

Congressman John D. Dingell

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NEWS RELEASE

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US, Canada Partner to Build Sturgeon Spawning Reef in Detroit River

Dearborn, MI - Canadian and US officials today announced a three-year project to build a lake sturgeon spawning reef off Fighting Island in the Detroit River as part of a binational effort to restore the lake sturgeon population.

The first phase of the project will be a pre-construction assessment funded with \$10,000 from Environment Canada's Great Lakes Sustainability Fund and \$24,500 from US Fish and Wildlife Service's Challenge Cost Share Grant Program. The second phase will focus on reef construction, and the third will consist of a post-construction assessment.

"It is wonderful to see improvement in the water quality of the Detroit River as a result of 35 years of pollution prevention and control," said Congressman John D. Dingell (D-MI15). "The improved water quality has laid the foundation for the return of lake sturgeon, and provides us an opportunity to work with our Canadian friends to enhance the sturgeon habitat through the building of a spawning reef off Fighting Island."

"We are honored to work with our US partners to build a lake sturgeon spawning reef off Fighting Island and to further the restoration of this keystone species in the Huron-Erie Corridor," said Canadian Member of Parliament Jeff Watson. "This provides further evidence of the return of our Detroit River and the place we all call home."

The lake sturgeon is listed as a species of special concern under the Canadian Species at Risk Act, a species of special concern by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and a threatened species in North America by the American Fisheries Society. It is also considered a globally rare species by The Nature Conservancy and a threatened species in the State of Michigan. Due to pollution of habitats, lake sturgeon are currently estimated to number only one percent of their former population. The Huron-Erie Corridor was, at one time, one of the most productive waters for lake sturgeon in North America.

In 2001, lake sturgeon spawning was documented in the Detroit River for the first time in over 20 years. Lake

sturgeon spawning habitats have now been built off Belle Isle in Detroit, off McKee Park in Windsor, and off Fort Malden in Amherstburg. Historically, the area surrounding Fighting Island was well known as an important spawning and nursery area for sturgeon. In November 2006, scientists from US Fish and Wildlife Service and US Geological Survey captured four juvenile lake sturgeon near the southern end of Fighting Island, providing additional evidence of the importance of the Fighting Island habitat to lake sturgeon and a clear rationale for the construction of a spawning reef.

Current partners in the project include: Environment Canada - Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Essex Region Conservation Authority, US Geological Survey-Great Lakes Science Center, Detroit River Canadian Cleanup, BASF Corporation, DTE Energy, Landmark Engineers Inc., Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Habitat Council, and Michigan Sea Grant.

The Detroit River has the distinction of being the only river system in North America to hold both American Heritage River and Canadian Heritage River designations. Further, it is home to the only International Wildlife Refuge in North America.

Contact persons: Dr. John Hartig, US Fish and Wildlife Service (734.692.7608), Mr. Matthew Child, Essex Region Conservation Authority (519.776.5209 ext. 368; Mr. Jim Boase, US Fish and Wildlife Service (248.894.7594). For more information from Member of Parliament Jeff Watson, please call Nancy Jahn at either 613.943.0477 or 613.818.2221 (cell).

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