

# Congressman John Dingell tours his Detroit River

## Wildlife refuge is a labor of love

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TRENTON, Mich. — The boat carrying the U.S. House of Representatives' longest-serving member glided across the Detroit River yesterday morning, dodging walleye fishermen, freighters, and sand bars.

If you ask 78-year-old John Dingell (D., Dearborn) where he'd rather be, on the water dressed in a flannel shirt, sport vest, khakis, hounds-tooth hat and boots or planted behind his Washington desk — well, there was no need to ask at all.

Despite a cool spring breeze that had a number of his guests bundled in winter gear, Mr. Dingell's shirt was open at the neck, and he rarely stopped talking and smiling during the three-hour journey from Trenton's Elizabeth Park Marina to the northwest corner of Lake Erie and back.

Mr. Dingell was joined by Bruce Manny, a fishery biologist, and Greg Kennedy, a marine biologist, both with the U.S. Geological Survey in Ann Arbor, for a tour of one of the congressman's most prized accomplishments — the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

In 2001, President Bush signed legislation establishing the refuge that stretches from the mouth of the Detroit River to Lake Erie in Monroe County. Mr. Dingell, a lifelong outdoorsman and environmentalist and the bill's initiator, teamed with U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D., Toledo) to get legislation passed last year extending the Ottawa Wildlife Refuge near Port Clinton west along the Ohio Lake Erie coastline toward Monroe County. Eventually, Mr. Dingell and Miss Kaptur hope, the two areas will be joined in a seamless wildlife habitat.

The refuge is unique. Most of the land is privately owned and developed — only three percent of the Detroit River stretch is marsh and wetlands — but through donations, lease agreements, and purchases the Detroit refuge has grown to 700 acres.

Mr. Dingell hopes to add more acreage and establish a refuge office and staff in the umbug Marsh area. Eventually, he envisions student biologists earning credits while phy-

U.S. Rep. John Dingell recalls his boyhood days fishing and hunting on the Detroit River.

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Dingell to hold meeting in Bedford Township. Page 2

ing the marshes and wetlands, establishment of hiking trails, and a citizens group formed to keep the refuge growing and protected.

One problem, though.

"We have budget constraints," Mr. Dingell said. "Getting money is very difficult."

Money was not so much on his mind yesterday, as the boat, driven by Mr. Kennedy, made its way down the river. As they are in the Maumee River this time of year, walleye fishermen were boat-to-boat at the mouth of the Detroit, where Mr. Manny said about 10 million walleye migrate each spring.

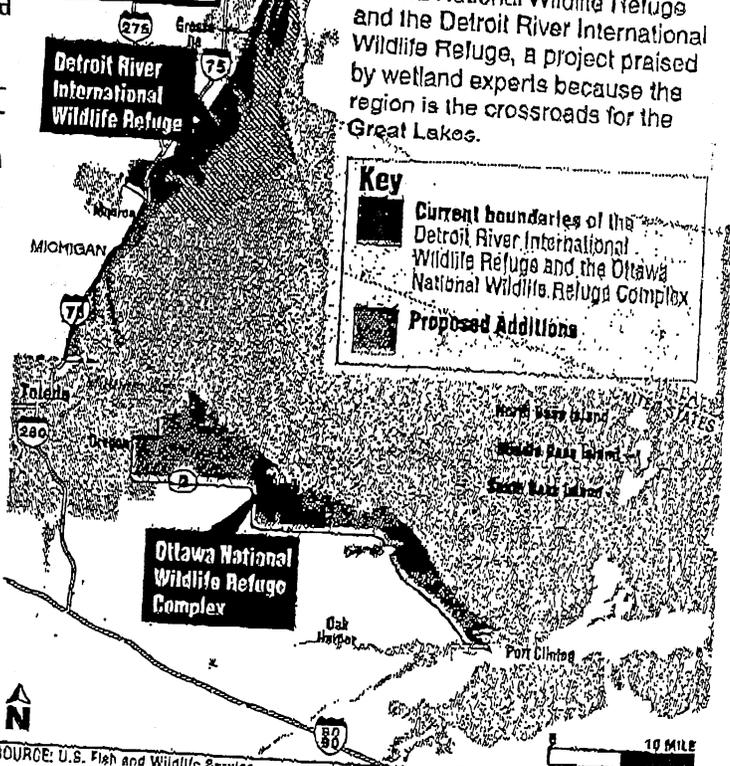
Across the way sat the 460-acre Humbug Marsh, the refuge's largest nonpopulated wetland, where hundreds of birds migrate each fall.

"This is what the whole Detroit River used to look like," Mr. Manny said.

Mr. Dingell, who grew up in West Detroit and began duck hunting and luring for walleyes on the Detroit with his father when he was barely school-age, recalled a different river — one that was polluted and lifeless.

"There were no state or federal environmental regulations [in those days]. Everyone was dumping everything into the river," said Mr. Dingell, recalling that the bottom of his boat used to be covered with oil scum after each journey.

His father, John Dingell, Sr., who served 23 years in the seat John, Jr., has held for nearly 50 years, was one of the area's first conservationists, according to his son.



SOURCE: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

BLADE GRAPHIC

## 'JEWELS' IN A 'NECKLACE'

Officials hope to have an ecological marriage along the western Lake Erie shoreline by expanding the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, a project praised by wetland experts because the region is the crossroads for the Great Lakes.

**Key**  
 ■ Current boundaries of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
 ■ Proposed Additions

As morning turned to afternoon, the congressman told stories of his early days on the river as a sneak hunter — an adventurous form of duck hunting that sometimes required the deployment of up to 100 decoys. Mr. Dingell also demonstrated his knowledge of birdlife with a brief discourse on snow geese, a fowl that migrates from western Siberia to the Texas gulf every year.

The boat passed vacant Sugar

Island, home to the river's finest beach, spurring a discussion of battles yet to be won. Its owner wants to build a bridge and develop the island with multimillion dollar homes. Mr. Dingell would like to see it remain in its present state and become a part of the refuge.

But that battle, he said, is for another day.

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