

ROUGE

FROM PAGE A1

Rouge River. Round green and blue decals replaced many of the previously spray-painted warnings.

"They're more attractive, they last a lifetime (and) they're fairly easy to put down," explained Erika Hidalgo, a Canton staff engineer who drove one of two shuttles transporting decal-placers in the township.

Volunteers applied approximately 200 decals to storm drain catch basins near the Lower Rouge Parkway, cleaning litter along the way.

And in many sites, there was garbage galore. "I don't understand why people do this," said Erin Hitchcock, working with her husband, Joshua, to drag a soggy, room-sized piece of carpeting from the river in Redford Township. "They just dump this stuff, and in the water of all places."

Another couple helped to remove dozens of tires strewn around a swampy area in Canton.

"I just think some idiot didn't want to take them to the dump," said Tom Micalo, who volunteered with his wife, Janet. "It's God's country and you wanna keep it that way."

The day's trash tally also included shopping carts, bicycles, sofas, hot tub covers and even a portable latrine. At Heritage Park in Farmington

"Two species of invasives could wipe out a hundred other species in a decade or so," Bill Craig, president of the Holliday Nature Preserve Association in Westland who aided in the removal of honeysuckle and garlic mustard from woodland areas. "Next spring we expect to see lots of wildflowers in their glory."

Bill Craig
Holliday Nature Preserve Association

Hills, goldfish dumped by well-meaning residents were discussed.

"They're not native," said Maslin Silver, a Friends of the Rouge member. "They get very big, very aggressive and they eat everything."

Once free, the goldfish often grow to more than 12 inches in length and wreak havoc on the river's ecology.

PLANTING AND EDUCATING

Controlling and removing invasive plant species was also a highlight.

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In Plymouth, 55 volunteers

worked to plant native flowers and lay down 40 cubic yards of mulch on paths near a Rouge tributary.

Educational activities included nature walks and birdhouse building in Canton and a speaker on native mollusks in Farmington Hills. Most participating in River Day expressed a desire to make a difference in their communities.

"Doing this gets them going on community service when they're young," said Farmington Hills Girl Scout leader Melinda Polk, whose teenage daughters both spent several hours in the river Saturday. "Then when something else comes up they're not afraid to get involved."

Many high school students jumped into this year's efforts.

"I don't think that enough young people are involved in the environment," said Alex Shapardania, 16, who worked in Livonia. "I wish we could do it more often."

Efforts to clean up the Rouge River are beginning to pay off.

"The habitat is coming back," said Ron Coryl, Redford Township water and sewer superintendent, who has seen coyote, deer and even a blue heron return to the area. "I see (animals) I didn't see as a kid in Redford, and we like to think that it's because the river is cleaner."

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