

Clear waters?

Cleanup plan gets lukewarm greeting

By Wayne Peal
Staff writer

A report calling for a new \$500 million bond issue to clean Michigan waterways was greeted with only lukewarm support from the man responsible for overseeing the Rouge River cleanup.

The report, sponsored by a group including a state trade organization for underground contractors, called for an end to combined sewers.

The outdated sewers — containing both storm water and raw sewage — dump at least 16 billion gallons of pollution into Michigan waterways each year, according to the Clean Water Michigan report. Roughly half that goes into the Rouge.

Clean Water Michigan includes Associated Underground Contractors Inc.

While Wayne County Public Works Director James Murray said he didn't dispute the findings, he doubt-

ed the report would have much influence.

"BECAUSE IT was commissioned by the contractors, I don't know how much influence it's going to have," Murray said.

Oakland County Public Works Director Milton Handorf was not familiar with the report. However, he said findings must be evaluated on cost effectiveness.

"It would be nice to be able to tear down and start again," he said, but in the real world that's not possible.

"They should be evaluated on whether it's most cost effective to separate storm water and raw sewage and retain it or (have it) go back into the sanitary system."

Billed as the first comprehensive statewide study of combined sewer overflows, the report called for a new state bond issue to help communities build new sewer lines or re-

tention ponds to separate storm water and raw sewage.

"The recommendation is for a \$500 million bond issue, payable over 30 years," said Linda Headley, a spokeswoman for Public Sector Consultants of Lansing, which compiled the study on Clean Water Michigan's behalf.

Elimination of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) is the report's goal, Headley said.

Combined sewers, many at least a half-century old, carry both storm water and raw sewage to water treatment plants. During heavy rains, or spring thaws, the systems back up — dumping sewage into rivers and streams.

CSOs in Wayne and Oakland County have long been considered a major source of Rouge pollution. (Area sites are continued on the accompanying map.)

"We found that combined sewer overflows dump between 16-20 billion gallons of contaminated wastewater each year," Headley said. "Of that, we estimated 7.8-8 billion gallons went into the Rouge."

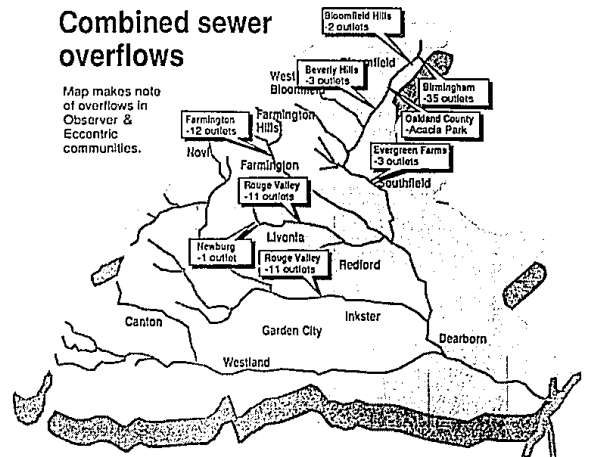
Based on that figure, Rouge pollution alone would annually fill more than 400,000 backyard swimming pools. More than 2,000 gallons of pollution is produced for every Michigan resident, according to the report.

"WE BELIEVE this is the first time there's been statewide figures like this," Headley said.

Age of the CSOs is a primary concern. In addition to the possibility of

Combined sewer overflows

Map makes note of overflows in Observer & Eccentric communities.



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Combined sewers, carrying storm water and raw sewage, dump pollutants into the Rouge River after backing up during heavy rain falls

or spring thaws. A recent report called for a \$500 million state bond issue to replace combined sewers.

cracks and leaks. Headley said the systems will soon be serving twice the number of people they were designed to serve because of population growth.

Rouge River Valley communities wouldn't be the only ones benefiting from the bond issue.

There are 568 CSOs in 70 com-

munities statewide.

Regardless of the report's impact, Murray said work is already underway to clean the Rouge.

"There's \$500 million in sewer work going on right now," he said, referring to the regional "super sewer" project involving Rouge Valley communities.

In addition, Wayne County has received \$400,000 in federal money to help eliminate CSOs.

Statewide, the Blanchard Administration also has implemented a revolving loan fund to help finance water pollution control projects.

"There's no doubt things will be done," Murray said.

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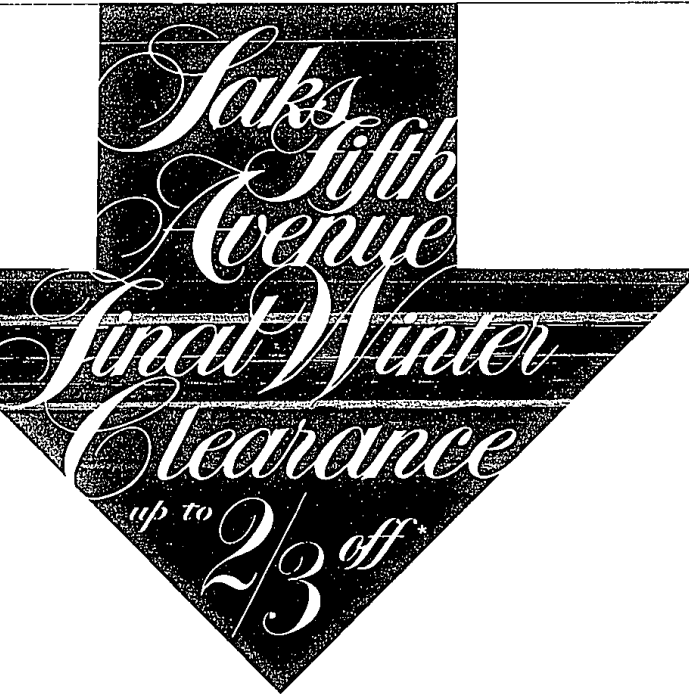
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