

Interpretive Plan for the Huron River National Water Trail Lower Reach, Flat Rock to Lake Erie

Prepared for the Huron River Watershed Council by the
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
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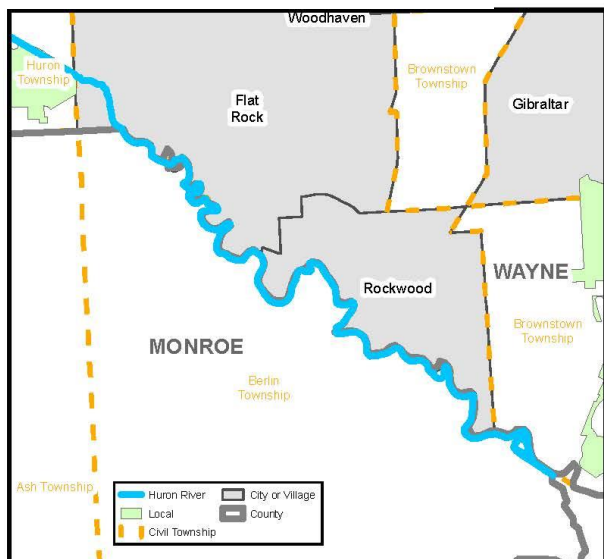
Project Background

The lower Huron River has a fascinating heritage, encompassing Native Americans, French explorers, clams and Ford Mustangs. The purpose of this plan is to help communities and stakeholders incorporate heritage on the lower reach of the nationally designated Huron River Water Trail (HRWT), from Flat Rock to Lake Erie, which will create a more meaningful trail experience and a greater sense of place. Outdoor recreation may be the destination driver, but it is heritage that makes a place feel special, different and socially interesting – the opposite of generic. The plan identifies the significance of the area, target audiences, heritage stories (natural and cultural), interpretive methods and a unifying theme. It also considers other efforts along the river corridor, to avoid repetition and promote regional collaboration. The Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC) started this project on September 24, 2014, with a meeting in Flat Rock to work on a vision for the river corridor. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Heritage Trail Program began assisting in 2016.

Planning Partners

Brownstown Historical Society, City of Flat Rock, City of Rockwood, Downriver Linked Greenways, Flat Rock - Our Hometown, Flat Rock Historical Society, H2E River Adventures, Huron River Watershed Council, Huron River Water Trail, Huron-Clinton Metroparks, Michigan DNR, Michigan Sea Grant, Motor City Canoe Rental, National Park Service, Riverside Kayak, Village of South Rockwood, Southern Wayne Regional Chamber of Commerce, Wyandot of Anderdon.

Project Location



Significance

For Michigan's first residents – both Native and European – waterways were the preferred means of transportation. They determined settlement patterns, trade routes, economic development and identity. Michigan's heritage grew inland from the shores of these blue highways, and one of the most significant inland routes was the Huron River. Now a nationally designated water trail, the Huron River runs 104 miles before it flows into Lake Erie, at a point where the Detroit River completes its connection of the upper Great Lakes with the lower. The ten-mile lower segment of the Huron River has provided a home for Wyandot culture, the expansion of Henry Ford's automotive empire and the founding of communities, including Flat Rock and Rockwood. The area's heritage also includes events and sites related to the War of 1812, like the Battle of Brownstown and General Hull's corduroy road.

The Huron River is the thread that unifies the communities in the area. It provides a common ground for businesses, organizations and residents to collaborate and create a more prosperous region. The lower reach of the HRWT is a destination for nature lovers. It is located at the intersection of the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways, where more than three hundred species of birds rest in the area's diverse habitats – making it a haven for bird watchers. In fact, the lower Huron River is part of the only International Wildlife Refuge in North America! An abundance of fish, such as smallmouth bass and walleye, make it a destination for anglers. Paddlers are attracted to the lower reach of the HRWT, where they can enjoy natural surroundings on their journey to Lake Erie. The river is also an anchor for parks, festivals and businesses, which draws communities together along its banks.



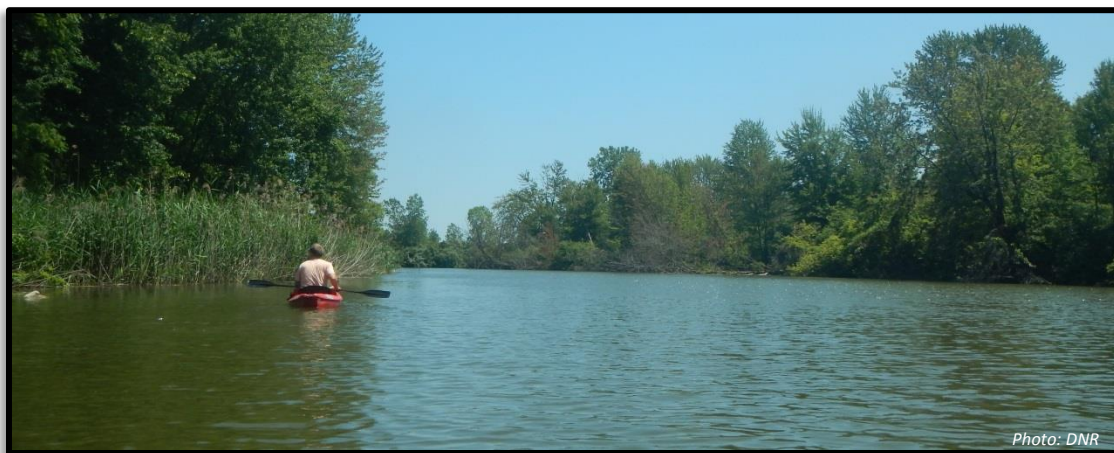
Photo: Courtesy of River Raisin National Battlefield Park

General Hull's Corduroy Road - which can be seen when water levels are low.

Target Audience

People visit the HRWT to engage in different activities. A 2016 study, “The Economic Impact Analysis of the Huron River Water Trail,” shows that 122,981 visitors (adults and children) access the Huron River National Water Trail annually—with 42% kayaking/canoeing; 28% walking, hiking or running; and 10% fishing. In order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the interpretive plan, the people that participate in these and other activities can be divided into target groups.¹

1. **Huron River Paddlers:** Kayaking is one of the fastest-growing nature-based activities in the U.S. A 2015 study on paddlesports found that more than 21.7 million people, or 7.4% of Americans, participated in paddling activities in 2014. Nationally, paddlers are evenly represented across age groups but tend to be more highly educated, with 40% of canoeists and 51% of kayakers achieving a college degree or higher. Some 54% of those who paddle the Huron River have a household income of \$60,001 or more. 41% of all Huron River paddlers spend more than 10% of their household budget on recreation.² This group of users already recognizes some of the trail’s intrinsic values, such as beautiful natural landscape, serenity, and a pleasant place to recreate or exercise out of doors. As people utilize the trail for these various reasons, they may be unaware of the area’s natural and cultural heritage. Some of the interesting facts and stories of the area’s heritage are obscure, and unknown even to locals. There may also be users who would not typically frequent museums or other cultural institutions, but are nonetheless interested in these topics.³



¹ Seidman Research Office, Grand Valley State University, “The Economic Impact of the Huron River,” for the Huron River Watershed Council, March 1, 2017, p17.

² Ibid., 64, 66.

³ Outdoor Industry Association, “2015 Special Report on Paddlesports,” accessed 14 November 2017. <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2015-Paddlesports-Research.pdf>

2. **Paddlers New to the Huron River National Water Trail:** The average paddler travels around 79 miles for a day trip and 117 miles for an overnight trip. This means paddlers from as far away as Saginaw, Battle Creek and Toledo would come to the HRWT for a day trip, and paddlers from as far away as Grand Rapids, Ft. Wayne, and Cleveland would travel make the journey to enjoy a multi-day trip. The addition of heritage will allow the Huron River to stand out from other water trails, and will present these users with a new kind of trail experience.⁴

3. **Heritage Tourists:** This target group values cultural experiences and will seek them out when planning trips or activities, so the addition of heritage to the HRWT can create a destination that is appealing to them. Visitors to the nearby battlefield are a prime example. Heritage tourists may also be nearby residents or vacationers travelling long distances, and they have distinct attributes that need to be considered when creating an interpretive plan. Heritage tourists are generally:

- a. **Busy** - So they want an enriching travel experience that combines education, entertainment, and authenticity.
- b. **Accountability-driven** - They look for value and experiences that will meet their expectations.
- c. **Well educated** – Most heritage tourists have advanced degrees. Education level is the single most significant factor that influences cultural and heritage participation and travel. And because they are typically more educated, they prefer that leisure travel be educational.
- d. **More Affluent** – They tend to spend more money when on trips than non-heritage tourists. They are also more inclined to stay overnight in hotels and bed and breakfasts, and stay longer than the average traveler.
- e. **Frequent Travelers** - Heritage tourists travel more frequently than non-heritage tourists: 5.01 annual leisure trips compared to 3.98 for non-heritage travelers.
- f. **Discerning** - Heritage tourists look for quality in infrastructure and services, as well as in program content.
- g. **Seeking Authenticity** - They seek out experiences that are authentic in order to learn about a community's history and culture.⁵

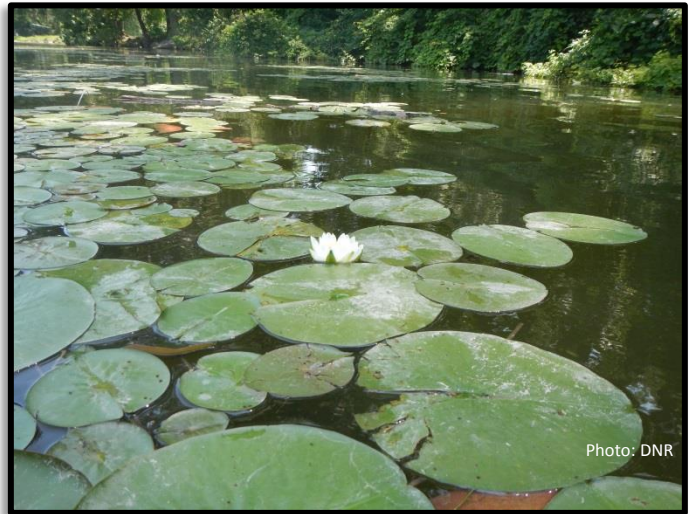
“The river made enormous bends, and we observed after five days of rowing we had made less progress than we usually made in one day’s march.”

- Robert Cavelier de LaSalle, describing the meandering nature of the lower Huron River in 1680.

⁴ Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development, “Huron River Water Trail, Economic Impact Analysis,” prepared for the HRWC, December 2013.

⁵ According to a 2009 study by Mandala Research on U.S. Heritage Travel. A press release for this report and the associated data can be found at: http://mandalaresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CHT_release_Oct_20.pdf

4. **Fishing Enthusiasts:** Anglers tend to be environmentally conscious, a trait confirmed by the Flat Rock-based Huron River Fishing Association. The organization describes itself as “dedicated to furthering and advancing the cause of the environment and natural resources conservation through education, protection and enhancement.”⁶ Interpretation of the natural environment with a message for conservation will be an effective approach in reaching this group.



5. **Land Based Recreationalists:** The Huron River provides an ideal setting for land based recreationalists too; there are numerous parks and land trails close by. These individuals can also interact with the various interpretive methods. Key users include:
- Bicyclists
 - Runners
 - General Park Recreation
 - Botanists
 - Birdwatchers
 - Hikers
6. **School Groups:** Natural and cultural heritage interpretation on the HRWT can provide a non-traditional learning opportunity for students. Many of these students may not have paddled on a river before. Programming and resources to assist teachers are important, including connection to guides with experience teaching new paddlers. A partnership with the DNR’s Outdoor Adventure Center in Detroit should be explored.
7. **Community and Service Organizations:** Many community organizations are looking for new learning, social and service opportunities. Offer programming and resources to help facilitate group learning, as well as objective ways they could help maintain the trail and interpretive efforts. For example, work with the Michigan scouting councils to develop a merit badge connected to natural and cultural history along the HRWT corridor.
8. **Neighbors:** Interpretive efforts should be designed and implemented in a manner that is respectful of nearby residents, businesses and property owners.

⁶ Huron River Fishing Association, “About Us,” <https://huronriverfishing.com/>, (Accessed on 11/13/2017).

Inventory

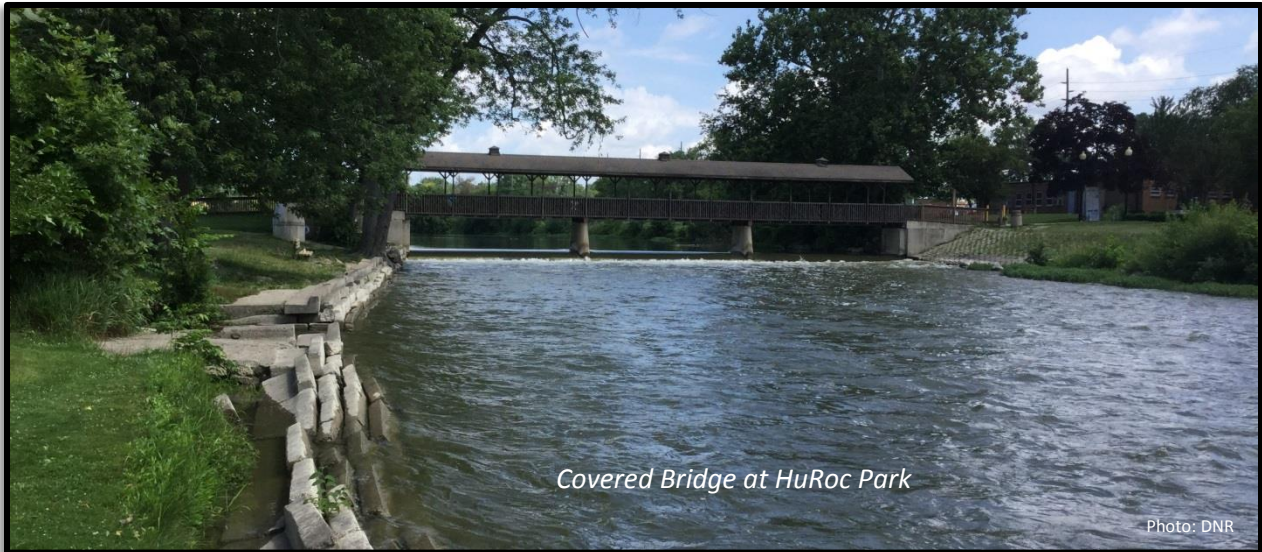
An inventory of existing interpretive efforts in close proximity to the river was conducted in the summer of 2017, in order to help ensure that a complete and unified heritage story for the water trail corridor is shared, to reduce duplicate efforts and to promote collaboration. The inventory also identifies locations along the river where future interpretive methods could be implemented and site interconnectivity. Each of the stakeholders that were surveyed expressed support for the integration of heritage with the HRWT. All sites in this inventory are indicated on the maps in the appendix (pages 24, 25).

1. **Huron-Clinton Metroparks:** Two Metroparks bookend this segment of the HRWT, with Oakwoods Metropark (1756 acres) just north of Flat Rock and Lake Erie Metropark (1607 acres) near the mouth of the river. There are also a few smaller undeveloped natural land areas owned by Huron-Clinton Metroparks upstream of I-75.
 - a. **Facilities:** A Nature Center is located at Oakwoods Metropark, and it provides information on the natural and cultural heritage of the area. The exhibits include live animals (such as turtles and a red-tailed hawk), a model of the fish ladder at Flat Rock Dam, and a mural depicting life along the lower Huron River over time. Park staff is currently working on an interpretive plan for the Nature Center, with a theme centered on depicting the lower Huron River as a timeless resource. Located at Lake Erie Metropark is the Marshlands Museum, which has exhibits on waterfowl hunting, wildlife, and ecology of the marsh and lake. A bald eagle named “Luc” is on display at the park and is very popular with visitors. There also is a 1,300 gallon “Great Lakes Aquarium” at the museum and a monument for Battle of Brownstown in the northwest corner of the park.



Beginning of mural at Oakwoods Metropark Nature Center

- b. **Programs & Events:** Both parks offer numerous programs and events for the public, school groups and scout troops, which examine a variety of topics related to history and the natural environment. Oakwoods Metropark owns a 34-foot, 18-passenger voyageur canoe, which it uses for interpretive rides that explore river ecology or the fur trade. Each autumn, Lake Erie Metropark is home to one of the nation’s largest raptor migrations, and a three-day “Hawkfest” is held to celebrate the event. Michigan Sea Grant operates “Discovery Cruises” from Lake Erie Metropark during the summer. While cruising the lower Detroit River or Lake Erie, people can learn about topics like fisheries, wildlife, shipwrecks and lighthouses. Please visit the Sea Grant website for more information:
<http://www.miseagrant.umich.edu/>.
 - c. **Trails:** There are a few short interpretive paths located near the Oakwoods Nature Center, including the 3/4-mile Bigtree Nature Trail, which has a small pamphlet that describes aspects of life for the Native Americans who first settled southeast Michigan. Installed in 1979, the “Walk-in-Water” paddle trail has numbered posts along the route that correspond with an interpretive booklet. It may be the oldest such water trail in Michigan.
2. **Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative:** Since 1998, the Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative (DLGI) has been working on a regional non-motorized system of land and water trails to connect 21 Downriver Detroit communities, and link out to a rapidly-forming regional and statewide system. A functioning and coordinated non-motorized trail system is an important factor in the quality of life for Downriver communities. This trail system is helping to spur new economic development opportunities, and leverage the region’s natural and cultural resources by connecting them. The East-West Connector of the DLGI links the Oakwoods and Lake Erie Metroparks through the cities Flat Rock and Rockwood. Please visit the DLGI website for more information:
<http://downrivergreenways.org>. (See *Appendix for map*).
3. **City of Flat Rock:** Flat Rock is one of five designated Trail Towns on the Huron River, and the only one on the lower segment (See: <http://huronriverwatertrail.org/trail-towns/>). The city is located just below the Flat Rock dam and is the ideal launch point for paddlers who want to travel the entire 10-mile segment to Lake Erie. The current is also generous for downstream paddlers in this upper reach, running briskly from Flat Rock to I-75. At I-75 the Huron River transitions to flat water, creating a slightly more strenuous paddle to Lake Erie.



- a. **HuRoc Park:** Located on the western edge of downtown Flat Rock, the park is primarily situated on an island in the river and connected by a scenic covered pedestrian bridge to a smaller parcel on the east bank. There is a large amount of space for events, a kayak/canoe launch, wayfinding signs, a bear statue that honors Native Americans, Flat Rock Depot & Museum, and restrooms. The city has developed preliminary plans with the firm FTC&H for a new boardwalk and park improvements for the east bank. (See Appendix for proposed renderings).

The Flat Rock portion of the DLGI runs through HuRoc Park. This non-motorized land trail is especially significant because it is also part of the Iron Belle Trail – the longest designated state trail in the United States. The intersection of the HRWT with the Iron Belle Trail, two nationally known trails with different uses, creates a focal point for outdoor recreation in the region.



- b. **DNR Boat Launch and Property:** A quarter mile downstream from Huroc Park is a DNR boat launch that can accommodate power boats, canoes and kayaks. It is situated on 11 acres of undeveloped property. The city has a preliminary plan to develop this substantial riverfront property, making it much more inviting for paddlers and the community at large. The proposal includes a universally accessible canoe/kayak launch, restrooms, paved parking, picnic shelter, amphitheater and large open greenspace. (See Appendix for proposed renderings).

- c. **Programs:** The Flat Rock Recreation Department connects people with heritage on the Huron River by sponsoring interpretive kayaking trips. In 2017, each of three trips explored a heritage topic and utilized the interpretive scripts prepared by travel writer Nina Ignaczak for the Huron River Watershed Council. *(Note: These scripts can be used by other communities or organizations and are described in further detail in the “Methods” section below).*
4. **Flat Rock Historical Society:** The museum campus is located at 25486 Gibraltar Road. It consists of four historic structures that depict life in early Flat Rock. The buildings contain a substantial collection of historic furnishings and other items that are in excellent condition. A growing archive of primary documents is also available for research purposes. It includes the only collection of the *Huron Valley Sentinel*. Educational opportunities include a variety of children’s programs, a cemetery walk and a Living History event that occurs the second Sunday of each month. The society also hosts a website with information on local events and history, and it will contain scanned documents from the society archives in the future (<http://flatrockhistory.org/>).



5. **Village of South Rockwood:** The village manages two parks on the south side of the river, both with access points.
- a. Dodge Brothers Park is located just upstream of the I-75 bridge. One of the properties donated by the Dodge family in the 1920s to be used as parkland, it has portable toilets and a launch for paddle boats.
 - b. Labo Park is located less than a mile downstream from Dodge Brothers Park on the east side of I-75. It is a popular put-in spot for the 3.5-mile paddle connecting to coastal water trails, and the preferred resting spot for the longer Flat Rock to Lake Erie route. Labo Park is more substantial than Dodge Brothers Park in terms

of open space and amenities. There are a tree and plaque commemorating the efforts of Liz Elling, who swam the length of the Huron River in 2007 to raise awareness of fresh water resources.



In 2016, the HRWC assisted the Village of South Rockwood in developing a master plan for the park that aims to protect the eroding riverbank and ameliorate recreation features. (See Appendix for proposed renderings). The plan includes the following items:

- i. Improved access to the Huron River for watercraft put-in and take-out
- ii. Parking and a drop-off area for use by local outfitters and others
- iii. Canoe staging area and Universal Access for paddlers with disabilities
- iv. Huron River Water Trail signage and information for coastal water trails
- v. Storm water management associated with proposed improvements
- vi. Riverbank restoration opportunities

6. **City of Rockwood:** Patricia Lezotte Quick Park is located directly across the river from Labo Park in South Rockwood. The narrow park hugs the river with a paved pathway, three wooden piers, and a concrete ramp for paddling watercraft access. A short pathway through a wooded area leads to picnic tables, a pavilion and a children’s play structure. There also is a connection to the Downriver Linked Greenways trail system.



7. **National Park Service:** The River Raisin National Battlefield Park, based in the nearby city of Monroe, operates the Hull’s Trace Unit at the mouth of the Huron River. Located here is boat launch suitable for canoes, kayaks and power boats, as well as ample parking.⁷ There is also a garden with signs identifying native, introduced, medicinal and edible plants from 1812 in the area.

Directly across Jefferson Avenue is a preserved section of the 200+ year-old Hull’s Trace corduroy road. It is sometimes covered by water, but the National Park Service (NPS) is exploring safe ways for people to cross Jefferson and view the road. A Michigan Historic Marker describing the Hull’s Trace route is also located



here. There are no other interpretive signs at this time, but NPS is planning to install some in the future.

The NPS owns a fleet of kayaks that it uses for programs that encourage people to get on the water and learn about the area’s history, such as the “Paddle the Battlefield” excursions



⁷ The HRWC and NPS are developing plans for universal access here.

(free and open to the public). The NPS also partners with the Youth Connection to run the “Ticket to Float” summer kayaking program. Each year it provides more than 1,000 inner-city youth hands-on instruction on how to safely paddle and a new way to interact with history.

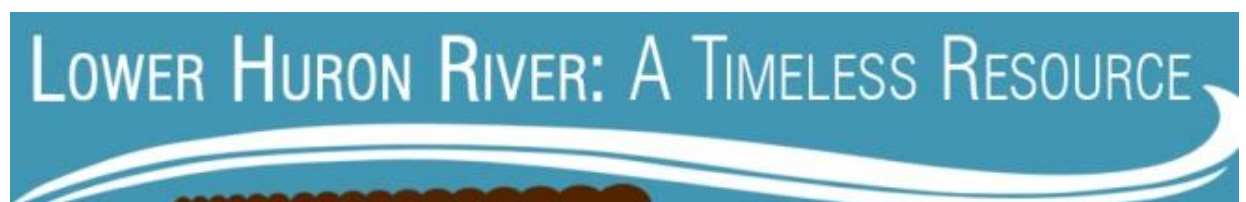
The River Raisin National Battlefield Park released its long-range interpretive plan in 2015. The report identified Hull’s Corduroy Road as one of five key themes that people should understand after visiting the park, with the following locations as the most appropriate sites to interpret it: Jefferson Ave / Dixie Hwy, Crossing of Otter Creek, Huron River mouth, St. Joseph’s Parish and markers along Hull’s Trace. Other themes with possible interpretation near the HRWT corridor are “battle for supremacy” and “Tecumseh Federation.” The report can be found at this website: <https://www.nps.gov/rira/learn/management/upload/RIRA-LRIP-LR-FINAL.pdf> (link active as of 11/17/2017).

- 8. Point Mouillee State Game Area:** Located at the mouth of the Huron River, it is one of the largest freshwater marsh restoration projects in the world (4,040 acres).⁸ A Michigan Historical Marker sharing the history of the marshland is located near the headquarters. There is an access point for motorized and paddle craft, which is also utilized as an end pick-up point by local canoe/kayak rental companies. There is ample land available for possible interpretative efforts, and portions of the game area are designated wildlife viewing areas. There are miles of pathways on the dikes throughout the game area. The two-day Point Mouillee Waterfowl Festival is also held there each autumn (see: <http://www.ptemouilleewaterfowlfestival.org/>).

⁸ http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10370_62146_62150-283172--,00.html, accessed December 1, 2017.

Connecting Theme and Key Concepts

Heritage sites and stories spread along the river may not have an obvious connection to each other, so there is the potential of creating a line of unrelated interpretive “dots.” A theme can prevent this by connecting them, and in turn create a larger, more marketable cultural asset. As identified in the Inventory section in this report, Oakwoods Metropark is developing an interpretive plan for its nature center around the theme: **“The Lower Huron River – A Timeless Resource.”** It is recommended that this theme be carried over to the entire lower segment of the HRWT, as it can create a common bond for the people and stories of today with those of the past. It says the same river people are paddling on is the same one that Native Americans depended on for food, water and transportation centuries ago. It’s also the same place where Henry Ford built part of an automotive empire that helped change the world. Incorporated through conscious design elements and messaging, it can be the unifying framework for heritage on the water trail, and at the same time encourage the preservation of the corridor’s natural and cultural components. Its use by Oakwoods Metropark, an upstream anchor for this segment of the trail, will reinforce this cohesive effort and give it momentum.



This theme is also supported by four the key concepts that stakeholders would like each visitor to encounter.¹⁰ If introduced through interpretive efforts along the water trail, these “big ideas” will help convey that the Huron River is indeed a timeless resource, and promote the preservation and prosperity of the river and nearby communities for future generations.

“Big Ideas” for Trail Users

1. **Pride of Place / Downriver Pride.** For thousands of years, this place has been important to people and wildlife. The people who have lived, worked and played here span generations, from Native people to Europeans, to you. This place is special!
2. **Importance of the river’s connection to the Great Lakes.**
3. **The river’s fundamental role in early Native and European settlement and development.**
4. **Responsible stewardship of natural and cultural resources, so that future generations can enjoy this unique place. Join us!**

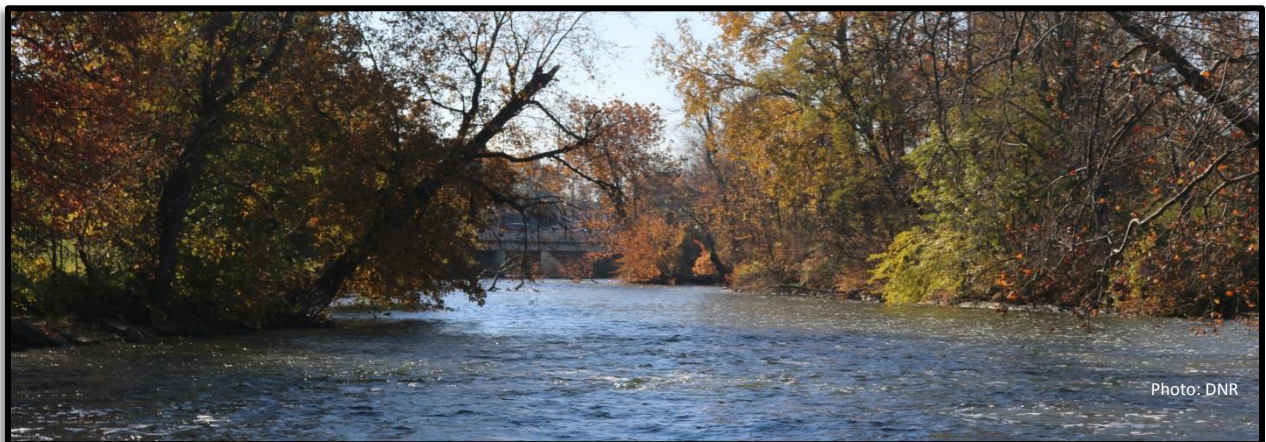
⁹ Logos, including the one on the cover, were designed by the DNR / Michigan History Center. While free to use, they are just examples of ways to incorporate the theme through design. A final decision on design elements may involve further discussion amongst stakeholders.

¹⁰ The Huron River Watershed Council facilitated stakeholder meetings in 2014 and 2015, to collaborate on a vision for the lower segment of the water trail. These discussions led to DNR facilitated meetings in 2016 and 2017, more closely focused on heritage interpretation.

Stories to Interpret

Thoughtful discussions with stakeholders, local historical societies and other experts in 2015-2016 revealed the following topics as important parts of the cultural and natural heritage of the area. These are the stories that will help reveal the authentic character of the trail corridor. They can grab the attention of people and demonstrate why this place is special. This is not to say that there are no other stories to be told, but any interpretive efforts should consider these topics.

Stories	
Flat Rock Dam and the river prior to its construction	Adam Brown's Town
Fish ladder at dam	Ship building at Gibraltar
Covered bridge, swing bridge, and other historic bridges that used to cross river	Reclamation of river delta
Hull's Trace	River excursions / steamboats
War of 1812	Duck hunting
Henry Ford's legacy and Flat Rock Metal	Flat Rock – Gibraltar Canal
Ford Mustang	River as a conduit for development throughout history
Native American presence & influence	La Salle's journey in 1680
Intl. Wildlife Refuge and Bird Migration	Bootlegging
Silica mining, industrial and extractive history	Endangered species and those now gone
Old lake plain	Native wildlife
Clamming industry	Fishery/ Sturgeon
Historic structures	



Methods of Interpretation

The needs of our audience and the major concepts we want all visitors to encounter on the HRWT serve as the core of this plan. To illustrate this, implementing any of these methods will make the trail more appealing to heritage tourists, create interactive learning experiences for school and scouting groups, and craft a unique experience that could attract paddlers from outside the region. While the water trail is not “owned” by any one entity, there are many stakeholders who have an interest in its success. Because of this, a different approach to interpretive projects is required, compared to many land-based trails which are owned or managed by a single entity. Efforts to integrate heritage with the trail may be championed by different organizations, and they all should include good communication amongst stakeholders to ensure the points of this plan are maintained. The Huron River Watershed Council can assist in facilitating this communication.

The nature of water trails also creates other challenges. Much of the land adjacent to water trails is privately held, as is the case with the HRWT. Additionally, currents and riverbank terrain make some standard interpretive methods impractical. Taking these concerns into consideration, different ways to integrate and interpret heritage on the HRWT are outlined in this section.¹¹

1. Interpretive Kiosks –

Installing interpretive signs at access points creates a valuable physical presence for the heritage story along a trail. They allow people with no prior knowledge of the heritage component to still encounter it, and through thoughtful design they can create an immersive element for the connecting theme. Include on the kiosk a map which shows where the other interpretive signs are on the river, along with the topics they cover. However, there are placement limitations for physical signs on a water trail.



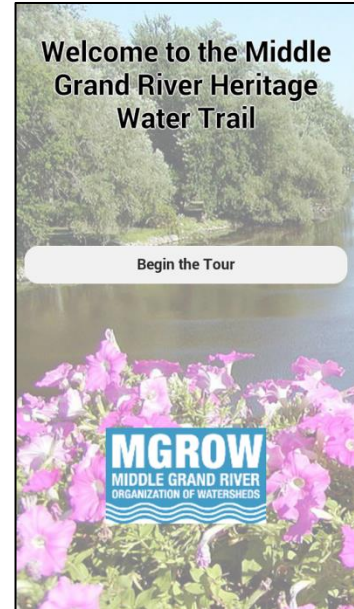
Material and design evoke the Iron Ore Heritage Trail's theme.

¹¹ While noting the unique challenges of water trails, the experience of traveling through a landscape is similar to linear land trails. Because of this, some of the examples listed in this section are from land trails. There are also relatively few examples of heritage interpretation methods on water trails to draw from.

In most cases, the only practical location for them is at access points, so the number of sites is limited and they could be spread miles apart – such as the four-mile stretch from Flat Rock to Dodge Brothers Park.

- 2. Mobile App** – Mobile apps are a popular interpretive method in this digital age, and are not subject to site limitations like physical signs. Mobile apps can provide information at any heritage point along the river through the use of GPS technology or beacons. As trail users cross a defined geographical “fence,” information pops-up on their device so they can interact with the story closest to where it happened! Mobile apps also allow for greatly accessibility to the interpretive material. With some additional programming for the app, mobile device screen readers can provide a full description for people with visual impairments, including pictures.¹²

To give one example of how this can be done, Michigan State University has developed a platform with these specifications for land and water trails. An app for the Kal-Haven Trail is currently being built, and one for the Middle Grand River Heritage Water Trail is already complete. This app can be adopted for the HRWT at a cost of approximately \$8,000. Michigan State would also charge \$900 every two years for hosting and maintaining the map service and app. It would be available through Google Play for use on Android devices. Apple iPhone is available, but deployment requires additional third party cost of \$100 year.



- 3. Art** - Art is a powerful interpretive medium as it can communicate to people on an emotional level, and it is appealing to heritage tourists. Art can be complex or simple. Because art can quickly share a message without using words, it could be effective if placed on an appropriate river bank location (not necessarily an access point). People would not need to stop or get out of their boat in order to appreciate it. An art display could also be included as an



Art display at the Iron Ore Heritage Trail, near Negaunee, MI.

¹² Approximately 60% of HRWT visitors bring their smartphones. Washtenaw County, “Huron River Water Trail, Economic Impact Analysis.”

interpretive point on a mobile app, where more information on the heritage story could be shared.

4. Guided Excursions – Guided excursions provide a fun and interactive way for people to learn about history and the natural landscape. Trained guides could lead scheduled trips or be hired for special events, but there are other approaches. The following are two examples:

- a. Narrative Scripts** – Create resources that empower any organization to facilitate a narrated paddle. Travel writer, Nina Ignaczak, prepared six easy to use interpretive scripts, each creating an interactive event that reinforces the Huron River’s importance to people throughout history. They provide tour guides with locations, questions to spur discussion, historic facts, and a script that can be read verbatim. Contact the HRWC for more information on how to use the scripts. The topics are:
 - i. Herstory: Bold Women in Michigan’s Past.
 - ii. Evening Paddle and Wine Tasting on the Huron River.
 - iii. War of 1812.
 - iv. A Photographer’s Excursion.
 - v. Henry Ford on the Huron Historical Tour.
 - vi. Wyandotte Travel Through Time Tour.

The preparation of new scripts that examine other topics should also be considered.

- b. Reenactment Excursions** – Ottawa County Parks and Recreation has organized interpretive paddles with reenactors stationed at points along the Grand River. The tour would stop at these stations and listen to volunteers dressed in period clothing sharing stories of the fur trading era. Groups also paddle a voyageur canoe, the “Gabagouache.” Similar programs could be created for the HRWT.



5. **Resources for School Groups and Scout Troops** – The following are a few examples, but other possibilities could be explored.
- a. Form partnerships with liveries and guides to provide a safe experience on the river.
 - b. Create narrative scripts for use by teachers or guides that are tailored to meet school learning goals or scouting merit badge requirements.
 - c. Develop “history trunks” that can be checked out by teachers for classroom use. These trunks could contain reproductions of historical items and clothing that students could interact with in a classroom setting.

6. **Wayfinding Signs** – Wayfinding signs serve a practical purpose by helping trail users identify their location and how far they have traveled. They can also help unify interpretive points as a single cultural asset through design that evokes the heritage theme. Some wayfinding signs are already in place on the HRWT, but this concept could be adopted for future versions.

Right- A mile marker with the authentic Manistique Line logo, installed on the Haywire Trail in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.



Below – Artwork on top of an Iron Ore Heritage Trail mile marker.



- 7. Artifacts and Reproductions** – Display sturdy artifacts or reproductions at appropriate points along the trail. Objects are the tangible touchstones that can change history from an abstract idea and bring it to life. When people are allowed to see and touch the objects of history, they are given an opportunity to challenge and enhance their understanding of the past. Artifacts or reproductions provide perspective and context in a way that other methods cannot, as well as added depth and texture - creating a more immersive heritage experience.



An oil derrick and train caboose are some of the artifacts stationed along the Kal-Haven Trail in Bloomingdale, Michigan.

- 8. Connections to other Cultural Sites, Organizations and Recreational Opportunities** – In order to expand interpretive opportunities and promote the local economy, it is important to connect trail users with other cultural sites and recreational opportunities. This can be done with connecting pathways, directional signage at access points, mobile apps, and information listed on other media platforms. The Flat Rock Historical Museum is one cultural example, but there are numerous other options outside of the river adjacent communities. An important recreational connection is the Downriver Linked Greenways trail system. Part of a larger regional and statewide land trail system, it intersects the HRWT at Huroc Park in Flat Rock. *(See Inventory section for more information).*

Interpretation Tips

- The interpretation of non-event specific topics (as they relate to people), such as the natural heritage of landscape or wildlife, should be framed in the context of all people that lived there.
- Use inspired design to evoke the heritage theme. Things like connecting pathways, stairs or signs serve a basic purpose, but how they are designed can expand their usefulness. Rizzolo Brown Studio (Ann Arbor) prepared a document on design-inspired planning along the Huron River in 2015, for the Huron River Watershed Council and RiverUp! Contact the HRWC for more information.
- Without being contrived, attempt to naturally incorporate one of the “big ideas” outlined earlier in this report, as it will reinforce the connecting theme “The Lower Huron River – A Timeless Resource.”
- Conduct sound historical research. Narratives must be accurate and verified, as an inaccurate story will cause people to distrust other interpretive efforts on the HRWT.
- Be authentic. Describe what is uncommon about the area – the opposite of a generic trail experience.
- Real people help bring a story to life and make it more relatable. When possible and appropriate, interpretive efforts should share the experiences of specific individuals or people groups from history.
- *The DNR’s Heritage Trail Coordinator can be a resource for interpretive efforts.*

APPENDIX

Outfitters Operating on Lower Reach

Motor City Canoe Rental

Flat Rock

Phone: (313) 473-9847

Website: MotorCityCanoeRental.Com

Email: MotorCityCanoeRental@gmail.com

H2E River Adventures

Flat Rock

Phone: (734) 379-9912

Website: h2eriveradventures.com/

Email: info@H2Eriveradventures.com

Riverside Kayak Connection

Wyandotte

Phone: (734) 285-2925

Website: riversidekayak.com

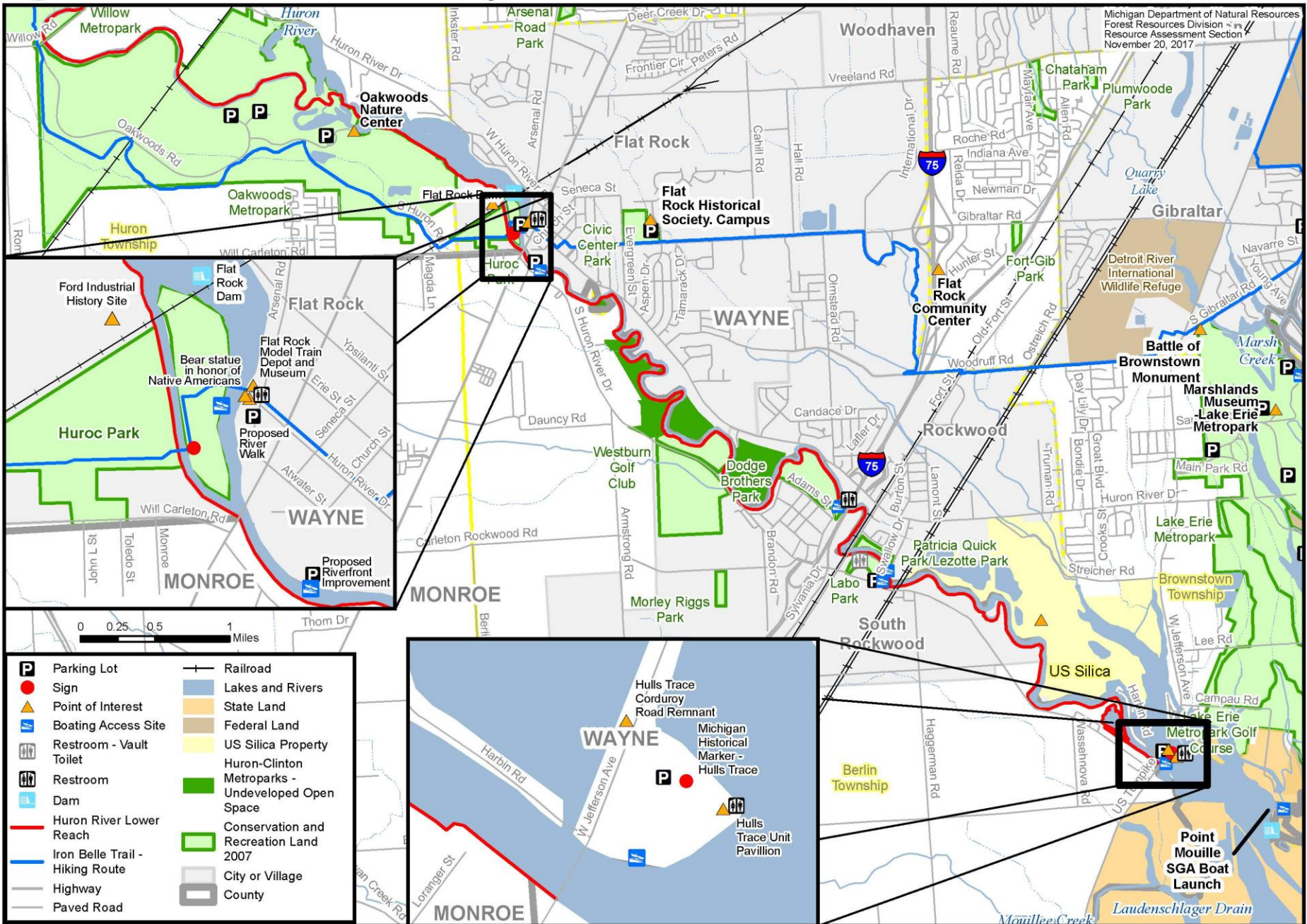
Email: info@riversidekayak.com



Huron River Lower Reach Wayne and Monroe Counties



Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Forest Resources Division
Resource Assessment Section
November 20, 2017





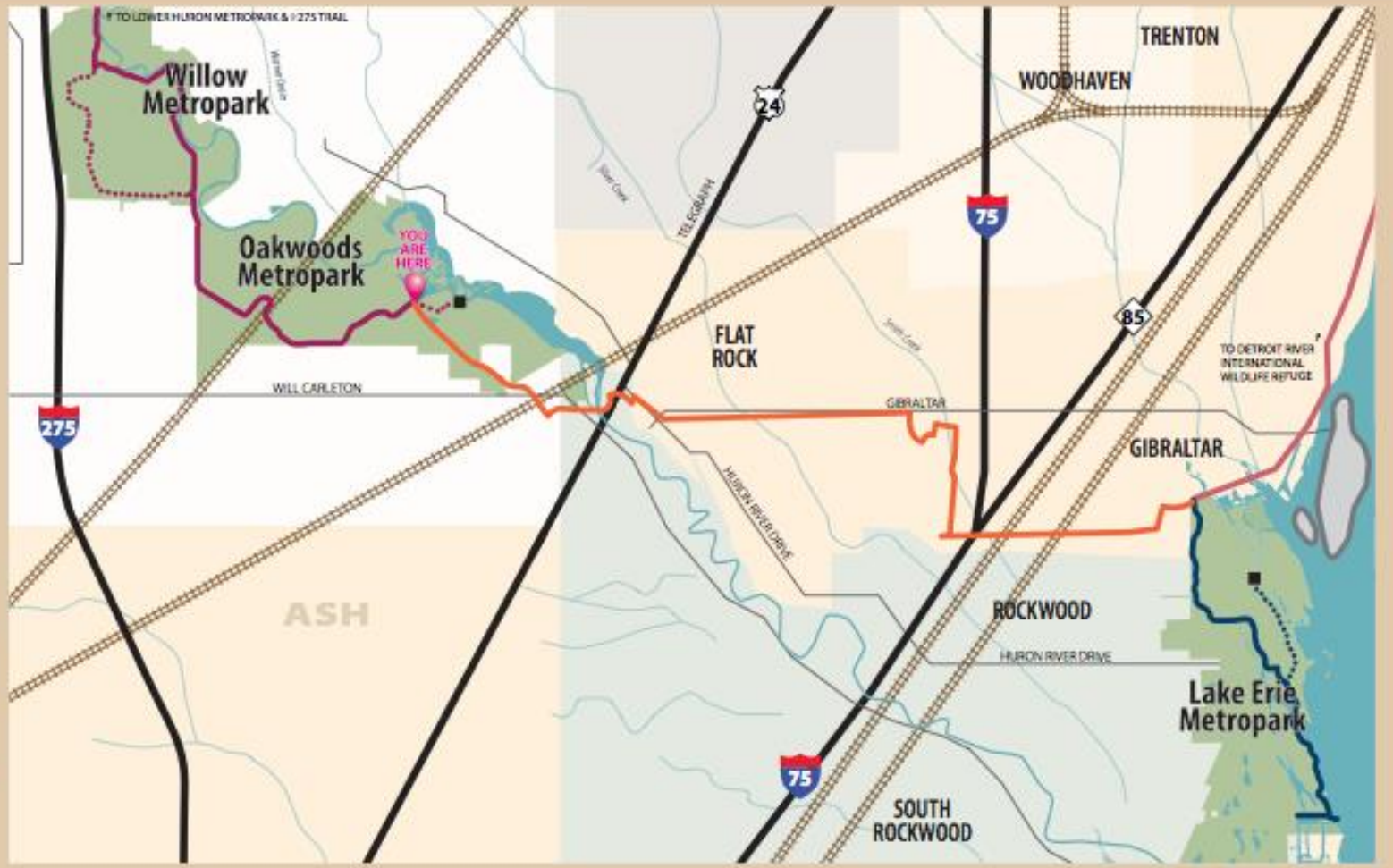
Downriver Linked Greenways

LEGEND

- Nature Center
- Oakwoods to Lower Huron Trail
13 miles
- Oakwoods to Lake Erie Trail
7 miles
- Lake Erie Trail
3 miles
- North-South Connector
3 miles



For more information please visit:
www.downrivergreenways.org
www.metroparks.com



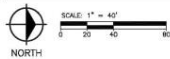
Courtesy of the Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative



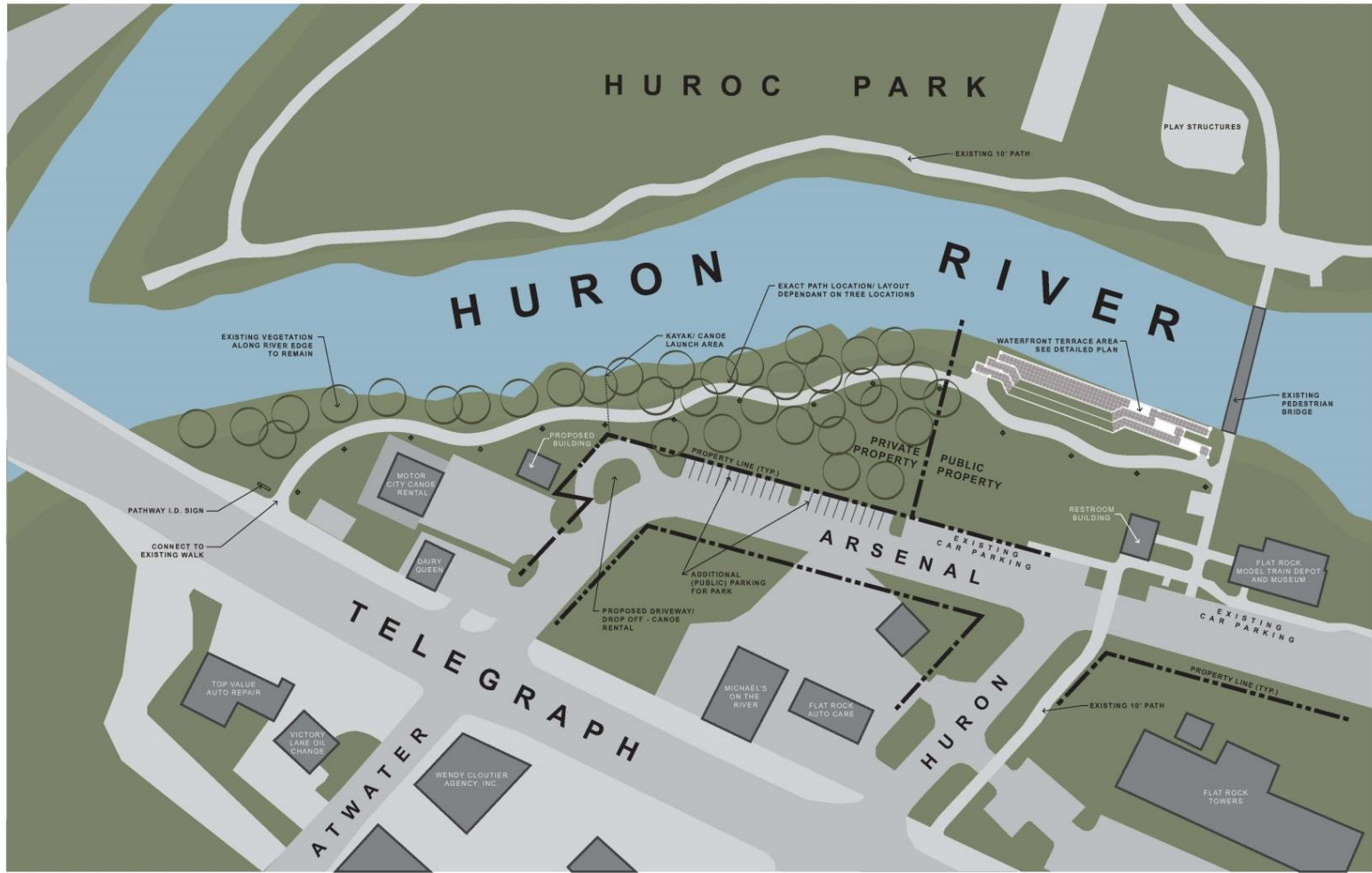
FLAT ROCK RIVER WALK

EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

8/30/2017



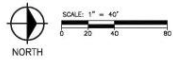
Courtesy of the City of Flat Rock



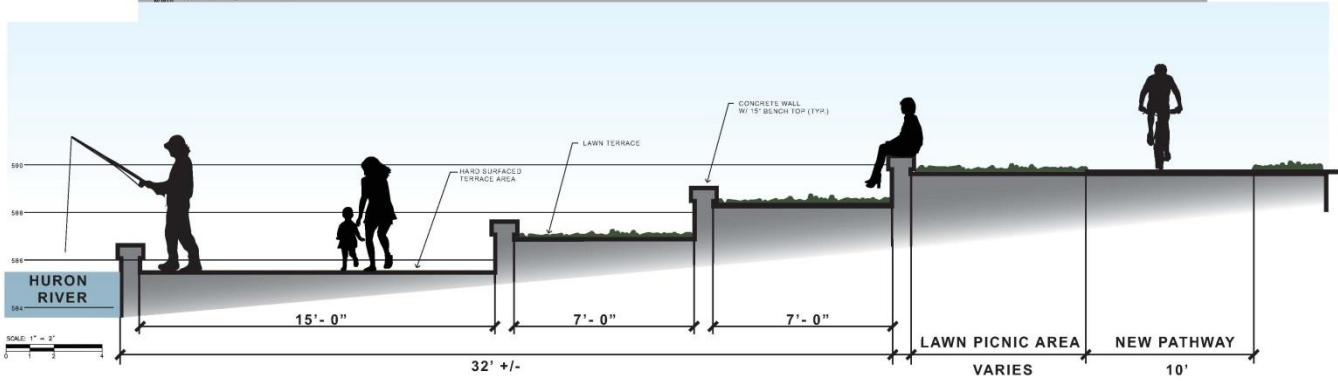
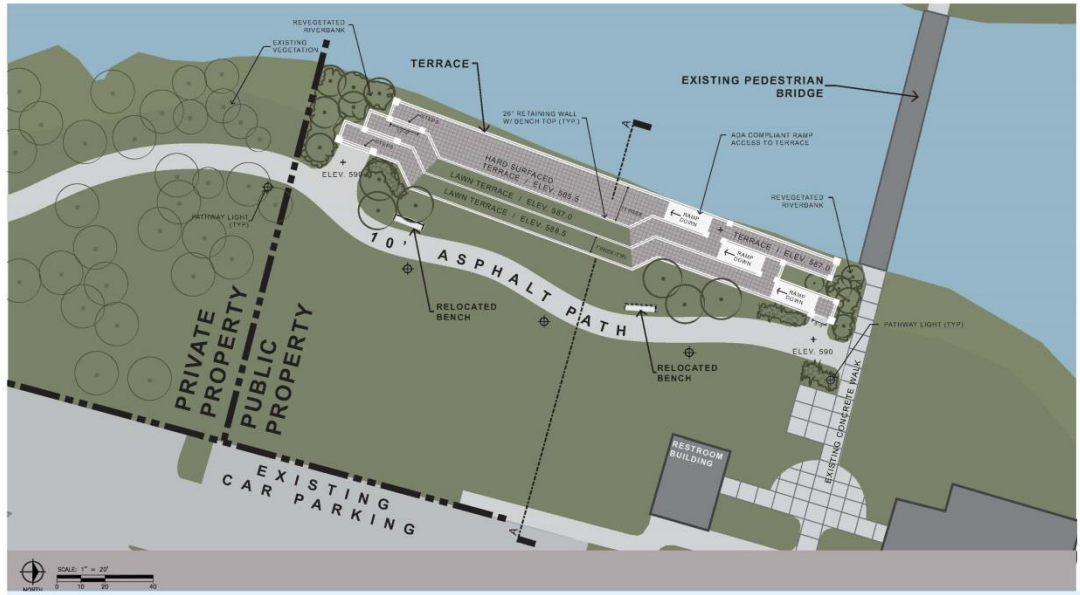
FLAT ROCK RIVER WALK

OVERALL CONCEPT PLAN

8/30/2017



Courtesy of the City of Flat Rock



FLAT ROCK RIVER WALK - SECTION A

8/30/2017



Courtesy of the City of Flat Rock



Restroom



Information Kiosk



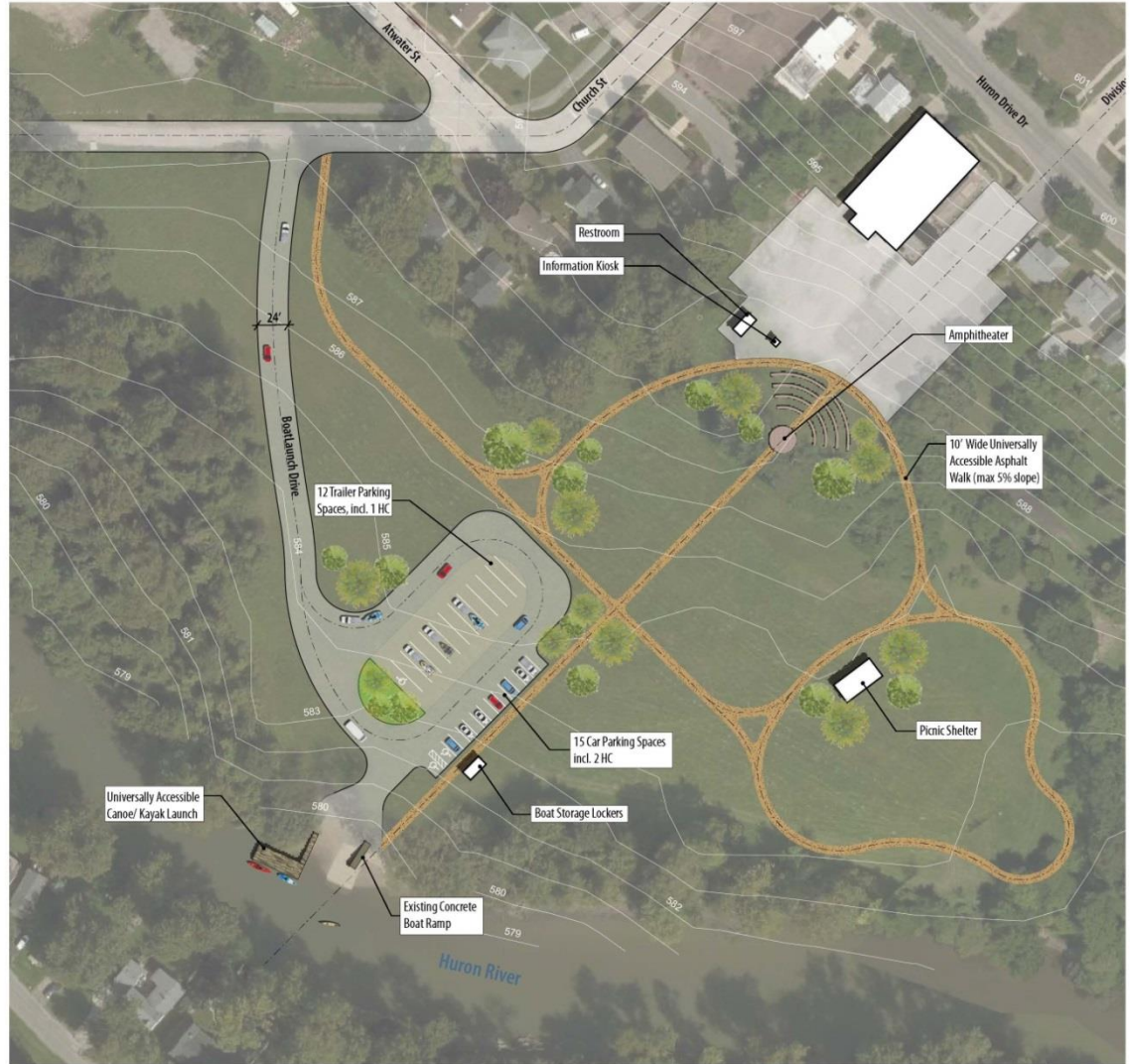
Amphitheater



Universally Accessible Canoe/ Kayak Launch



Picnic Shelter



Financial assistance for this project was provided, in part, by the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Office of the Great Lakes, Department of Environmental Quality, and is supported through a grant under the National Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, administered by the Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The statements, findings, conclusions and recommendation in this report are those of the Huron River Watershed Council and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Environmental Quality and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



FLAT ROCK RIVERFRONT
Flat Rock, MI
0 50 100 200ft

SMITHGROUP JJR

September 2016

Courtesy of the City of Flat Rock



- Shoreline stabilization
 - detail to be determined
- Varying width riparian buffer
- River access
 - canoe/kayak
 - o EZ Dock provides universal access
 - o group launch (30'x30')
 - fishing deck (15'x30')
- ADA access and path
 - 10' wide gravel path
 - construct and maintain with appropriate ADA material
 - requires grading in floodplain to meet slope requirements
- Rebuild wood stairs
- Signage (e.g. directional to river access or interpretive on shoreline stabilization, stormwater mgt, riparian buffer, universal access, etc.)
- Parking improvements
 - define edges w/ new guardrail
 - new picnic area at east end
- Maintenance access
 - gates at service drive and lift station

Labo Park Master Plan

7
June 2016

Courtesy of the Huron River Watershed Council

