

Thank you for being the Heart of the Rouge

*Remarks delivered by Andrew Berg, Director of Development
at Heart of the Rouge: Our Ruby Anniversary – August 13, 2026*

"The good life of any river may depend on the perception of its music; and the preservation of some music to perceive."

— **Aldo Leopold**

These are the words of Aldo Leopold, the twentieth-century conservationist who authored *A Sand County Almanac* and articulated the concept of the land ethic. It's so powerful it bears repeating:

"The good life of any river may depend on the perception of its music; and the preservation of some music to perceive."

So, what is that music? You're here because you've heard it. It is a symphony composed of:

- Water flowing
- Sunlight beaming
- Plants growing
- Flowers blooming
- Fish swimming
- Frogs croaking
- Bugs skimming
- Birds singing
- Bees buzzing
- Beavers building
- Adventurers paddling
- Explorers walking
- People laughing
- Children learning

And a million other notes of nature in harmony.

Who, then, preserves this music to perceive?

Is it just a coincidence that in 1986 the top Billboard song of the year was Dionne Warwick, Stevie Wonder, Gladys Knight, and Elton John's *That's What Friends Are For*?

Perhaps not. After all, we are the Friends. We speak for the Rouge. Maybe even sing for it.

Friends of the Rouge is a member-based, donor-driven, volunteer-powered watershed conservancy. I am delighted to recognize with gratitude the people that make this preservation possible. They are the:

- Board of Directors: who lead the organization as fiduciaries and funders
- Members: who put the Friends in the Friends of the Rouge, creating a collective voice of advocacy
- Donors: whose support makes possible the work in monitoring, restoration, trails, and education
- Volunteers: who provide waders in the water, hands in the garden, and help wherever it's needed

As we greet each other tonight, I invite you to look at the nametag of your neighbor and thank them for being a director, member, donor, volunteer, or staff. Together, we preserve the music of the river for all to perceive.

If you're here tonight, you're part of the choir of collective voices, but there is always more to be done. Invite your friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers to join us in speaking for the Rouge. Explore the amazing art created by local artists - thank you - and bid on it in the silent auction so you can take it home. Buy a 40th anniversary t-shirt to show your pride. Talk to our staff members to learn more about the programs we offer and all of the ways you can get involved.

With this milestone comes the chance to dream of what's next. We will soon announce a more streamlined membership program, new giving societies, and expanded volunteer opportunities so you can continue to level up your love of our river and support the flora, fauna, and people of our watershed.

That river music we preserve for all to perceive is centered on a beat that starts right here. Thank you for being the Heart of the Rouge.