



news release

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The Nature Conservancy Helps Double the Size of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge World's Leading Conservation Organization Enrolls Erie Marsh Preserve Into Refuge System

ERIE, Mich. – North America's first-ever International Wildlife Refuge – the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge – is doubling in size as The Nature Conservancy in Michigan enrolls its Erie Marsh Preserve into the refuge system. Since 2001, the refuge has grown from 394 acres to now 4,339 acres.

Congressman Dingell, who led the congressional effort to establish the refuge in 2001, hailed the announcement.

“Congratulations to the refuge and to The Nature Conservancy for this extraordinary partnership in conservation,” Congressman John Dingell said. “It’s very personally gratifying to see the refuge grow and expand through this wonderful collaborative effort with The Nature Conservancy.”

Dingell will join 140 dignitaries, including Cong. John Conyers, business and civic leaders, and Canadian Member of Parliament Jeff Watson for a tour of the Refuge this evening.

Helen Taylor, state director of The Nature Conservancy in Michigan, said enrolling the 2,217-acre preserve into the refuge shows that partnerships can work to protect our most vital natural resources like the Detroit River.

“This is an exciting step forward for the refuge, the Conservancy, and most importantly, for conservation,” Taylor said. “People often forget how important this part of the world is to our global environment, particularly to freshwater ecosystems and species like migratory birds. Protecting places like Erie Marsh and the Detroit River play a significant role in preserving nature and helping to sustain the health of our ecology for plants, animals and people.”

MORE

Nature Conservancy Helps Expand Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

Erie Marsh represents 11 percent of the remaining marshland in southeast Michigan and is one of the largest marshes in Lake Erie. Coastal marshes are critically important to migrating waterfowl, raptors, and shorebirds, and serve as breeding grounds for numerous spawning fish, plants, insects, reptiles and amphibians.

The Nature Conservancy supported Congressman Dingell's legislation creating the refuge and has donated or protected several tracts now included in the refuge, including Calf Island in 2002. The Conservancy previously transferred ownership of Gard Island to the University of Toledo, which became part of the refuge earlier this year. The Nature Conservancy is currently exploring additional opportunities to help continue the expansion of the refuge, including acquiring properties such as Sugar Island.

"The Nature Conservancy has been and will continue to be a significant partner in protecting this conservation corridor that's so vital for our long-term health," said John Hartig, refuge manager for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. "With the help of The Nature Conservancy and many other private and public partners, the refuge is rapidly gaining a national reputation for public-private partnerships for conservation, sustainability, and close-to-home recreation."

The Detroit River flows into Lake Erie, part of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem that represents one-fifth the standing freshwater on the Earth's surface. The Great Lakes provide 95 percent of North America's drinking water. Additionally, approximately 3 million birds fly annually through the Detroit River corridor, according to Conservancy scientists. At least 117 species of fish can be found in the river. Lake sturgeon and lake whitefish are again reproducing in the Detroit River after many decades of absence.

The Conservancy will retain ownership rights, as well as its long-term lease with the Erie Fishing & Shooting Club, which has managed a portion of the property for more than 100 years. Directions to the preserve can be found online at:

<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/michigan/preserves/art16985.html>

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

The mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats, for the continuing benefit of the American people.

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