

# 2025 Marketing & Community Engagement Report

Hello Friend,

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

Thanks to your support, 2025 saw strong community engagement across Metro Detroit, empowering residents to learn, volunteer, and help improve the Rouge River.

Your support made it possible for us to continue engaging residents across Metro Detroit in meaningful action and education in a year that challenged all of us to think differently – about how nonprofits are perceived, how we show up for your Rouge River, and how we care for our communities and ourselves.



*Members of the community enjoying and connecting with their river*

In 2025, our staff, board, partners, and community members came together to create a new Strategic Plan that will guide our work through 2030. More than a roadmap, it reflects a shared vision for restoring damaged places, protecting what is irreplaceable, and expanding access so every person in our region can feel connected to the Rouge.

This process required honesty, clarity, and courage – and it reaffirmed that our greatest strength is you. Volunteers, students, municipal partners, funders, families, and neighbors all play a vital role in shaping a healthier, more vibrant watershed.

Reasons to cheer in 2025:

- **623 outreach, action, and education events**
- **7,064 hours of river and environmental education**
- **A baby endangered mussel and three dragonfly species found at Fordson Island**
- **\$2.5 million secured to expand access to the Rouge**
- **A new 4,475 sq ft rain garden in Redford, keeping up to 585,558 gallons of stormwater out of the sewer system each year**

Your valued partnership and committed investment make this good work possible.

Together, we are building a future where the river thrives and every person has the opportunity to experience its beauty and resilience. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashley Flintoff'.

*Ashley Flintoff, Executive Director*

**Friends  
of  
the ROUGE**

# Engaging Community—Action, Advocacy & Education

**More than 25,000 Friends from across Metro Detroit joined us in 2025 to take action, speak up for the River, and learn together.** With your partnership, we're creating a more vibrant Rouge community: hands-on education that grows informed River stewards; monitoring that tracks the River's health and the impact of our restoration work; rain gardens and trees that reduce flooding, clean our air and water, and strengthen wildlife habitat; and trails that expand equitable access to your Rouge River.

Together, we're building a future you want to live in — one you'll be proud to pass on to the next generation.



*Images: (top left) family of paddlers at the Spring open water birding paddle; (top right) student summer interns learn about fish identification with expert Bob Muller; (bottom left) community members participate in the fall bug hunt; (bottom right) maintaining a Sacred Grounds rain garden*

# The “Rouge Rundown” e-newsletter Connects Friends



Friends  
of the  
ROUGE

MAY 21, 2025

ROUGE RUNDOWN



Friends  
of the  
ROUGE

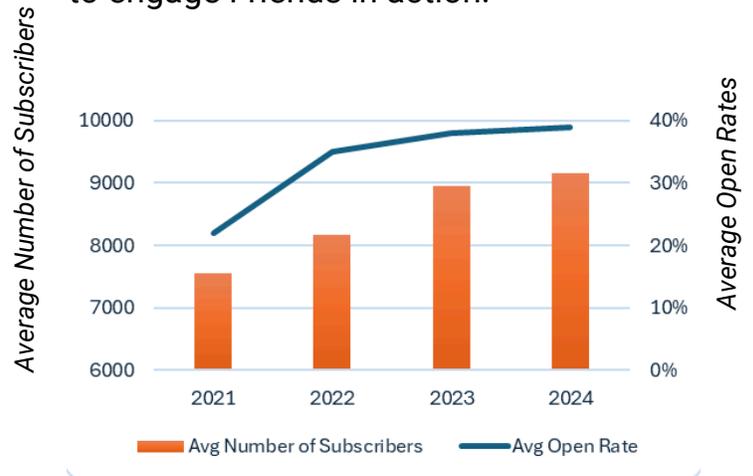
March 12, 2025

ROUGE RUNDOWN

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

## Your logo belongs in the “Rouge Rundown”!

The average number of subscribers for FOTR’s bi-weekly e-newsletter has stayed steady over the past two years with 8927 in 2023 and by 32% over the 5 year period shown in the graph below. Likewise, **the average Rouge Rundown open rate stayed roughly same as 2024 at 32% for 2025.** The e-news remains FOTR’s most effective tool to engage Friends in action.



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

## Record number views on Youtube

In 2025, one of our most notable social media successes was a fish monitoring demonstration video that resonated far beyond our usual reach.

Posted to YouTube on September 30 with the simple caption, “FOTR Fish Monitoring Team demonstrating fish sampling techniques in the Rouge River! 🐟💙”, the video quickly gained momentum, **surpassing 700,000 views on YouTube and an additional 100,000 views on TikTok.**

This surge in visibility led to a measurable increase in subscribers across both platforms, underscoring the public’s growing interest in hands-on river science and the work of our Fish Monitoring Team.



# Engaging Community via Social Media

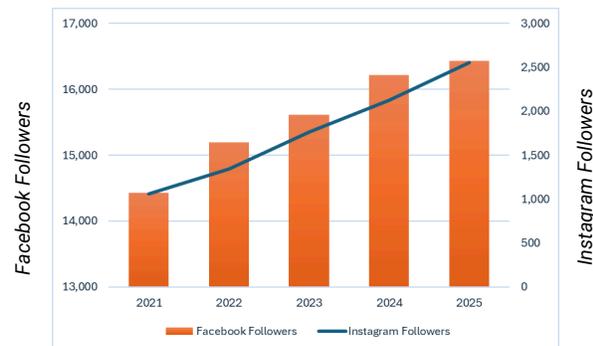
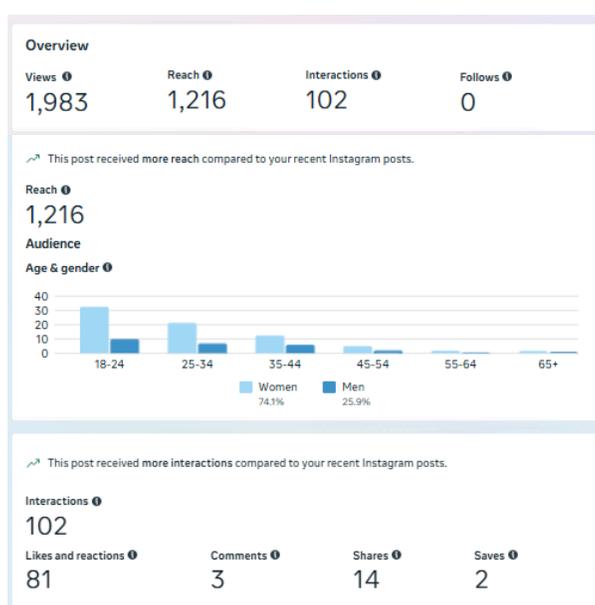
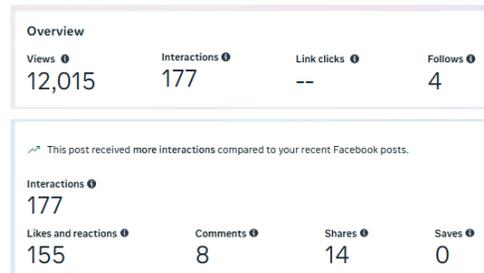
FOTR continued to use social media as a powerful storytelling tool in 2025—sharing event information, Rouge-themed memes, news stories, event recaps, impact highlights, fundraisers, River facts, and sponsor recognition. Engagement remained strong across platforms, with steady growth in both audience size and interaction.

**Facebook continues to be FOTR's largest and most active community, now reaching 16,430 followers, including 210 new followers added in 2025.** The highest reach of the year occurred in May, July, and August, reflecting strong seasonal engagement and interest in on-the-ground River activities.

**Instagram also saw significant momentum, growing to 2,556 followers—an increase of 428 in 2025.** The platform continues to attract a younger audience and delivered notable performance gains this year, including a **70% increase in total reach and a 90% increase in total views compared to 2024.** Engagement spiked in March during the Native Plant March Madness—style tournament and again in May, July, and September.

Together, Facebook and Instagram now connect FOTR with a broad and diverse audience of Friends across Metro Detroit, strengthening awareness and deepening community involvement.

Since the launch of the new FOTR website, overall traffic and engagement have continued to rise. **Over the past 12 months, the site welcomed 66,731 users and achieved an impressive engagement rate of 86.38%,** reflecting meaningful interaction with content and a strong user experience.



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

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

A better River is built by many hands. **In 2025, Friends of the Rouge worked alongside more than 225 partners** – from universities and state agencies to national nonprofits and neighborhood block clubs. Creating a vibrant future for the Rouge is complex work, and it thrives when our community shows up together across the most diverse and populated watershed in Michigan.

*Images: (top) Metro Parks, National Kidney Foundation and UofM Dearborn Environmental Interpretive Center all hosted booths at the Haunted Paddle/Friends Fest; (bottom left) Orin and Charlette Gelderloos Environmental Leadership Intern helps search for Stoneflies in the winter; (bottom right) The 2025 Mandela Washington Fellowship cohort of the Young African Leadership Institute, hosted by Wayne State University, did a volunteer day in the PARC gardens.*

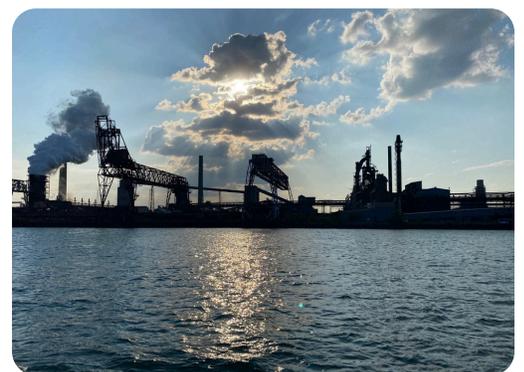


## 2025 Rouge Cruise



What a “bon” voyage for the 2025 Rouge Cruise! A packed boat, sunshine all around, storytelling from our very own Captain Sally Petrella, and spectacular views made it a beautiful and memorable evening.

We can't wait to gather again on land for Heart of the Rouge 2026!



# 2025 News Coverage: Select Highlights

December 2, 2025

**Detroit City Football Club (DCFC):** Continuing our Giving Tuesday celebration, we're excited to shine a spotlight on another amazing partner: Friends of the Rouge

November 20, 2025

**CBS Detroit:** Avoiding fatbergs this holiday season

November 4, 2025

**Detroit News:** Conservation groups raising \$6 million to save rare prairie in southern Wayne County

October 29, 2025

**WXYZ Detroit:** Inkster holding public meeting to get feedback on Inkster Park improvement plan

October 10, 2025

**WXYZ Detroit:** WXYZ Live Mention (Inkster Park Community Engagement)

September 19, 2025

**WXYZ Detroit:** Southwest Detroit is getting its first access point to the Rouge River

September 24, 2025

**Detroit Free Press:** Trump's proposed Great Lakes science cuts would hurt locally, group says

August 26, 2025

**Izaak Walton League of America:** Meet a Monitor: Lauren Eaton

August 8, 2025

**Dearborn/Dearborn Heights Times Herald:** Dearborn partners with Friends of the Rouge to offer Rain Gardener 101 class on Aug. 9



Executive Director Ashley Flintoff discusses how you can protect your home's pipes and your hometown River by avoiding fatbergs this holiday season.



News coverage of ground breaking at Fort Street Bridge Park, Southwest Detroit's first access point to the Rouge River with a new kayak launch and observation deck, marking a major milestone for the 29-mile river water trail project.



Lauren Eaton appears at a news conference at the Wilcox Lake Hines Park Recreation Area in Plymouth on Thursday, Sept 24, 2025 about the Trump administration's federal budget cuts for Great Lakes conservation and research efforts.

# 2025 News Coverage: Select Highlights continued

June 26, 2025

**FOX 2 Detroit:** Kayak season is here - and give us one more way to enjoy nature

June 18, 2025

**CBS Detroit:** Friends of the Rouge Install Rain Garden in Redford

June 13, 2025

**Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE):** Conservation groups in Plymouth, Adrian awarded EGLE watershed planning grants



CBS Detroit reports that local organizations like Friends of the Rouge are installing large-scale rain gardens, such as the 4,500 sq. ft. project in Redford, to manage stormwater, prevent runoff pollution, and protect the Rouge River.

May 21, 2025

**Detroit Bird Alliance:** Partner Highlight: Friends of the Rouge with Herman Jenkins, Trails Manager

May 13, 2025

**Fox2Detroit:** Native Plants with Friends of the Rouge

May 9, 2025

**MSN:** Friends of the Rouge holding fundraising drive as federal funding cuts hit nonprofit

May 6, 2025

**FOX 2 Detroit:** Friends of the Rouge holding fundraising drive as federal funding cuts hit nonprofit

March 19, 2025

**Fox2Detroit:** Friends of the Rouge kicks off paddle season

February 19, 2025

**WWJ 950 AM Radio:** Frog & Toad Survey/Training Session – Lauren Eaton interview with Beth Fisher

February 11, 2025

**Fox2Detroit:** Paper straw ban: Metro Detroit non-profit concerned after Trump decision

**Thank you! See you on the River in 2026!**