty-five CSOs discharge untreated sewage and wastewater directly into the Rouge whenever stormwater overwhelms these old systems.

This is why the work of Friends of the Rouge



BIRDING & PADDLE TRAILS SPRING 2023

remains so vital to the health of our community. We work through several avenues to accomplish a vision of clean water in southeast Michigan. Volunteers and community participation are at the heart of our work.

Our Rouge Monitoring team is fulfilling our mission to "engage residents in collecting data about the health of the watershed." During our fish surveys this year, surveyors found five Redside Dace - an endangered species in Michigan - in Johnson Creek. Our Frog & Toad Surveys, where community members monitor these important indicators of healthy habitat, just wrapped up the successful 2024 season. A team

of two interns has joined the staff this summer in surveying for Red Swamp Crayfish - an invasive species that harms habitat. Opportunities await for community members who want to join in our upcoming Fall Bug Hunt on October 12! Find out more information here: <https://therouge.org/bug-hunt-events-and-trainings/>

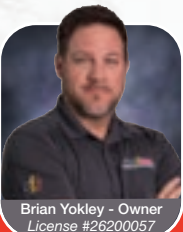
Friends of the Rouge Education Project completed our spring monitoring season, where local K - 12 teachers take their students to the river to do water quality testing and aquatic bug identification. This gives students - and teachers - "a better understanding of the life that calls the Rouge River "home," says Sam Davis, Interim

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MONITORING BUG HUNT



STUDENTS AND TEACHER — EDUCATION



MONITORING FOR MUSSELS

Education Manager. Channel 4 recently covered one of these “astounding acts of education and stewardship,” showcasing the Rouge Education Project in action. Detroit Country Day Middle School science department chair Jen Gabrys and her students were busy performing nine different water quality tests on the Rouge River: <https://youtu.be/1KHJFdKYG20?si=17yCUS-Mvr9fe8ce>

The Lower Rouge River Water Trails program work continues to grow and advance in our mission to make our hometown river more accessible for recreation and appreciation. Two universal-access boat launches are in construction now, including the Wayne County



RAIN GARDEN PLANTING — RESTORATION

Parks project in Venoy Dorsey Park. Thanks to funding from the Gilbert Family Foundation and the City of Detroit, construction is beginning on Fort Street Bridge Park on the banks of the Rouge in Detroit. Paddling trips are continuing this fall, including a birding paddle trip co-hosted with Detroit Bird Alliance on October 5, and the outrageous Haunted Paddle on October 19. For more information on FOTR Trails work, contact Trails Manager Herman Jenkins at hjenkins@therouge.org.

Our Restoration Team is digging in all over the Rouge River watershed and Detroit with projects that educate residents and build

green stormwater infrastructure. In Plymouth Township, a rain garden is in the works for Golfview Park, funded by Bosch. In our Rain Gardens to the Rescue program, residents and community groups in Dearborn's South End, Detroit, and River Rouge are receiving rain gardens through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Friends of the Rouge and community volunteers will be building dozens of rain gardens this year alone. How does this help your Rouge River? Rain gardens capture excess, polluted rainwater runoff, rather than allowing it to overwhelm our stormwater systems. They absorb and filter out pollutants. Rain gardens reduce neighborhood flooding and erosion in the Rouge. They also provide pollinator and songbird habitat because they are planted with beautiful Michigan native plants.

For information about our upcoming Fall Plant Sale on October 5, co-hosted by our Restoration team and Keep Growing Detroit, visit <https://therouge.org/store/>

Ashley Flintoff, new executive director at Friends of the Rouge shares, “Opportunities to engage with your hometown river are abundant through the many programs Friends of the Rouge offers. As a new member of the FOTR team, I’ve already been able to assist with culvert surveys, red swamp crayfish, and fish sampling, and have visited various rain garden sites across the watershed. At the same time, I’m also meeting with local officials and partners to advise on issues that affect our communities – including the need to invest in green stormwater infrastructure and advocating for funding to support cleanup efforts along the Rouge. Whether you’re interested in river monitoring, restoration, water trails, or education, there are a myriad of ways you can get involved and make a difference.”

For more information about all these and other Friends of the Rouge projects, visit www.therouge.org/ or email: friends@therouge.org.



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