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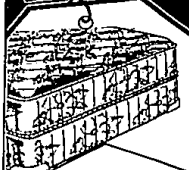
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Project highlights value of rivers

The City of Southfield and the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation (MWHF) have dedicated a unique demonstration project, which may show how to inexpensively raise the recreational value of many southern Michigan's tarnished rivers.

In the treated stretch, which extends from the Telegraph Road bridge to Hooper Avenue upstream, triangular "wing deflectors" were built with broken concrete and stone to direct the river's current against reinforced banks. This is resulting in decreased bank erosion, areas of faster current and deeper pools.

The river actually is "going to

work," scouring accumulated sediment from targeted stretches and depositing it as designed sand and gravel bars. In the new current-swept stretches, workers have placed clumps of rocks to provide additional fish microhabitats.

THE PROJECT was designed to test the idea that simple stream improvement structures could improve habitat for fish in urban areas and even in rivers that are considered polluted. Post-project fish surveys and other investigations, which will begin next summer, will be needed before related questions are fully answered. Thus far, the project has resulted in the physical changes its

planners anticipated and there are early indications that the river's biological community is responding favorably.

In many areas where the deepest water was less than a foot during low flows, the river now has current-swept pools three feet or more in depth. Clean gravel has been exposed where sediment up to two feet deep formerly covered the rocky bottom. Overall, the current has been greatly speeded, as the width of the stream at low flows has been decreased.

The river's appearance also has been greatly improved by the in-stream work and by brush clearing

and seeding of certain bank segments.

Even as the work progressed, crew members noticed that the rocky structures they installed were colonized quickly by small fish and crayfish. Two rainbow trout, "holdovers" stocked in the spring for the city's annual "Trout Derby," were caught in mid-summer of last year.

"URBAN RIVERS are the most overlooked, yet most valuable assets we own," William Walenczak, Southfield's parks and recreation director, said. "We believe the Rouge River offers great potential to improve the aesthetic and recreational lives of

our citizens."

Tom Anderson, Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation board chairman and a member of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission, also chairs the Rouge River Basin Executive Steering Committee.

"This project demonstrates the value of cooperative efforts between government and the private sector to restore fish and wildlife habitat for public benefit," Anderson said.

The MWHF is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to mobilizing private-sector resources to benefit fish and wildlife.

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