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As the Rouge River is Cleaned Up, a New Species Moves In

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The Rouge River has come a long way in the past half century --- from being so polluted that it literally caught fire to now playing host to a bug, the caddisfly, so sensitive to water quality that it can only be found in significantly clean waters and rivers. A recent identification by the Friends of the Rouge is the first discovery of the caddisfly in Michigan.

While this find is important in its own right, it is the larger trend that it demonstrates which is even more exciting. For decades, the Rouge River was written off as a dumping ground for discharges from factories, homeowner washing machine and appliances, and even the occasional full car or dead body. That began to change in the late 1980s when the government, in partnership with local activists and conservationists across the region, listed the Rouge River and dozens of other sites around the Great Lakes as "Areas of Concern" and allocated funding for remediation, accordingly.

Since that time, industry now only accounts for 2% of the pollution in the River and non-point source pollution is being tackled through further action as laid out in a Remedial Action Plan. This level of government funding and involvement in cleaning the Rouge is simply one more example of the positive change that is possible when our elected representatives make a commitment to cleaning even our dirtiest waters. Today, the future of a once-burning river continues to improve, a fact for which the 1.5 million citizens of the Rouge River Watershed, and the caddisflies, can be grateful.

- Image via insects.tamu.edu.

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