

POINTS OF VIEW

Rouge River reveals nature's beauty close to home.

Where can you go to see deer, salmon and the largest cottonwood tree in Michigan? Up North, right? Wrong. Try the Lower Rouge River, which runs through western Wayne County communities.

Hard to believe, you say? Well, it's true that the Rouge has had its share of ups and downs through the years. But what has impressed me has been its ability to fight back, to stay alive. Given the chance to heal, the Rouge always seemed to recover enough for wildlife to reappear. And there's more good news. There are many local organizations and schools pitching in to help the Rouge.

As for myself, I got "involved" around 1993 when I joined the Friends of the Rouge. I wanted to know how, as a sixth-grade teacher, I could help the Rouge rebound. I got a lot of good ideas from the DNR (now

DEQ) River Rouge Action Plan coordinator and the Friends of the Rouge. Soon afterwards, I found myself setting up educational projects to help the Rouge and promote scientific literacy.

Here is a list of popular projects that I've tried and would recommend: Wood Duck nesting boxes - With the destruction of valuable nesting habitat, Wood Ducks have all but disappeared from our area. Building and installing nesting boxes along the Rouge River will help re-establish these beautiful ducks.

Bat houses - Bats are the primary predators of night-flying insects and play a key role in the balance of nature. They eat mass quantities of mosquitoes and other yard pests. Bat houses come in different shapes and they are fairly simple to construct. Depending on the size of the house you build, you could attract and house



FRANK WALKER

between 50-200 bats per house.

Storm drain stenciling - This is another very worthwhile project to warm folks not to pour chemicals and eaters down area storm drains. Paint, stencils and other needed supplies can be obtained locally from Friends of the Rouge. Remember, contact local municipalities for permission to spray paint storm drains first. Some cities won't allow this project and others restrict spray paint possession by

minors.

Water quality monitoring - This is really the core of the Rouge River Education Project locally. High school, middle school and elementary school students perform water quality tests on water samples drawn from the Rouge River. Data is collected and entered into a computer network called Econet and is shared worldwide. Water testing, stream surveys and examining aquatic invertebrate life are the key components here. However, some individuals and groups in our area choose to test their ponds and waterways independently, or be unaffiliated with any one large environmental group.

I hope that I've stirred you to act now to save the Rouge River. Sure, it will take a lot more than a one-day cleanup effort or a one-week unit in the classroom on river ecology. It will take time, motivation and commit-

ment. It involves getting down to the river to see, smell and hear, first-hand, the river reaching out to you.

Here are some organizations that can help you get started: Friends of the Rouge, (313) 961-4050; Friends of the Rouge Education Project, (313) 961-4098; Bat Conservation International, (512) 327-9721; Wayne County Department of Environment, Rouge Program Office, (313) 961-0700; WCRESA Environmental Education Center, (313) 334-1300; and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Rouge River Remedial Action Plan, (313) 953-1441.

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Lack of education hurts prisoners - and the rest of us

I thought I heard the legislator right when I quoted him as saying 62 percent of Michigan parolees are back in prison in two to four years.

Not so, said the Department of Corrections PR guy, who proceeded to give me two books full of data.

"About 11 percent of all parolees come back to prison with a new crime while on parole," said Chapter D on Parole.

"An additional 15 percent are returned as a result of technical parole violations in which at-risk behavior is identified before new criminal activity occurs. These prisoners may be returned to prison to serve up to their unexpired maximum sentence."

So the good news is that 74 percent don't come back.

After Leslie Allen Williams did four serial killings of teen girls, the Legislature changed the parole system. Civil servants were out. They were replaced by appointees of the director,

Ken McGinnis, who is in turn an Engler appointee. Their orientation is law enforcement. Not many bleeding heart social workers there.

"The change in law has resulted in fewer parolees, especially for sex offenders," said DOC's book.

I recently visited HASTA, a group of Hispanic inmates in the lowest-level security prison in Jackson.

"Why do you do that?" colleagues ask me.

Because these guys are going to be out soon. The HASTA president is due out next year.

We tend to think of prison inmates as McConnell Adamson, Anita Coomers and Leslie Williams - lifers without hope of parole. Wrong. The average minimum sentence is seven years, one month.

More than 90 percent will be back out. My conservative, self-defense instincts tell me it's wise to teach them good lessons about the law and get them some job skills.



TIM RICHARD

In a Law Day column, I blistered McGinnis for saying, when asked if inmates had any inherent constitutional property rights, "None at all." That's a terrible lesson to teach guys in prison. It's also wrong, given the number of expensive class-action lawsuits against the Corrections Department the state has settled or is fighting.

One inmate complained, in Spanish, there is no English as a Second Language program. He got in trouble because the rules are only in English,

which he couldn't read.

DOC's Chapter L confirms it. There is no ESL listing.

Inmates say vocational training is a joke; rather, they greet the subject with derisive guffaws.

DOC's Chapter L confirms it. Just 11,500 of the 42,000 inmates get any kind of education - high school, GED, college or vocational.

"Vocational offerings in the prisons include: auto body repair, auto mechanics, building trades, electronics, food management, graphics and printing, horticulture, machine tool operation, meat cutting, business technology, small engine repair, television production, welding, and dental lab technology," says DOC.

DOC is careful not to say how many get voc training.

DOC also reveals that "College programming paid for by the state is provided only in prisons under court order to offer such classes."

Do the inmates need education?

DOC's Chapter F, Profile of Michigan Prisoners, says only about 20 percent have a high school education. Their occupations at time of arrest: 37.6 percent had "none," 51.4 percent were "unskilled." That means 89 percent were doing grunt work. You can't make it in a global economy on grunt work. Ask liberals. Ask conservatives. Ask unionists. Ask bosses.

Prison industries? Chapter K confirms that just 2,500, or 6 percent, work at anything. They make metal furniture, road signs, shoes, corrugated cartons, three-ring binders ...

"In some states, prisoners are paid the prevailing wage," says Chapter K. Not Michigan State Industries, which pays an average of \$5.90 a day.

With that kind of preparation for the outside world, it's a wonder the recidivism rate really isn't 62 percent.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

Improve confirmation process

The newspaper was brief: "The Senate confirmed University of Michigan economics professor Edward Gramlich to the Federal Reserve Board. President Clinton's other nominee, Roger Ferguson Jr., a New York banking consultant, was also confirmed. The nominations had been held up when a group of senators unhappy with the Fed insisted on using the nominations as a forum to criticize and debate the central bank's policies."

This is the story of how my friend Ned Gramlich finally was confirmed as a Governor of the Federal Reserve Board, one of the most influential economics positions in this country. It is a cautionary tale that explains much of why the government of our nation is in such disarray.

Gramlich has had a truly distinguished career in academic and in public service. He rose through the ranks of the Economics Department at U-M, eventually becoming chair and, later, dean of the newly formed School of Public Policy. He did research on monetary policy at the Fed in the late 1960s and later, in 1986-87, he was deputy director and then acting director of the Congressional Budget Office.

In 1994, he was appointed chair of the national Advisory Commission on Social Security. For two years, he applied all of his diligence and patients trying to bring agreement from his often fractious colleagues on how to reform the Social Security system. It was this work, I assume, that led the White House to sound him out this past February about his interest in an appointment to the Federal Reserve Board.

He was a trial balloon article in the Wall Street Journal emerged in April. Nearly three months later, he was formally nominated by President Clinton.

The process of clearance for any nominee to high government office is enough to deter even the most thick-skinned.

Gramlich had to reveal all his financial assets and all outside sources of income since he was 21. (How many of us keep our tax returns for more than 10 years?) He had to prove that he and his wife, Ruth, had paid Social Security tax on their cleaning lady's wages. He had to detail all of his trips abroad since he was 21. He was finger printed. When the FBI came to interview the neighbors, they spent a full hour talking to a woman who hardly knew the Gramlich family.

But Gramlich survived, and in September, six months after his name first surfaced publicly, it was forwarded to the Senate Banking Committee. The committee held confirmation hearings and reported the nomination to the full Senate on Oct. 7.

At that point, in accordance with an arcane senatorial custom authorized nowhere in the Constitution nor the law, Gramlich's nomination



PHILIP POWER

was put on hold by one senator, Tom Harkin of Iowa, who disagreed with the ways the Federal Reserve manages monetary policy.

Harkin had no personal, political or policy dispute with Gramlich. But he didn't like the way the Fed manages the money supply and interest rates, and so he used "senatorial courtesy" to hold the nomination hostage.

Harkin was not unique. While Gramlich's nomination was languishing this fall in the Senate, some 45 other nominations to senior positions in our government were also put on hold by individual senators. Most were so gutless as to remain anonymous while toying with the lives of distinguished Americans willing to serve their country.

Gramlich was concerned. The Senate wanted to finish its business and adjourn, which might have put the whole process back to after New Year and required an entire new nomination process.

But Harkin's price was modest. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott gave him 90 minutes in front of the C-SPAN cameras to discuss about interest rates and the money supply. Gramlich was confirmed as a Governor of the Federal Reserve on Oct. 31. The process had consumed nine months.

During those nine months, Ned Gramlich and his family lived in limbo.

Until he was finally confirmed, the Gramlich family could not sell their house in Ann Arbor and buy an apartment in Washington. They couldn't make definite arrangements for packing and moving. Ruth Gramlich, who had a senior management job at Ford, couldn't talk concretely with her boss about her future.

No sane company would put prospective senior managers through what Ned Gramlich and his family had to go through in order to get confirmed. That's why, increasingly, able people are rejecting out of hand spending part of their lives serving their country.

Surely, there has to be a better way.

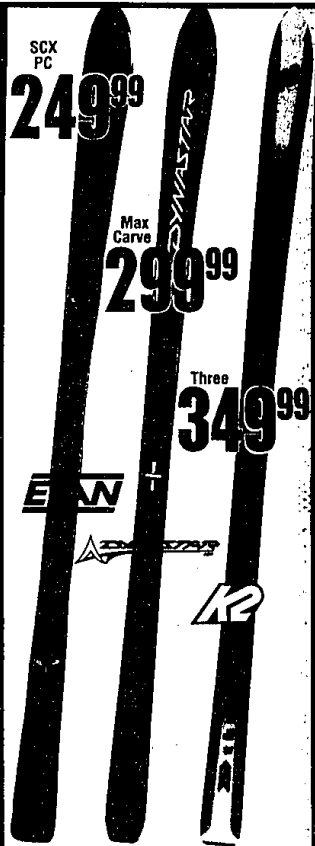
Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

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