

New Rouge council chief has scientific savvy

By Teri Banas
staff writer

Bruce Monson, who isn't in the habit of checking his daily horoscope, did so one day two weeks ago to learn he was in "for a sudden career change."

Coincidentally, that was the day he landed the job as executive director of the Rouge River Watershed Council. The council, based in Livonia, is charged with overseeing the water management and environmental concerns of the 125-mile river which runs through Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw counties.

Arriving from Minnesota, where he worked as an environmental researcher, Monson soon realized it would be no lightweight assignment.

The Rouge River, according to the state and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is the dirtiest river in Michigan and an international pollution threat.

MONSON replaces Karen Gottlieb, who has joined the newly-created Michigan Office of the Great Lakes.

"Bruce is arriving at a good time, particularly because this is when the state Water Resources Commission is drafting its Remedial Action Plan for the Rouge," said Gottlieb of the cleanup that's shaping up. "It's important that we have someone who can critique that scientific effort."



'I was doing biology research, but began realizing that was not going to have a big impact on society. I started gravitating more to applied aspects.'

—Bruce Monson
executive director,
Rouge Council



'The toxic load of the Rouge River impacts on the Great Lakes. And this concern extends internationally, between the United States and Canada.'

—Karen Gottlieb
outgoing director,
Rouge Council

With a master's degree in aquatic biology, Monson, 30, is attending the University of Michigan for a second master's in water resource management. He brings to the part-time Rouge post impressive credentials.

BEFORE LEAVING Minnesota, a state known for its abundance of lakes, he worked for a nationally known private foundation, the Gray Freshwater Biology Institute.

As a lakes research specialist, he studied chemical stresses on lake water, particularly the toxic levels of copper sulfate and its effects on plankton growth in Lake Minnetonka.

Earlier, he worked for a consulting firm, the Environmental Research Group, at its St. Paul, Minn. base, taking ground water and air samplings of asbestos in local schools.

As a result, he stressed: "I'm not intimidated by a lot of technical detail, especially water quality."

In addition to his employment credentials, Gottlieb said she is impressed with Monson's work as an environmental advocate.

In the early 1970s, Monson worked as a door-to-door canvasser on the Clean Water Action Project, a national push to adopt the federal Clean Water Act. Monson planned to earn a zoology

degree and open a dairy farm. But his work in limnology (the study of lakes) laboratory as an undergraduate changed that.

"I was doing biology research, but began realizing that was not going to have a big impact on society. I'm get-

ting more and more concerned about this as I get older," Monson said. "I started gravitating more to applied aspects. This job is perfect for me in that regard."

IN HIS ROUGE council role, Monson will seek funding from outside sources for the clean-up effort.

He also will act as a coordinator for the newly formed Friends of the Rouge citizens advocacy group and help organize the Rouge River Day, a recreational event planned this June to bring attention to the Rouge.

His biggest job will be coordinating local efforts in the river clean-up plan, which is being led by the state's Water Resources Commission along with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

To follow up on an idea from Gottlieb, who served as director for 18 months, Monson will organize an "Adopt a Mile of the Rouge River" program to gain support of civic and social groups.

"I'M A REAL believer in grass roots work," said Monson, who also directed

a food co-operative at one time, learning first-hand about being "politically savvy" and making decisions through committees.

Monson said he will attempt to "raise some consciousness" as well as much needed information about the river's pollution levels by asking some homeowners along the Rouge to collect daily samples of the river water. Because of jurisdictional arguments over the years, no one government agency has routinely collected this information.

He calls the work ahead a tremendous challenge because of the newly focused attention on the Rouge system.

Gottlieb will remain close to Rouge work as the newest staff member in the four-person Office of the Great Lakes.

It was Gottlieb, a resources specialist, who stressed the need before the state's Water Resources Commission to involve local participation in the Remedial Action Plan. This plan eventually will be used for other water systems across Michigan once it's enacted on the Rouge.

OU to hold career day

One hundred Oakland University graduates are helping put to rest the myth that there are no jobs for liberal arts graduates.

The alumni will return to campus March 19 to provide free advice to current students in the 7th annual Arts and Sciences Career Day in the Oakland Center.

The volunteers are in careers that range from analytical chemistry to sales, from substance abuse therapy

to marketing research. All agree that many employers are receptive to liberal arts graduates who can adapt to changing technologies and business needs.

The 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. program gives students a chance to learn from OU graduates different ways of using their degrees, how to develop a professional network, future employment trends and tips on job hunting.



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