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Case Study and photos at iaglr.org/aoc/detroit-river/

A river's remarkable ecological recovery drives economic benefits for Detroit

ANN ARBOR, MI — From its reputation as one of the country's most polluted rivers in the 1960s, to its current status as a major urban attraction, the Detroit River has an incredible story to tell. It's one of the most remarkable ecological recovery stories in North America, according to study results reported today by the International Association for Great Lakes Research (IAGLR). This turnaround has resulted in both ecological and economic benefits that lead to a higher quality of life for Detroiters and visitors alike.

Designated as one of the Great Lakes' most polluted spots decades ago, the river has been the target of restoration efforts under the Detroit River Remedial Action Plan since 1985. Decades of pollution prevention, control, and cleanup, including more than \$US 32 million from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and Great Lakes Legacy Act, have resulted in substantial environmental improvements. As a result, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, osprey, lake sturgeon, and lake whitefish are reproducing again, common terns are back on Belle Isle, and even beavers have returned. Walleye have rebounded from a state of crisis, with the Detroit River now a key part of the "Walleye Capital of the World."

With a healthier river comes a growing public interest to reconnect to it. In 2016, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy celebrated the completion of the first phase of its capital campaign, raising \$US 163 million to build 3.5 miles (5.6 km) of the Detroit RiverWalk. Nearly three million visitors are already using it annually. The conservancy estimates that 90% of these visits would not have taken place without the significant riverfront improvements. In addition, these improvements spurred approximately \$US 1 billion in total public and private sector investment during the first 10 years, with more than \$US 1 billion expected over the next decade. Clearly, these data show a substantial return on investment in building the Detroit RiverWalk, with more economic benefits yet to come.

"Without this early focus on cleaning up the river and improving water quality, this transformation of the river's edge would not have been possible," notes Mark Wallace, president and chief executive officer of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy.

Such economic data, along with environmental and ecological data, demonstrate the importance of sustaining efforts to clean up Great Lakes Areas of Concern.

The Detroit River case study is part of a larger project to evaluate achievements and lessons learned from 32 years of efforts to clean up Great Lakes AOCs. Available online at iaglr.org/aoc/detroit-river/ this second case study will become part of a user-friendly publication prepared for a broad range of stakeholders to help sustain support for cleaning up AOCs and to inspire and motivate others to restore other degraded aquatic ecosystems.

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The International Association for Great Lakes Research is a scientific organization made up of researchers studying the Laurentian Great Lakes, other large lakes of the world, and their watersheds, as well as those with an interest in such research. With its mission to promote all aspects of large lakes research and communicate research findings, IAGLR is uniquely positioned to foster the connection between science and policy, a connection vital for effective management and protection of the world's large lakes.