



*Working together, restoring the river*

## **Strategic Planning Document**

*Adopted by the Alliance of Rouge Communities on 5/6/08*

The following document was assembled to help guide the ARC members through a strategic planning process. The format, content, and topics are all open to discussion. Comments are encouraged. Please forward written comments to [comeara@ectinc.com](mailto:comeara@ectinc.com) for inclusion in subsequent drafts.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN COMMITTEE**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Rouge River Watershed, located in Southeast Michigan, runs through the most densely populated and urbanized land area in the state. The watershed is approximately 438 square miles in

size and includes all or part of 48 municipalities in three counties, with a population of over 1.4 million people.

The Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC) is a voluntary public watershed entity currently comprised of 40 municipal governments (i.e. cities, townships and villages), three counties (i.e., Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw) and the Wayne County Airport Authority as authorized by Part 312 (Watershed Alliances) of the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (MCL 324.101 to 324.90106) as amended by Act No. 517, Public Acts of 2004. (*Further information is available at [www.allianceofrougecommunities.com](http://www.allianceofrougecommunities.com)*)

Officially formed in January of 2006, the ARC members represent public agencies with storm water management responsibilities whose jurisdictional boundaries are totally, or in part, located within the Rouge River Watershed located in southeast Michigan. The state law authorizing the formation of watershed alliances throughout Michigan was modeled after a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) adopted by the Rouge River watershed communities and counties in August of 2003, which successfully guided a regional effort over a three-year period to address watershed-wide water quality and water quantity issues.

The 2003 MOA was developed by the communities and the three counties to respond to declining federal grant funds to Wayne County for the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project that had supported watershed-wide management efforts since 1993. During the three years of operation under the MOA, the Rouge River watershed communities voluntarily contributed nearly \$900,000 to match available federal funding for cooperative watershed management activities. The first year budget for the ARC (2006) was approximately \$600,000 with fifty percent local and fifty percent federal funding.

Under the ARC bylaws all cities, townships and villages as well as the counties located totally or in part within the Rouge River watershed are eligible for membership. Over 95 percent of the eligible communities and counties have adopted the bylaws through formal action of their respective governing authorities. In addition, the bylaws provide for membership of other public entities in the watershed who under state law are required to have a water discharge permit. Several public agencies are still considering membership.

The purpose of the Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC) is to provide an institutional mechanism to encourage watershed-wide cooperation and mutual support to meet water quality permit requirements and to restore beneficial uses of the river to the area residents. The ARC Technical Committee, in addition to design and review of the annual ARC water quality monitoring program, develops materials to guide members in meeting state storm water permit requirements, assists in the development and implementation of technical training programs, and serves as liaison with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality on storm water permitting issues including the development of subwatershed management plans. The ARC Public Information and Education Committee (PIE) develops public information materials, sponsors workshops, and other public involvement activities to encourage stewardship of the river, coordinates activities with non-profit organizations and other public and private organizations interested in building public stewardship of the river, and conducts informational meetings for

public officials to explain the role of the ARC and the benefits of governmental cooperation in addressing water management issues.

Funding for these activities as well as for the staff support of the ARC and its committees is raised through assessments to members based upon an allocation formula that gives equal weight to the population and land area for community contributions and a similar weighted assessment for non-community, public agency members. Local contributions are used to match grant dollars that currently represent nearly fifty percent of the annual ARC budget.

The ARC's structure requires a full membership meeting at least twice each year. Election of officers, adoption of the annual budget and assessments to communities, major policy issues, as well as any other formal action is reserved for the full membership meetings. The ARC takes formal actions based upon a majority vote of its members unless there is a call for a voting of member shares. The voting shares are directly proportional to the annual assessments. The Alliance elects three officers (i.e., Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer) from among its community members for two-year terms. The three officers, representatives of each county, and elected representatives from each the seven subwatershed groups comprise the ARC Executive Committee that oversees the day to day operations between the meetings of the full Alliance. In addition, the chairs and vice-chairs of the standing committees (i.e., Finance, Public Involvement and Education, Technical.) are appointed by the three officers. Standing committee membership is available to all members. The members and chair(s) of the Organization Committee are subject to approval by the full ARC and this committee examines and recommends organizational and policies including consideration of new public agency members and the designation of non-voting ARC Cooperating Partners.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

In 2007, the Alliance of Rouge Communities hired an executive director to run its day-to-day operations. Previously, the ARC determined that once an executive director was in place, a strategic plan would be developed in cooperation with and approved by the Executive Committee.

This document is based on meetings of the Organizational Committee's Strategic Plan Subcommittee held from August 22, 2007 to January 16, 2008. The 15 subcommittee members were asked to discuss where they would like the ARC to be in five years. Comments from the committee's first session were distilled into four focus areas: Membership, Financing, Storm Water Permitting and Communications. A draft version of this document was also reviewed by the ARC Executive Committee and the full ARC. This final product is based on Input by the membership.

## **MISSION AND VISION**

### **Mission**

The Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC) will continue to improve the Rouge River, return beneficial public uses, and prevent future problems. It will reduce costs for meeting storm water permit requirements through cooperative efforts, and provide a state and national model for locally driven watershed approaches that minimize the need for State/Federal mandates.

### **Vision**

We envision a dynamic working partnership comprised of Rouge River communities, counties and agencies working together to sustain a healthy and vibrant Rouge River.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOCUS AREAS**

### **MEMBERSHIP**

The Alliance of Rouge Communities will demonstrate value to its membership by providing technical assistance on permit issues, conducting public involvement and education activities and addressing other issues as they arise to benefit the organization. Ultimately, these activities demonstrate the value of a working partnership and will restore the Rouge River for public uses.

Retention of existing members and addition of new members to the ARC remains a challenge. Since the ARC began operations in 2003, the officers and membership have been focused on formalizing the ARC's organizational structure by pursuing watershed alliance enabling legislation, writing bylaws and hiring an executive director. The ARC has done well retaining its membership during this transitional period. The pieces are in place and now the ARC must conduct activities that are meaningful to its membership.

The day-to-day operations of the ARC are performed through a group of standing committees. Currently, the Technical Committee oversees activities such as the monitoring program, the illicit discharge elimination program, and pursuing grants. The Public Involvement and Education Committee oversees broad initiatives such as, conducting workshops, distributing materials and helping to publicize successes. The Organizational Committee oversees membership requirements and rules. The Finance Committee oversees budget matters, including membership dues and finances. All ARC members receive the benefits of these activities, but these benefits must be sufficiently valuable to retain existing members and engage others. This goal's objectives will consistently underscore the benefit of ARC membership to a community that is a dynamic entity with changing demographics, officials and stakeholders. .

#### **GOAL 1: Retain members and gain new ones**

- a) Offer cost-effective permit compliance support.
- b). Actively encourage permit holders such as school districts, universities and industry to participate in the ARC.
- c) Promote ARC membership by communicating the benefits to member communities and agencies.

- i. Prepare a presentation package for communities including a brochure and powerpoint presentation
- d) Formalize the nomination process for officers.
  - i. Review the nomination process for ARC officers and either endorse or modify the policy to reflect the concerns of ARC members.

## **FINANCE**

Since the Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC) was created in 2003, member communities have paid dues based upon equal weight to the population of the unit of government within the watershed according to the most recent United States census and the land area within the watershed. The current assessment is not reduced based upon the addition of new members. There is some concern that dues may have to be increased to make up for the funding that could be lost without notice when federal funding ends. If dues are not increased when federal funding ends, the ARC would have to conduct its business with half of its current operating budget.

As mentioned previously, ARC dues pay for 50% of the following items:

- Executive Director and staff
- Water Quality Monitoring Program
- Public Education activities
- Liability insurance
- Subwatershed Management Advisory Group facilitation
- Illicit Discharge Elimination Program (IDEP) activities
- Advocacy with agencies like the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the Michigan congressional delegation, and the U.S. Corps of Engineers

The ARC continues to seek methods for long-term funding. One of the underlying reasons for creating the ARC was to reduce the cost of storm water permit compliance by working together to address water quality policy in general, storm water permit issues and Public Education Plan (PEP) and IDEP compliance. Currently, 50% of ARC activities are funded by Wayne County using the Rouge Project funds. The other 50% of ARC costs are paid for by the member communities. Other storm water activities in the Rouge River watershed are funded through a county grant program that provides 50% of total project costs. Total federal funding for Rouge River watershed activities has been reduced over the years and could stop all together in 2009. At the same time, costs to local governments for storm water compliance are increasing and revenues are decreasing. It could be harder to pay to support permit activities.

### **GOAL 2: Develop and attract resources that enable the ARC to accomplish its goals**

- a) The Finance Committee will review the membership dues structure and endorse or modify it to reflect the concerns of the member communities.

- i. Explore an incremental dues increase.
  - ii. Correlate any dues increase with the ability of subcommittees to increase effectiveness.
- b) The Finance Committee will investigate the creation of a contingency fund/reserve to augment the transition to funding the ARC using dues (when the RPO grant ends)
- c) The Executive Director will investigate and pursue alternative funding sources, especially grants and donations to support ongoing operations of the ARC.
- d) The ARC will develop a plan for approaching private sector companies within the watershed for project sponsorship and partnership opportunities.

**GOAL 3: Be more cost-efficient/share costs.**

- a) Continue to pool resources for monitoring.
  - i. The cost effectiveness of this effort must be documented for presentations to local boards and councils to clearly demonstrate the efficiencies gained through participation on the ARC.
- b): Leverage county resources.
  - i. The County services remain a cost effective means for permit compliance and should be coordinated and documented through the ARC.
- c) Formalize policies and processes related to requests for proposals, out of scope expenses and evaluations of consultants and firms conducting business with the ARC.

**STORM WATER PERMITTING**

The cost of permit compliance continues to grow but the ARC is looking for ways to control cost while improving water quality. Currently there are seven subwatershed management plans for the Rouge River Watershed. This means seven sets of goals and a plethora of objectives to fulfill those goals, as well as dozens of community actions to fulfill the objectives. A single permit could:

- Allow all ARC communities to address the same set of goals and objectives;
- Allow the ARC to focus on watershed-wide solutions to solve water quality problems,
- Pave the way for a single annual report which would outline comprehensively all ARC activities that addressed permit activities in a year and reduce the amount of time communities have to spend writing their annual reports;
- Provide for consistent reporting on watershed activities.

One watershed permit would dovetail nicely with the planned Rouge River watershed management plan update slated for 2008. One watershed management plan could be developed with a chapter devoted to each subwatershed. While addressing this goal, consideration would have to be given to Rouge River Watershed border communities, such as Troy, who are in more than one watershed. In addition, the ARC must determine how best to work within the legal constraints of the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL ) program to improve water quality and control costs to local communities. The TMDL policy of the USEPA has been challenged in court continuously for decades. The result is a haphazard program that varies from state to state and Region to Region. The ARC has had a preliminary meeting with MDEQ regarding proposed TMDLs for the Rouge River Watershed. In addition, the draft storm water permit which will be implemented by MDEQ in April, 2008, requires communities to address TMDLs in many areas of the proposed permit.

**GOAL 4: Explore the option of establishing a single watershed permit for the Rouge River**

- a) Establish a working group to work on this issue.
- b) Develop standard reporting methods/one annual report written on behalf of members. The ARC will attempt to secure approval from MDEQ for a consolidated annual or bi-annual reporting mechanism concurrently with the single permit approach.

**GOAL 5: Develop a strategy for addressing TMDLs**

- a) Establish a working group to address this problem.
- b) Negotiate with MDEQ to revisit the E. coli requirement.
- c) Negotiate all TMDL requirements in the Rouge River Watershed with the MDEQ.

**COMMUNICATIONS**

Environmental programs continue to evolve and the cost of compliance changes from year to year. The Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC) should consider how best to impact these changes in a manner that continues water quality improvement but limits the cost of less productive bureaucratic procedures. A comprehensive communications strategy should be developed to communicate with the following parties:

- MDEQ
- ARC Members
- Other watershed alliances/groups
- Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG)
- U.S. District Court Judge John Feikens
- The Media

**GOAL 6: Develop a communications strategy.**

- a) Regularly create press releases on newsworthy ARC events and initiatives
- b) Write an annual report targeted to local boards and commissions.
- c.) Generate a monthly e-mail that discusses issues being addressed and other information that is important to ARC members.
- d) Make ARC resources available for presentations to local boards, councils and commissions.
- e) Conduct meetings with the MDEQ and the USEPA as required