



# Assembly of Rouge Communities

**OURS TO PROTECT**

*Working together, restoring the river*

**ARC Documents**

**Meeting Calendar**

**General Assembly**

**Executive Committee**

**Technical Committee**

**Public Involvement  
Committee**

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**Rouge River Wet  
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Project**

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The Rouge River Watershed Local Management Assembly (Assembly of Rouge Communities) is a voluntary organization of the 38 local municipal governments (i.e., cities, townships, and villages) and the three counties (i.e., Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw) located in part or totally within the watershed of the Rouge River located in southeast

Michigan. It was formed under an informal memorandum of agreement (MOA) in August of 2003, following nearly two years of discussion. The communities and the three counties recognized that the federal support to Wayne County for the [Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project](#) that had funded water quality restoration activities since 1992, was being substantially reduced and a commitment from the watershed communities was needed to continue the cooperative effort to restore the river and meet federal and state water discharge permit requirements.

In 2004, the Assembly of Rouge Communities endorsed the introduction of Watershed Alliance state legislation that would formally recognize certain watershed based organizations, like the Assembly of Rouge Communities, as governmental entities that would be authorized under state law to develop watershed management plans and implement joint actions to address issues identified in the plans. The Watershed Alliance legislation was passed, signed by the governor, and placed in immediate effect on January 3, 2005. The new Watershed Alliance law is Part 312 of the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act as amended by as Act No. 517, Public Acts of 2004.

## WHAT'S NEW

**[Alliance of Rouge Communities Proposed Bylaws](#)**

**[Bylaws letter to eligible ARC members from Chair Beckley](#)**

**[Watershed Alliance Legislation](#)**

**[Alliance of Rouge Communities Overview Presentation](#)**

**[2005 Invoice Mailing](#)**

The Rouge River watershed local governmental agencies are now in the process of adopting bylaws to conform to the new law authorizing watershed alliances. The bylaws under consideration closely parallel the MOA that formed the Assembly of Rouge Communities incorporating the requirements of the new Watershed Alliance statute.

## History

The Rouge River watershed, located in southeast Michigan, runs through the most densely populated and urbanized land area in the state. The watershed is approximately 438 square miles in size and includes all or part of 48 municipalities in three counties, with a population of over 1.4 million. The industrial growth of the lower Rouge River in the first half of the twentieth century and the rapid residential and commercial growth in the last half of the century in the upper portions of the watershed created serious pollution problems. Despite pollution control efforts as early as the 1940s, when the Detroit wastewater treatment facility was built to serve southeast Michigan including many of the Rouge River watershed communities, pollution problems have increased in the river. It has only been in the last decade that significant restoration of water quality has begun to be documented as a result of over one billion dollars of investments by area residents for pollution control.

In 1985, at the urging of local citizens and organizations the State of Michigan adopted the Rouge River Basin Strategy. In 1987, the International Joint Commission designated the Rouge River as one of the 43 most polluted areas in the Great Lakes. In 1989, the original Rouge River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) was completed and endorsed by a majority of the watershed communities. This original RAP called for an ambitious twenty-year plan to address pollution problems. The progress in achieving restoration has been documented in [Rouge River RAP 2004 Revision](#). In the early 1990s, the United States District Court, at the urging of local communities, facilitated a phased process for correcting combined sewer overflows (CSOs) affecting the river. In 1992, with the bipartisan assistance of the Michigan congressional delegation representing the watershed, Wayne County received the first U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant for the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project (Rouge Project).

The U.S. District Court, as part of its oversight responsibilities for pollution control on the Detroit River stemming from a court case filed in the 1970's and its role in facilitating the CSO resolution (i.e., the "Bulkley Settlement"), has maintained a continuing interest in the results of the Rouge Project. In the mid-

1990s, the U.S. District Court strongly urged the 48 local public agencies within the Rouge River watershed to adopt a more comprehensive approach to control pollution from sources other than CSOs. The U.S. District Court proposed a watershed-wide authority under the Michigan Drain Code to manage water issues within the Rouge River watershed. At the same time, the U.S. EPA was required by a Federal Court consent judgment to adopt regulations to control storm water discharges under the Federal Clean Water Act.

As an alternative to the Drain Code authority proposed by the U.S. District Court, and to comply with the pending U.S. EPA storm water regulations, a group of local agencies and communities within the Rouge River watershed proposed a watershed-based approach to the control of pollution sources related to storm water discharges. In 1997, the MDEQ adopted this unique watershed approach developed by local agencies under the Rouge Project. Subsequently, 44 public agencies with storm water responsibilities within the Rouge River watershed entered into this voluntary general storm water permit which was later endorsed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) as meeting Phase II federal storm water discharge regulation requirements that became mandatory for urbanized communities in 2003.

The watershed-based storm water permit approach, developed with assistance from the Rouge Project, has become a national model. There are now seven cooperatively developed subwatershed water management plans in place for the Rouge River. Each local agency has prepared and submitted a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Initiative Plan (SWPPI) to the MDEQ that identifies their commitments to implement their part of each of the plans. However, the federal funds from the Rouge Project that initially provided the basic monetary support for this joint effort were being substantially reduced and alternative means to continue this cooperative effort was needed as the federal funding was being phased down.

A small drafting committee, representing watershed communities and the three counties appointed in 1991, was encouraged to develop the framework for a new watershed organization that could continue to support collaborative local governmental efforts to restore the water quality of the Rouge River and meet federal and state water quality requirements through more effective and efficient cooperative use of limited local resources. After considering alternative watershed organization structures throughout the nation and in Michigan, the Rouge Drafting Committee recommended a transition, voluntary organization that would focus first on assisting the local governmental units in meeting the requirements of their watershed-based, storm water NPDES discharge permits.

As an interim arrangement in 2003, 38 cities, townships and villages and 3

counties within the Rouge River watershed formed a partnership to address their storm water permit requirements. After successfully operating since August of 2003 under a [Memorandum of Agreement](#) establishing the Rouge River Watershed Assembly of Local Governments (hereinafter, Assembly), the Rouge River watershed communities supported the passage of state legislation that would authorize local governments to form watershed alliances. That legislation, Public Act 517 of the Public Laws of 2004, (herein after Watershed Alliance legislation), was signed by the governor on January 3, 2005 with immediate effect.

## Operational Funds and Purpose

The goal was to raise approximately \$300,000 from communities in each of the two years covered by the interim agreement that would be matched with an equal amount of federal dollars. The total budget for the Rouge Assembly during 2003 and 2004 is approximately 1.2 million dollars, which was used to fund: 1) watershed-wide monitoring; 2) sampling data analyses and reports; 3) the coordination of public education and involvement activities all of which are required by local units of government under the Michigan watershed-based storm water permit. In addition, the funds were used to provide technical guidance and facilitation for the Assembly, its committees and the seven Subwatershed Advisory Groups.

## Governance

The Assembly of Rouge Communities structure involves a [General Assembly](#) that meets twice a year where any member can require that issues be decided based upon a of voting shares with the communities having 8875% of the voting shares proportional to their individual monetary assessments, and the three counties dividing the remaining 1225% based upon their respective population within the watershed. Annually the full Rouge Assembly elects [three officers](#) (i.e., Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer) from among its community members. The three officers, representatives of the three counties, and elected representatives from the seven subwatershed groups comprise the Rouge Assembly [Executive Committee](#) that oversees the operations of the Assembly between the semiannual meetings of the full Assembly. In addition, each of the officers chairs a one of three standing committees (i.e., [Finance](#), [Public Involvement and Education](#), [Technical](#)). Two special committees (i.e., [Organization](#) and [Membership](#)) were established to examine and recommend organizational changes including potential legal status, and broadening

membership to include other public agencies within the watershed.

## Monitoring Progress

As of December 2004, [38 communities plus the three counties](#) have signed the Memorandum of Agreement and have paid their 2003 and 2004 assessments. Only two local communities with limited areas within the watershed have declined to participate. There have been numerous meetings of all Committees, the Executive Committee, and the full Rouge River Local Management Assembly. A new section of the Rouge Project website, <http://www.rougeriver.com/>, serves as the primary tool for disseminating information about the Rouge Assembly. This web site is intended to provide information to all members on the status of activities and actions, and to provide interested citizens and organizations the ability to monitor progress of the Assembly of Rouge Communities and identify meetings they may like to attend.

Accomplishments of the Assembly of Rouge Communities include:

- Development and implementation of 7 subwatershed management plans that have established state and national models;
- Continued operation of 7 Subwatershed Advisory Groups;
- Shared materials/information/ideas among members that have reduced the cost and increased the effectiveness of pollution control efforts;
- Reduced storm water permit costs through tools such as templates for required reports and plans and activities such as shared development of informational and educational materials
- Extensive cooperative river monitoring to determine the effectiveness of various pollution control activities (the river monitoring program is the most extensive in the state and perhaps one of the most extensive in the nation);
- Completed the third comprehensive survey of watershed residents to evaluate the effectiveness of public information and education efforts;
- Workshops for elected and appointed officials;
- Training for agency employees on required illicit connection inspections;
- Extensive advocacy for members including support for passage of Watershed Alliance Law and work with MDEQ to improve the

efficiency of meeting permit requirements and increasing the effectiveness of storm water discharge permit requirements.

- Addressed the concerns of the U.S. District Court that once held as many as four hearings a year and has not called a hearing in nearly two years;
- Documented measurable improvements in the Rouge River and restoration of beneficial uses.

## **Transition to the Alliance of Rouge Communities**

Thirty-eight cities, villages and townships and three counties signed an August 15, 2003, Memorandum of Agreement (herein after, MOA) establishing the Rouge River Watershed Assembly of Local Governments (hereinafter, Assembly). The 2005 Budget, the officers, policies, procedures and assessments to members adopted under the August 15, 2003 MOA will remain in effect until the formal establishment of the ARC under the proposed attached Bylaws. The Officers elected for the 2005 calendar year under the August 15, 2003, MOA formally noticed all communities, counties and public agencies eligible for membership in the Alliance of Rouge Communities of an organizational meeting hosted by Canton Township on February 22, 2005. At this first meeting, the signatories to the August 15, 2003, MOA determined that there was broad interest in forming a permanent Rouge River watershed organization under the new Watershed Alliance legislation.

A transition committee composed of members of the Assembly began drafting the bylaws required under the new law to form an Alliance of Rouge Communities under the new statute. A draft set of bylaws was presented to and modified by the Executive Committee of the Assembly at its April 20, 2005, meeting in Farmington Hills and subsequently provided all prospective members of the proposed Alliance. At the meeting of the full membership of the Assembly the bylaws were formally accepted as proposed at the meeting, with only one additional article to be prepared concerning indemnification of officers and other members for activities conducted on behalf of the Alliance.

The Assembly of Rouge Communities are expected to adopt a new set of bylaws to form the Alliance of Rouge Communities by September of 2005, at which time the responsibilities of the informal Assembly of Rouge Communities will be transferred to the new, statutorily recognized Alliance of Rouge Communities. The new Alliance may included additional members including communities within the watershed but not now members of the Assembly, the Wayne County Airport Authority, public educational institutions, and other public agencies within the watershed that have water management

responsibilities. The Alliance will be created when at least twenty local public agencies adopt the new bylaws.

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Please address all comments and suggestions about the contents of this Web page to [rougeweb@co.wayne.mi.us](mailto:rougeweb@co.wayne.mi.us).

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