



News Release Communiqué

THOUSANDS OF INTERNATIONAL 'FLIGHTS' DAILY CANADA AND THE U.S. LAUNCH "BYWAYS TO FLYWAYS" – AN INTERNATIONAL BIRD DRIVING TOUR

LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO, May 12, 2007 – On behalf of the Honourable John Baird, Minister of the Environment and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, Dave Van Kesteren, Member of Parliament for Chatham-Kent—Essex and Jeff Watson, Member of Parliament for Essex and the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, today, on International Migratory Bird Day, launched the international bird driving tour – "Byways to Flyways".

This eco-tourism and education project, which aims to bring people and nature together, is a partnership of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance and Michigan Sea Grant, supported by *Wild Birds Unlimited, Inc. Pathways to Nature Program* with in-kind contributions from Parks Canada and other partners. The brochure and map have been designed as an auto tour highlighting 21 significant birding hotspots in Southeast Michigan and Southwest Ontario and includes information about the global significance of avian habitat and history.

"With birding clearly established as an economic generator in North America and the position of the Essex and Kent regions at the crossroads of two migratory flyways, this area is well poised to deliver a premier-ranked birding destination and increase tourism to the region," said Minister Baird. "Communities, governments and international groups are working together to celebrate this amazing migration phenomenon through conservation and education initiatives."

A recent study examining birding opportunities in the Essex region states that, "25,000 birders visit the region each year, with direct spending of 12.4 to 14.4 million dollars." Parks Canada's Point Pelee National Park was identified as the most important birding destination in the region complimented by Holiday Beach Conservation Area, Hillman Marsh Conservation Area, Pelee Island and Ojibway Park as key secondary sites. The launch of "Byways to Flyways" meets several recommendations found in the study including product development, packaging the regional birding products and working collaboratively to achieve greater success.

"This will truly be a unique project to showcase outstanding birding opportunities in both Southeast Michigan and Southwest Ontario as part of North America's only International Wildlife Refuge," notes Congressman John D. Dingell.

On behalf of the people of Canada, Parks Canada protects and presents nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and fosters public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of its heritage treasures in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations.

The mission of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance is to support the first International Wildlife Refuge in North America – the Detroit River – through partnerships to protect, conserve and manage

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the refuge's wildlife and habitats, and to create exceptional conservation, recreational and educational experiences to develop the next generation of conservation stewards.

Working together to demonstrate the importance of collaborative initiatives between communities, regions and countries to increase awareness of bird conservation, environmental education and the economic benefits of birding as a core attractor for the region.

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