



News Release

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State of the Strait Conference Report Calls for Sense of Urgency to Address Contaminated Sediments in the Detroit and Rouge Rivers

Windsor, ON – Today, the State of the Strait Conference Steering Committee released a new report titled “The Contaminated Sediment Remediation Challenge: Complicated Problems that Require Interdisciplinary and Creative Solutions.” It is based on the 2022 State of the Strait Conference held at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

This report found that contaminated sediments continue to limit the ecological recovery of the Detroit and Rouge River ecosystems. In the Detroit River, up to 5.1 million m³ of contaminated sediments on the U.S. side have been targeted for remediation by state and federal governments. In the Rouge River, scientists are determining how much contaminated sediment will require remediation. The good news is that the Great Lakes Legacy Act will provide 65% of the funding through federal dollars, with local nonfederal partners providing the 35% match funding. No additional sediment remediation is required on the Canadian side of the Detroit River.

The conference noted that the window of opportunity to receive federal funding for this needed contaminated sediment remediation, through the Great Lakes Legacy Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is narrow – about 4-5 years. If this window of opportunity is missed, there is no guarantee that federal money will be available at these scales in the future. However, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is committed to restoring uses in all U.S. Great Lakes pollution hotspots called Areas of Concern.

At the conference, a call to action was given to collaborate on all necessary contaminated sediment remediation to restore all beneficial uses in these Areas of Concern and to realize concomitant community and economic benefits. Conference recommendations include:

- ensuring environmental justice is a priority in the process of remediating contaminated sediments in the Detroit and Rouge Rivers;
- placing a high priority on full remediation of contaminated sediment in the Detroit River and the Lower Rouge River Main Stem (turning basin to the cut-off channel) and Old Channel;
- ensuring all relevant stakeholders work with a deep a sense of urgency to recruit partners to help make the necessary 35% non-federal match on sediment remediation projects;
- challenging the State of Michigan to fund the Renew Michigan Fund (designed to help fund environmental cleanup and redevelopment) at an adequate level or create a similar

mechanism with adequate funding to be able to help meet the non-federal match on these Great Lakes Legacy Act projects;

- ensuring that Detroit and Rouge River stakeholders pursue both collaborative funding and creative financing – moving beyond federal and philanthropic grants, including environmental, social, and governance and sustainability-linked investment opportunities – to address contaminated sediment remediation that achieves associated social and economic benefits; and
- encouraging all Detroit and Rouge River stakeholders to develop a unified bold and compelling vision for their watersheds that can be carried in the hearts and minds of all watershed denizens and that this vision is coupled with a complementary investment thesis to help make these watersheds more investable.

“Contaminated sediments along the U.S. shoreline of the Detroit River and in the Lower Rouge River Mainstem are a substantial and pressing problem that will require collaboration of many stakeholders,” noted Dr. Casey Godwin, Co-Chair of the State of the Strait Conference Steering Committee. “All must work with a sense of urgency to leverage federal funding from the Great Lakes Legacy Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law while these funds exist.”

“Efforts should also be made to ensure that contaminated sediment remediation and other ecosystem restoration efforts improve the lives of people living in the watershed,” noted Dr. John Hartig, Co-Chair of the State of the Strait Conference Steering Committee. “We should think of these efforts as part of a continuum of remediation, restoration, reconnecting people to these waterways through greenways and water trails, and community revitalization.”

Report available at: <https://www.uwindsor.ca/glier/state-of-the-strait-2022>.

The State of the Strait is a U.S.-Canada collaboration that hosts a meeting every two years that brings together government managers, researchers, students, environmental and conservation organizations, and concerned citizens to understand historical ecosystem conditions and assess current ecosystem status in order to achieve a better future for the Detroit River and western Lake Erie.

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