

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife & Oceans

[fisheries](#) - - Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6232 - - (202) 226-0200

Witness Statement

Testimony supporting H.R. 1230

A Bill to Provide for the Establishment of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in the State of Michigan

Edward J. Bagale

Vice Chancellor for Government Relations

The University of Michigan-Dearborn

House Subcommittee of Fisheries, Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Chairman, Representative Wayne Gilchrest

Mr. Chairman:

I am submitting this testimony in support of House Resolution 1230. As Vice Chancellor for Government Relations at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, I have spent many years working with broad-based community coalitions that are committed to environmental restoration and preservation, quality ecologically based recreation, and economic development. In that capacity, I serve as co-chair of Rouge River Gateway Partnership and am past president of the Automobile National Heritage Area. The University of Michigan-Dearborn and the aforementioned partnerships each consider it an important part of their mission to help promote and inculcate environmental awareness and the responsibilities of stewardship into each generation throughout the region we serve. These are values that are exemplified in H.R. 1230.

The University of Michigan-Dearborn is located on the banks of the historic Rouge River, one of the major watersheds flowing into the Detroit River. The Rouge River was once one of the worst sources of pollution in the Detroit River and the Great Lakes basin. But thanks to the commitment of the 48 communities within the watershed, hundreds of public and private institutions and thousands citizens, the Rouge River has become a national model for environmental reclamation. In the future, the Rouge watershed will be recognized for the contributions of its residents to historic preservation, habitat restoration, and industrial revitalization.

One of the important lessons that we have learned is that rivers and watersheds are important ways to define communities. These natural geographical features transcend political jurisdictions and encompass an enormous range of social and economic diversity. They connect us to our past, and they are linked to our future.

Of course, not everything connected to the environmental reclamation agenda for the Rouge River and the Detroit River is good news. The sad fact is that we have already lost over 95% of the coastal wetland habitats in Detroit River ecosystem. This is habitat that is critical to hundreds of species of birds, butterflies, and fish. Many of these species would naturally migrate into the Detroit River's tributaries, such as the Rouge River. But unless something is done immediately, the people of Detroit and Windsor run the risk of losing the remaining habitat along the Detroit River. This would reverberate throughout the watersheds

feeding the Detroit River and be a tragedy for many millions of people on both sides of the border.

H.R. 1230 provides an effective strategy for preserving wildlife refuge in the Detroit River. It is also an important mechanism for forging a shared vision for conservation, restoration, and management of fish and wildlife habitats in both the United States and in Canada.

The citizens of Dearborn, Detroit, the communities downriver, and indeed in towns and townships extending throughout three watersheds are making incredible personal and financial sacrifices to clean up the water in their communities. We are rapidly moving forward toward full compliance with the Clean Water Act. We are integrating solid principles of environmental stewardship into the curricula of elementary, secondary and higher education institutions. Volunteers and professionals together are carefully monitoring the primary indices of environmental health. We believe we deserve the support of government in preserving these ecological treasures for future generations. Support of H.R. 1230 is an important step in achieving this important objective. I join with thousands of educators, public officials and residents throughout the regions served by the University of Michigan-Dearborn. We are united in our support of H.R. 1230. And we are committed to continuing to provide stewardship over the environmental resources entrusted to us.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record.

Edward J. Bagale
Vice Chancellor, Government Relations
The University of Michigan-Dearborn
4901 Evergreen Road, 1130 AB
Dearborn, Michigan 48128

June 18, 2001

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