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ON WORLD WATER MONITORING DAY DETROIT RIVER PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS RELEASE NEW REPORT TITLED “STATE OF THE STRAIT: MONITORING FOR SOUND MANAGEMENT”

World Water Monitoring Day is an annual, global celebration of organizations involved in monitoring to protect and preserve the world's most precious natural resource – water. Specifically, World Water Monitoring Day is celebrated to introduce people to the importance of water monitoring and connect them personally with efforts to protect and preserve their local watersheds, and to expand the base of information available about the health of each watershed over time.

Today, the University of Windsor's Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research, the Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative of Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, the Detroit River Canadian Clean-up, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, and other partners release a new report titled “State of the Strait: Monitoring for Sound Management.” This report is based on a 2004 biennial conference held at the University of Windsor.

The State of the Strait Conference is held every two years to bring together government managers, researchers, environmental and conservation organizations, students, and concerned citizens from Canada and the U.S. to assess ecosystem status and provide advice to improve research, monitoring, and management programs for the Detroit River and western Lake Erie.

“Monitoring is essential for effective, and defensible management,” said Dr. Jan Ciborowski of the University of Windsor and Canadian Co-Chairman of the Conference. “We can't know what actions to take to restore or protect the river's health unless we understand its condition. But 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 current data and information on whether these projects are really making a difference.”

This new report notes that volunteer monitoring programs offer a wealth of valuable data and information that can complement traditional monitoring activities. Good examples of “citizen science” discussed in the report include the Christmas Bird Count programs, “Hawk Watch” programs like the Holiday Beach Festival of Hawks and the HawkFest at Lake Erie Metro Park, frog and toad surveys, and the Stream Team.

“Volunteer monitoring programs are underappreciated and underutilized,” said Dr. John Hartig of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Co-Chairman of the Conference. “Greater emphasis must be placed on ensuring that volunteer monitoring data have sufficient quality controls, that management agencies sanction these efforts and agree to use the data for management purposes, and that the data are broadly disseminated and actually used.” A unique partnership announced at the conference between the Stream Team and Wayne County Department of Environment is a good example of effective use of volunteer monitoring data by government for environmental management.

On this 2005 World Water Monitoring Day, the State of the Strait Report recommends:

- Greater coordination of monitoring amongst agencies, organizations, and citizen groups;
- Strengthening the science-management linkage by establishing quantitative ecosystem targets and measuring effectiveness of remediation and restoration projects;
- Timely reporting and translation of monitoring data in a clear and understandable fashion; and
- The establishment of a single, central directory of past and present monitoring data on the Detroit River and western Lake Erie to support management and policy efforts.

“Water is something we must not take for granted,” said Dr. Ciborowski. “World Water Monitoring Day offers us an opportunity to take stock of our Detroit River and western Lake Erie, and to build our Canadian and U.S. capacity to monitor ecosystem health and promote better ecosystem-based management.”

For more information on the conference and report, visit: <http://uwindsor.ca/softs>

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