



Detroit River – Facts and Figures

The Detroit River and its neighboring IBAs, Lake St. Clair and western Lake Erie basin, support up to 7% of the world's Canvasback ducks each fall and winter.

The Detroit River is a connecting channel linking Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie.

The river channel was formed some 10,000-12,000 years ago during the retreat of the Wisconsin Glacier.

The Detroit River was a center for resource gathering, culture, and trade among Aboriginal people long before European exploration, which began in the 17th Century.

The first European settlement in Detroit was established 1701 by a young French officer named Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac.

In French, the word Detroit means “the straight.”

The mean discharge from the Detroit River to Lake Erie is 185,000 cubic feet per second (5,240 cubic meters per second).

The current speed 1-3 feet per second.

The Detroit River is 32 miles long.

The river is 0.33-4.0 miles wide. Water depth is variable, ranging from 1 to 50 feet.

The Detroit River contains 21 islands.

The Canadian portion of this watershed is largely agricultural (90 percent), the remaining area consisting of urban, residential and industrial lands located around Windsor in the northern reaches of the River.

The U.S. portion of the watershed is only 30 percent agricultural, and the remainder is residential (30 percent), urban (30 percent), and industrial (10 percent).

Over 5 million people live in the Detroit River watershed.

Eighty-seven percent of the U.S. shoreline and 20 percent of the Canadian shoreline have now been modified with revetments and other shoreline hardening structures. Consequently, many of the historical coastal wetlands have been lost through dredging, bulkheading, and/or backfilling. The remaining wetlands mostly occur on islands in the River. In recent years, loss of wetlands along the shores has diminished, but incremental loss from agricultural conversion, shoreline modification, marina development, and urban encroachment is still a concern.

The shipping channel is routinely dredged to a depth of 27 feet for navigational purposes.

During 1998 total U.S.-Canadian trade exceeded \$396 billion. Approximately one-third of all trade that travels by road, passes over the Ambassador Bridge.

During 1998, approximately 22 million vehicles passed through the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel or over the Ambassador Bridge.

Detroit is one of the busiest ports in the Great Lakes. In 1998, 19.5 million tons of cargo were handled at the Port of Detroit.

The Detroit River and the Rouge River are both identified as Great Lakes Areas of Concern or pollution "hot spots." Ten beneficial uses of the Detroit River are impaired.

The Michigan Department of Community Health advises that no one eat carp from the Detroit River and that certain individuals eat limited amounts of certain sizes of redbreast sunfish, freshwater drum, northern pike, walleye, and yellow perch because of bioaccumulation of persistent toxic substances.

Phosphorus control at the Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant was the single largest factor in reversal of cultural eutrophication of Lake Erie. Between the late 1960s and mid-1980s there was over a 90% reduction in phosphorus loading from the Detroit Plant to the Detroit River; phosphorus loading since then has been fairly stable.

Sediments in many stretches of the River are contaminated with heavy metals like mercury, oils, and PCBs, especially along the U.S. side of the River. These contaminated sediments are often referred to as the legacy of the Industrial Revolution.

Contaminated sediment at Black Lagoon in Trenton has been cleaned up at a cost of \$9.3 million. Shoreline habitat has also been restored and funding is in place for a new marina. It is now called Ellias Cove.

Mayflies have returned to the Detroit River which is sign of improved water quality.

Lake whitefish are spawning in the Detroit River for the first time since 1916.

Bald eagles are nesting and producing young in seven locations along the Detroit River.

The Detroit River is a major waterfowl migration corridor and is recognized for its significance in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. 29 species of waterfowl are commonly found in the Detroit River.

The Detroit River has one of the highest biodiversities (i.e., diversity of plants and animals) in the Great Lakes Basin and has been designated as a Biodiversity Investment Area by the United States and Canadian governments. 65 species of fish are found in the Detroit River.

The Detroit River has an international reputation for its walleye fishery. It is estimated that walleye fishing alone brings in \$1 million to Downriver's economy each spring.

In July 2007, FLW Outdoors came to Detroit River with its \$1.5 million Chevy Open. This bass tournament is one of the largest in North America. It brought in \$4-5 million to the local economy.

The Detroit River is the host of the International Hydroplane races.

The International Freedom Festival fireworks display, which is one of the largest in North America, occurs each year in downtown Detroit and Windsor over the Detroit River.

Belle Isle is a 980-acre island park located in the Detroit River within close proximity to the Central Business District of the City of Detroit. It is the crown jewel of Detroit's public park system. Belle Isle was designed in 1883 by Frederick Law Olmstead who designed New York's Central Park. It is situated on one of America's busiest waterways and provides spectacular views of Detroit, Canada, freighter traffic, and the Ambassador Bridge. Other unique features include: the Belle Isle Aquarium is the oldest in America; the Nancy Brown Peace Tower; the Dossin Great Lakes Museum which has the world's largest collection of scale-model Great Lakes ships; the Scott Memorial Fountain; and the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservancy.

Historic Fort Wayne is located at a strategic location on the banks of the Detroit River. It was built in the early 19th century during a period of tension with the British in North America. It was used during the Civil War and both World Wars. Later, it became one of the largest induction centers during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

In 1998, President Clinton designated the Detroit River as an American Heritage River. Community-based projects are now being implemented under the Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative to promote environmental stewardship, encourage economic development, and celebrate our history and culture.

In 2001, the Detroit River received a Canadian Heritage River designation, making it the first international "heritage river" system in the world.

In 2001, President George Bush signed into law the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Act, making the Detroit River the first international wildlife refuge in North America.

In 2001, the Detroit region celebrated the 300th anniversary of the European settlement of the area. This yearlong celebration, called Detroit 300, featured spectacular events, festivals, projects, and educational programs.