

Local Officials Ponder Rouge Cost

Local officials already are raising an eyebrow at a \$253 million proposal to reduce pollution and eliminate flooding of the Rouge River basin.

All 46 affected communities would have to hold public hearings because they will be asked to share the cost, based on the expected benefit.

For example, Wayne County Commissioner John J. McCann (D-Livonia) said that "with the amount of money and the cooperation of two counties needed, it doesn't seem realistic to me."

THE PLAN was financed by a \$35,000 contribution from Wayne and Oakland counties 15 months ago and was drawn up by the engineering firm of Wade, Trim & Associates of Taylor. Even the \$35,000 study stirred a controversy, particularly in the Oakland board.

The idea is that much of the Rouge's pollution and flooding are due to unified waste water and storm water sewers. When holding basins become filled during a heavy rain, the water in the basins spills out into the river.

The plan calls for a giant underground drain to take the spillover.

Two years ago, Henry ("Cap") Herrick, outgoing Wayne County drain commissioner, predicted in local speeches that such a project would cost \$250 million. He was right on the target.

BRIEFLY, THE plan calls for construction of a tunnel 18 miles long, extending from Hunter Boulevard in Birmingham to the Detroit River. This tunnel then would be fed by all the branches of the Rouge and would effect every section of Overland.

Aside from the construction of the tunnel, the plan calls for the acquisition of 791 acres of flood plain for the establishment of parks. If accomplished, there would be an almost continuous green belt from Birmingham to Dearborn.

The plan further calls for the improving of 10 bridges crossing the main channel of the Rouge and the phasing out of all septic tank systems in the drainage area and con-

structing new sewers. Construction of these sewers would be financed by the local communities and would be apart from the estimated \$253 million price tag.

THE PROPOSED tunnel would connect with the easement of the Rouge in a concrete trough south of Michigan Avenue that is now being constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers to increase the water carrying capacity.

The tunnel, a new facet of the plan, would increase in size from 15 feet to 17 feet to 35 feet and later to 45 feet in diameter as it reached the point south of Michigan.

Under the proposal a seven member commission would be named and would include the state agricultural director and three officials from each county.

One of its first tasks would be to ask the state to authorize the sale of bonds to finance the project. It has been estimated that the bond proposal would cost the taxpayers \$20.4 million a year for 50 years.

Before this is done, the public hearings would have to be held in all 46 communities which drain into the Rouge. The commission would decide

the communities' share of the cost, based upon the benefit they received from the project.

THE MOST expensive portion of the project and the one that is certain to be the most controversial, is the building of the tunnel. Not only is the initial cost high but the system would cost \$3.9 million annually to operate.

The second phase of the program, according to the report of the study, also may be headed for trouble. This is the phase calling for acquisition of 791 acres of flood land, much of it

privately owned, in Oakland County.

These acres would be developed into playlots, softball diamonds, nature trails, bike paths, tennis courts and swimming pools. This cost is estimated at \$24.4 million with an annual maintenance cost of \$80,000.

All of these projects are along the main branch, but the study advocates the expenditure of \$350,000 for studies of the eight branches and mostly the middle branch that runs from Walled Lake through Northville, Plymouth and Livonia on the way to the river.

WHILE MAKING the study, the engineers bypassed as impractical an underground retaining basin or approximately 1,100 above-ground basins. They also ruled out a proposal for the widening of the stream and the straightening of the curves, claiming such moves would interfere with the river's flood plain and the displacement of numerous homes along the way.

After learning of the report, drain officials in both Wayne and Oakland Counties ventured the opinion that it would be some time before such a

project is undertaken-if at all. The matter becomes a problem of priorities, according to Stanley B. Patterson, chief engineer of the Wayne County drain commission. He called the project "feasible," but questioned whether Wayne County would give it high priority.

In Oakland County James Pemberton, chief engineer, stated that at least three years of study are needed on the proposals—even if both counties approved of the idea.

From the start, Oakland County has been critical of the

idea, claiming that it was a ruse on the part of Wayne County to gain financial help to clean up its pollution problem.

McCann, who represents the Livonia-Plymouth-Northville area on the Wayne County Board of Commissioners, remarked, "I have read the account of the report and I still don't know just what it means. There's one way to get the job done, and that is to drain Walled Lake (which is artificial) and start all over."

Meanwhile the commissioners of both counties have taken the plan under advisement.



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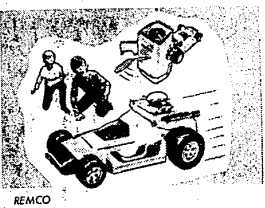
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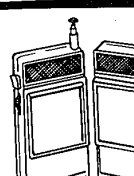
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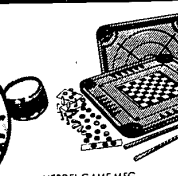
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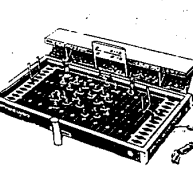
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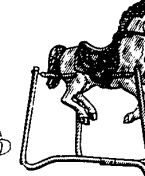
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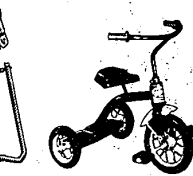
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