



# BLUE WATER RIVER WALK

## CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE

Visitors to the Blue Water River Walk will notice a significantly different shoreline landscape than they may find along other stretches of the St. Clair River. Over the last many years and decades, much of the St. Clair River shoreline has been hardened with steel seawall, paved sidewalks and metal railings. During this process much of the natural plant and wildlife habitat is often removed or destroyed.

The restoration and redevelopment of this stretch of the St. Clair River has been planned with a vision for a more naturalized and accessible shoreline. As you walk along the River Walk you will not find steel seawall or railings along our path. What you will find is a new shoreline made up of natural rocks, boulders and pebbles. A significant

part of this restoration includes native plants, flowers, trees and shrubs growing in a more natural condition, which will be unlike the flowers and landscaping visitors to local public parks might see. When completed, the grasses and flowers growing



*Naturalized shoreline compared to seawall with paved walk and railing.*



▲ *A naturalized landscape versus a manicured flower bed.*

along the River Walk will not be cut, mowed, trimmed or contained within neat little flower beds. The more naturalized shoreline of the River Walk serves multiple purposes, including providing safe cover and habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, and also serving as a filter for the runoff from rain and storms.

Beginning in 2014 when the River Walk is completely re-opened to the public, visitors will find a River Walk experience unlike most others. A walk along the shoreline will invite you to pause, stop, look for turtles, have a picnic, skip stones, watch the freighters, smell the flowers, and listen to the sounds of the waves lapping against the new pebble beach or the offshore reefs.

**“AS YOU WALK ALONG THE RIVER WALK YOU WILL NOT FIND STEEL SEAWALL OR RAILINGS ALONG OUR PATH.”**

## WHO OWNS THE RIVER WALK?

The Blue Water River Walk is not owned by any unit of government. It is privately owned by the Community Foundation of St. Clair County through one of its subsidiary companies, the Blue Water Land Fund.

The entire stretch of shoreline now known as the River Walk was given to the Community Foundation by local philanthropist James and Suzanne Acheson in 2011. In return for the gift, the Foundation promised to find the funding necessary to finish the restoration and rehabilitation of the shoreline, and promised to make it available to the public forever. In essence, the Foundation has turned the shoreline into a “public” park.

The Community Foundation of St. Clair County was originally created in 1944. Today it is the largest grantmaking foundation in Michigan’s Thumb Region and serves to help donors manage their charitable and philanthropic giving. To learn more about the Community Foundation visit their website at [Stclairfoundation.org](http://Stclairfoundation.org)

▼ *Philanthropy in St. Clair County is changing our landscape, and pictured here are a few of the prominent donors whose personal or corporate investments are making the Blue Water River Walk possible; (left to right) Jim Acheson, Mike Cansfield, Jenifer Kusch, Geof Kusch, Sandy Duffy, Catherine Houghton, Randy Maers, Dr. & Mrs. Bassam Nasr, Hale Walker, Donna Niester*





*Boulders sit atop newly constructed offshore reefs.*



## OFFSHORE REEFS

Perhaps the most strikingly different aspect of the new St. Clair River shoreline along the Blue Water River Walk is the huge stone and boulder structures sticking up from the water just offshore. These huge offshore reefs extend down almost 15 feet into the river bottom. The large boulders you see on the surface weigh as much as 4,000 pounds. They are resting on two other layers; recycled slabs of cement on the very bottom and a middle layer of smaller boulders. All together, our crews used over 8,000 tons of rock, stone, cement and boulders to build these reefs.

These new offshore reefs are a critical element to the overall naturalization of the St. Clair River shoreline. Their purpose is twofold: first, they will help knock down the incredibly strong wave energy caused by passing boats. Left unchecked, those waves would cause serious damage to the new plants and habitat along the shoreline. Secondly, they create new shallow water habitat between the reefs and the shoreline. This habitat is critical to the growth and development of small fish, reptiles and amphibians. Much of the upper St. Clair River is lacking in shallow water habitat for fish and wildlife. These reefs have helped create new shallow water habitat along almost one-mile of shoreline.

## CREATIVE HABITAT

The new shoreline habitat visible as you walk along the Blue Water River Walk is only half the story. Along with new plant habitat planted onshore, a significant amount of new fish habitat has been created under the surface of the shallow waters just offshore. In the photo here, Greg Lashbrook, a professional diver from local company Gregory A.D. (Gregoryad.com) can be seen in the shallow waters at our Outdoor Classroom area. He is supervising the installation of the first of several cement culverts that are being repurposed as clever new fish habitat.

Along other sections of the River Walk, habitat amenities such as basking logs for turtles, and snake dens (harmless snakes) have been added to complement what Mother Nature might otherwise provide. Visitors will also notice a wide variety of new bird houses installed along the shoreline. When completed, this stretch of the St. Clair River may not look exactly as it did 200 years ago, but it will be as close as possible in a small urban environment like Port Huron.



*This cement culvert will become fish habitat.*

## BLUE WATER RIVER WALK WORKSHOPS

### Fish & Wildlife Restoration on the St. Clair River

Wednesday, October 30, 2013 • 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Great Lakes Maritime Center, 51 Water Street, Port Huron



Join us to learn about the natural history of the Port Huron area and the benefits to fish and wildlife that the River Walk will provide. We are hoping to train local residents and enlist their help with caring for the River Walk over time. Please consider becoming a “volunteer steward.”

#### We'll cover:

- Early natural communities, plants and animals
- Habitat features in the River Walk for fish and wildlife today
- Invasive species/stewardship of the River Walk habitats

We will conclude with a walking tour of the River Walk.

### Invasive Plants: Identification & Control

*A workshop for Blue Water River Walk stewardship volunteers*

Saturday, November 9, 2013 • 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

YMCA of the Blue Water Area, 1525 3rd Street, Port Huron

The Blue Water River Walk is an incredible asset for both people and wildlife along the St. Clair River, but invasive plants can diminish its value. Become a stewardship volunteer and help preserve the River Walk!

#### We'll cover:

- Native plants that are used along the River Walk and the natural communities in which they occur
- Invasive plant identification and species of particular concern
- Invasive species control methods and mapping tools

We will finish up with a walk featuring the most common invasives in the area, so be sure to wear sturdy shoes!



*To register, or for more information, contact Suzan Campbell at (313) 378-0433 or [campbells1@michigan.gov](mailto:campbells1@michigan.gov). Workshops presented by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory and sponsored by the Community Foundation of St. Clair County,*

## 2014 & Beyond: Future goals of the River Walk

- The development of Rotary Park just north of the Railroad Ferry Dock
- A fishing pier south of the Gray Fox ship
- A learning node dedicated to our Native American ancestors

*For more information about the River Walk visit [Stclairfoundation.org](http://Stclairfoundation.org)*



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
OF ST. CLAIR COUNTY

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