

Rouge cleanup tab 'staggering' to Oakland

By Tim Richard and Wayne Paul staff writers

"Staggering." The word was said repeatedly as Oakland County officials got their first look at a \$900 million plan to clean the polluted Rouge River.

"That's the cost of 20 Silverdomes," said Patrick Nowak, deputy county executive, comparing the project to the Lions' football stadium in Pontiac.

Few doubt the river should be cleaned of industrial wastes. Nor did they doubt that combined sewers should be separated into sanitary sewers and storm so that the overflow in rainy seasons wouldn't dump untreated human wastes into the slow-flowing stream.

What they questioned was the ability of anyone to convince the public that heavy taxes and/or water rate increases are justified in cleaning it up.

"I HAVEN'T had anybody tell me they're concerned," said Lawrence Pernick, D-Southfield. "There are lots of lakes for fishing. And the Rouge isn't a source of water supply."

'Village' school is accredited

Children's Village school, an educational center for youths who are wards of the court, is the first special learning institution in Michigan to receive full North Central accreditation.

The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary School accredits more than 6,000 schools throughout the Midwest. Children's Village students now receive full transfer credits if they leave the Children's Village and continue with another accredited school in their home community.

"I'm very pleased Oakland County has the first accredited special learning program in the state. The Children's Village School is not only recognized, but certified for its continuing high quality," said Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

In order to maintain the standards of the accreditation association, the staff and administration of the school will continue to submit self-evaluation listings of the schools' strengths and weaknesses.

Pernick himself, however, thinks cleaning it up is a good idea despite the "staggering" cost.

"What's amazing to me is how we got to that stage over the decades," he said, citing industrial wastes and overflows from local government sewers.

"Those of us who understand public works projects know that after decades of abuse, a big price will have to be paid. But what kind of commitment is the public willing to make?"

"I'VE BEEN peripherally involved in this for about four years," said Commissioner Marilyn Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills. "When we first talked about this at SEMCOG, I heard the figure \$50 million and was staggered."

The study released Wednesday by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments placed a \$900 million

pricetag on construction work, but also said the cost could rise to \$1.8 billion if financed by bond issues.

If there were no federal or state aid, and the work were financed solely by property taxes, the tabs would be:

- Beverly Hills — \$1.2 million or 5.61 mills.
- Birmingham — \$2.7 million or 5.19 mills.
- Bloomfield Township — \$3.7 million or 3.16 mills.
- Farmington — \$4.9 million or 27.88 mills.
- Farmington Hills — \$2.1 million or 1.67 mills.
- Franklin Village — \$272,000 or 3.53 mills.
- Lathrup Village — \$150,000 or 2.06 mills.
- Southfield — \$2.1 million or 1.3 mills.
- Troy — \$328,000 or 0.18 mills.

• West Bloomfield Township — \$829,000 or 0.84 mills.

"It places a disproportionate burden on some of the people," said Gosling. "It's going to be difficult to sell to people who don't live near the river and don't see the problem."

"Dig a new river," said Commissioner R. William Caddell, R-Walled Lake, chairman of the county board's finance committee. "It's a high price. We're swimming upstream."

SEMCOG ISN'T telling the 48 affected communities how the finance the work, though the seven-county regional planning agency is willing to help seek federal aid.

"We wanted to tell communities what needed to be done and leave it to them to find a cost-effective way of doing it," said Chuck Hersey, SEMCOG environmental planning consultant.

SEMCOG suggests a giant drainage district including all communities in the Rouge watershed.

The district, Hersey said, could finance local projects through special assessments, tax increases or increased water bills.

SEMCOG reports local charges could be massive without state and federal grant money.

SEMCOG EXPECTS a \$133 million construction grant from the federal government, though Congress is considering eliminating the program under which the money was promised. If the grant money is obtained, as SEMCOG officials expect, it would be used for the Detroit Pump Station, North Huron-Rouge Valley Interceptor, Evergreen-Farmington district improvements and the Hamilton relief outlet.

SEMCOG officials also said they would be campaigning for a new state revolving loan fund, seeded by a final, \$365 federal grant and \$75 million in matching state money. While the new program wouldn't exclusively be used for the Rouge, it would provide major assistance to Rouge communities, SEMCOG officials said.

SEMCOG also advocates increasing state assistance for local projects from its current 20 percent level.

In addition, SEMCOG recommends a coordinated effort among local municipalities in pursuing low-interest construction loans from grant program sources.

Costs for cleaning up combined sewer overflows would be assigned to communities responsible for the overflows, though at least \$360 million in state and federal grants would also be sought.

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