

1998 YEAR IN REVIEW

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1998 was the sixth year of the Rouge Project -- you could call it the eighth year if we started with the first Section 319 Grant in 1991. Either way, 1998 was a successful year for the project. In 1998, we saw dissolved oxygen levels rise by 1 mg/L in parts of the Rouge River, and combined sewer overflow (CSO) volumes fall by hundreds of million gallons. We restored over 200 acres of lake and waterfront parkland at Newburgh Lake, and initiated over 60 new projects for source control, wetlands, recreation, geographic information systems (GIS), and septic system management. We accomplished a lot, and we also developed a step-by-step implementation plan for future work through the year 2001.

Let me give an overview of 1998, and our direction ahead, in terms of five major areas: CSOs, storm water, the federal Court case, real environmental progress, and Rouge Project grants.

First, in CSO control, most Phase 1 projects were completed. There are only three facilities remaining to be completed, and two of the three -- Hubbell Southfield in Detroit and River Rouge, will be finished by mid-1999. The third is Dearborn. MDEQ and Dearborn completed work on a new schedule to replace the original tunnel project, and Dearborn's work is resuming. NPDES permits for CSO phase 2 were completed and signed, and the details of the Phase 1 CSO evaluation were established in a cooperative

way by communities and the MDEQ. The Water Environment Research Foundation (WERF) peer group technical group met again last November to review results of the Phase 1 monitoring, and to continue to make our findings on CSO control of use to others around the country.

Second, our storm water achievements are best described through the watershed wide coverage under the MDEQ storm water General Permit. As of early February, 43 communities and agencies in the watershed, including all three Counties and Drain Commissioners plus 38 local units of government, had applied to MDEQ for coverage. Detroit and Birmingham have committed to work on the watershed's storm water needs through their existing CSO NPDES permits. With these applications and other commitments, we have over 90 percent of the watershed covered. Wayne County co-sponsored workshops on the General Permit with MDEQ, we provided grant assistance to communities to develop applications, and probably most importantly, we assigned County and RPO staff to work closely with each of the seven subwatershed groups. We are extremely happy with the results of these efforts and the endorsement by all communities and agencies of the General Permit approach to storm water and watershed management.

The third area of progress is with the US District Court. At the February 4, 1999, federal court hearing before Judge Feikens, Wayne County presented a progress report on the "14-month" schedule. (Copies are available in the back). The focal point of discussions at recent hearings and Court Committee meetings was "institutional

arrangements” for sustaining the Rouge restoration efforts after federal grant monies have been used. The Court discussions dealt with a number of national regulatory issues of import to the Rouge Project, like the role of the federal Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program, the federal Clean Water Action Plan, EPA’s proposed NPDES Phase 2 storm water program. Also, through the Court committee, we had valuable discussions and understandings of the role for GIS and GIS standards in the watershed restoration, the interaction and roles of the RAP planning process for the watershed and the new planning process for the watershed outlined under the MDEQ General Permit. By the end of 1998, the communities in the watershed had developed a three-tier institutional arrangement that could address these issues: the first tier being the local community or agency and its obligations under the General Permit and/or a CSO NPDES permit; the second tier being the seven subwatersheds, which represent communities and respective counties, and also have representation on the Rouge RAP Advisory Council (RRAC); and the third tier being a group to coordinate watershed wide activities. We are looking at a restructuring of this Steering Committee to be that third tier, and we will discuss that later in this meeting.

Fourth, 1998 was a year when we could really begin to measure environmental progress along the Rouge. Dissolved oxygen was up by 0.5 to 1.0 mg/L at six sites along the river in the last two years compared to earlier findings in 1994 and 1995. We can attribute CSO controls, illicit connection elimination, and better public, industry and community awareness of pollution prevention. Cooler weather was also a help with higher dissolved oxygen readings, but we believe that we really have an upward trend

starting with the pollution reductions that have been accomplished. The CSO basins have collectively captured and sent to treatment an estimated 3 billion gallons of overflow since the first basins went on line in 1997. With the completion of Detroit's Hubbell Southfield project this spring, all of the completed basins will be controlling CSOs at a rate of about 4 billion gallons per year. Our illicit discharge teams have eliminated 12.5 million gallons per day of dry weather discharges, and the Newburgh Lake project has eliminated the PCB fish advisory and restored a major recreational resource in the Rouge.

Fifth, the federal grant dollars are being used to support local community and agency priorities in the restoration. During 1998, the community grant program provided \$4.3 million for 61 projects by communities and agencies for GIS, storm water, recreation and habitat, wetlands, and on-site sewage disposal system inspection and management. These new projects, coupled with the CSO projects and storm water pilot project begun in earlier years, we now have approximately 100 community projects using grant funding to support their local restoration needs.

In the last half of 1998, the County began planning a new grant program to support activities by communities and agencies that received coverage under the MDEQ General Permit. This new program allocates \$3.5 million in federal dollars to the seven subwatersheds for illicit discharge elimination, public education, and subwatershed management plans. These dollars are to be used in 1999 to early in 2001. A second phase of this program will begin in 2001, or earlier if requested by the subwatershed, and

will allocate an additional \$6 million to the subwatersheds for implementation of planning recommendations. The County's change to allocating future grant funds through the subwatersheds supports that second tier of the institutional arrangement and it helps communities to work in close cooperation on local watershed restoration needs.

In conclusion, we have a mature project with plenty of momentum -- and lots of hardworking and involved people. By one measure -- our contact database -- we count over 1,201 people involved in the Rouge Project. Included in that total is this Steering Committee, and the County wants to recognize your support and leadership in your own communities, agencies, and roles, to the projects' success. We also want to recognize the Court monitors, RRAC, MDEQ, EPA, DWSD, SEMCOG, Oakland and Washtenaw Counties, and we look forward to continuing our work with you in the year ahead.