



NEWS RELEASE

UOFW TO HOST ANNUAL STATE OF STRAIT CONFERENCE: *MONITORING FOR SOUND MANAGEMENT*

(WINDSOR, ONTARIO, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2004) –More than 200 environmental managers, researchers, students and citizens will gather Thursday, December 2, in Ambassador Auditorium at the University of Windsor’s CAW Student Centre to share the latest information on the condition of the Detroit River, one of North America’s most important waterways.

The annual *State of the Strait Conference* is being jointly convened by a large contingent of organizations including the University of Windsor’s Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research; the Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative of Metropolitan Affairs Coalition and the Detroit River Canadian Cleanup. The groups will report on both traditional and innovative new programs being used to monitor the river’s health.

“Monitoring is essential for effective and defensible management,” said Dr. John Hartig, Detroit River Navigator and conference co-chair. “We can’t know what actions to take to restore or protect the river’s health unless we understand its condition. Today, monitoring is given a much lower priority than in the 1970s and 1980s. Millions of dollars have been spent to upgrade sewage treatment plants and clean up contaminated sediments, and tens of thousands of dollars are spent each year to measure the quality of the Detroit River’s water, sediments, and biota, but we still don’t really understand whether the ecosystem is improving or not. Stakeholders are asking for indicators of whether these projects are really making a difference.”

Thursday’s conference will take a new approach. Rather than simply asking local experts to report on amounts of chemicals present in water and sediments, the conveners have organized the agenda into three categories – traditional monitoring, bio-monitoring, and volunteer monitoring.

Speakers in the first category, Traditional Monitoring, will report on the latest trends in well-known pollutants such as PCBs and mercury, and discuss local efforts to control and prevent pollution. In addition, the group will examine newly discovered potential threats to the river environment, such as pharmaceuticals and flame retardants, and the steps being taken to minimize their risk to the river and its users.

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In the Bio-Monitoring category, experts will discuss programs to monitor changes in the health of fish and diving duck populations, as well as hawk migrations, and local eagle populations. Although some of these programs have been in practice for over 25 years, much of the information to be presented in this session has not previously been widely available to the public.

The third category, Volunteer Monitoring, will offer a wealth of valuable data and information.

“The quality of volunteer monitoring data has been questioned by some regulators in the past,” says conference co-chair Dr. Jan Ciborowski, a professor at the University of Windsor. “But there are well-organized programs to make sure that the citizen scientists who take part are properly trained in the procedures.”

Speakers at the conference will discuss the health of birds, frogs and the biota of streams based on volunteer monitoring programs such as the Christmas Bird Count, Marsh Monitoring, Friends of the Rouge, and Stream Team programs.

“You would be amazed at how much monitoring work is being done on the Detroit River and how little people know about it,” says Hartig, “Greater priority must be given to making monitoring data more accessible, translating them for decision-makers, and communicating the results and findings broadly.”

Conference attendees are being asked to mark the sampling locations of their own monitoring projects on a large map of the Detroit River corridor. After the conference, the data will be compiled, and will eventually be made available for the public to view on the internet.

Over a dozen different agencies in Canada and the US are sponsoring the one-day event. Although seating at the conference is already oversubscribed, details can be found by visiting the web site, www.uwindsor.ca/softs.

The University of Windsor is Canada’s leading university in automotive, social justice, and the environment, and offers “the degree that works,” an innovative, learner-focused approach combining theory and practice. Our strategic plan, *To Greater Heights*, defines a University of Windsor vision that supports students, teaching, learning and research initiatives.