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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RIVER RAISIN HERITAGE TRAIL DEDICATED

MONROE, Mich. – Following a decade’s worth of work by a broad spectrum of community organizations, the River Raisin Heritage Trail was officially dedicated today at a ceremony near the corner of E. Elm and Detroit avenues.

That location is where the greenways path connects the City of Monroe to the River Raisin National Battlefield Park and Sterling State Park, one of the busiest in Michigan. The trail also snakes by the Ford Marsh within the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, connects to Downtown Monroe and will eventually link to Monroe County Community College.

The ceremony, which was free and open to the public, included a keynote address by U.S. Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.); comments by featured guest Jeff Corwin, host of Animal Planet’s “The Jeff Corwin Experience” and wildlife and science expert for NBC/MSNBC; a ribbon cutting; a living history encampment; and the unveiling of a new River Raisin Heritage Trail entrance sign designed and constructed by local volunteers.

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“This trail connects a unique collection of sites, from a key battlefield in our nation’s second war for independence to the shore of a Great Lake,” Sen. Levin said. “It links Michigan’s history to its natural beauty and highlights how the intersection of land and water has shaped our state. I’m proud to have worked with so many citizens, volunteers, private groups, government agencies and with the tireless [U.S. Rep.] John Dingell to make today’s ribbon cutting possible.”

“Great states have great parks and trails, and great cities have great parks and trails,” said Ron Olson, chief of the Parks and Recreation Division for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment. “Greenway trails have many significant benefits. They provide safe places to walk, bike and ride; encourage tourism; provide universal access to green spaces, water and parks; create efficient, safe linkages between parks and open spaces; increase property values; help revitalize areas; and enhance the whole quality of life.”

“To me the trail represents a great example of what can happen when people from Monroe County work together, across the lines of jurisdiction and personal interest, to realize goals we all can agree upon,” said Paul Wannemacher, board chair of the Community Foundation of Monroe County. “It also shows that good ideas have a way of gaining momentum, and through tenacity and selfless efforts, good ideas can become great realities. This is a day to celebrate the ‘can do’ attitude and cooperative spirit that makes our county a vibrant and enjoyable place to call home.”

In addition to Levin, Corwin, and Olson, other speakers at the event included Dr. David E. Nixon, president, Monroe County Community College; Dr. John H. Hartig, manager, Detroit

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River International Wildlife Refuge; Andy Buchsbaum, regional executive director of the National Wildlife Federation's regional Great Lakes office; Cynthia Burkhour, accessibility technical expert for the Kellogg Foundation's Access to Recreation Grant Program; Paul Wannemacher, board chair, Community Foundation of Monroe County; State Sen. Randy Richardville (R-Monroe); State Rep. Kate Ebli (D-Monroe); Robert Clark, mayor, City of Monroe; and William Sisk, chair, Monroe County Board of Commissioners.

Coastal Wetland Environment

The River Raisin Heritage Trail offers ample opportunities to both celebrate and reflect on the reclamation and protection of Monroe County's coastal wetland environment. It provides public access and recreational and educational opportunities in a wetland habitat that formerly served as the private hunting reserve of Henry Ford and his descendents; the adjacent marshland parcel served as the private hunting reserve for Monroe Papermill executives.

This marshland is an important flyway for thousands of migrating birds, a habitat for bald eagles and a wide variety of mammals, and is home to significant beds of the American Lotus, the official symbol of Michigan's clean water ways.

Historically Linked

All of the property upon which the River Raisin Heritage trail sits is now part of the public domain and uniquely linked with the newest unit of the U.S. National Battlefield Park System.

The site of the River Raisin National Battlefield Park was the scene of one of the bloodiest battles of the War of 1812. Out of nearly 1,000 American troops who participated in

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the engagement, only 33 escaped death or capture. This event, arguably the largest land engagement of the war, gave birth to the emotional rallying cry “Remember the Raisin,” which spurred the American forces on to victory at the Battle of the Thames nine months later.

In the almost 200 years since the fighting ended, the battlefield was developed for commercial purposes, serving as home to the paper mill at the turn of the last century. Demolition crews have since brought down the smokestacks and blighted paper mill and archeologists and historians have been shedding new light on this pivotal moment in American history.

Protecting and Preserving Natural and Historical Resources

Monroe County, the gateway community to the State of Michigan, is reclaiming and protecting its natural and historical resources. The River Raisin Heritage Trail is a linear park constructed to universal access design standards and incorporates state-of-the-art information stations, a fishing pier, and multiple educational and recreational opportunities.

Two Days of Celebration

As part of a two-day Dedication Celebration for the trail, Corwin will make a presentation at 7 p.m. tonight at Monroe County Community College’s La-Z-Boy Center. He will discuss the importance of saving endangered species and will hold a book-signing for his latest book, “100 Heartbeats.” Events slated for Saturday include a 5-mile run and walk, family educational tours, a dog walk, a family bicycle ride and “Mysteries of the Marsh” ghost tours.

Some of the events have a cost associated with them. Please check www.rtrail.com for details, including the full schedule of Dedication Celebration activities.

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