

EXISTING USES AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

A. Land Use

The uses to which land are being put in the watershed are changing, and much of the change involves the gradual loss of agricultural and open space lands to more intensive uses, primarily urbanization. Ann Arbor is by far the largest municipality in the watershed, but smaller communities such as Chelsea and Brighton are also growing in size. In addition, the number of rural residences is increasing also, as more people seek a non-urban living environment. Despite population increases (total watershed population is approximately 315,000), agriculture remains a viable component of the economy with most of the acreage used for crop and pastureland, with an emphasis on truck farming. Light industry and commercial activities have also increased in the region, much of it related to the automobile industry or created as spin-offs of university research efforts.

Recreation is a major activity in the watershed and in the aggregate accounts for a significant amount of public-owned land. Major recreation landholders are the state and the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority. A large share of the recreation land is associated with the watershed's abundant water resources, including the river itself and numerous lakes. Much of the property frontage along lakes is privately owned. Development has often not been carefully regulated these areas, but has instead progressed largely according to the inclination of individual subdividers and builders. The result in many cases has been the stimulation of a number of water resource related problems, particularly over-fertilization due to high nutrient levels and destruction of natural values along shorelines.

B. Private Recreation Facilities

There are 11 private campgrounds within the Huron River watershed which provide 585 vehicle campsites and 1,285 tent sites to the camping enthusiast. In addition, other campgrounds in the counties encompassing the watershed provide roughly 2,000 campsites of various sorts. Other recreational activities provided by private sources include golf courses, archery ranges, horseback riding, boat and canoe rentals and fishing ponds and lakes.

C. Public Recreation Facilities

All or portions of seven recreation areas and three state parks are contained within the watershed. In addition to a variety of day-use facilities, these areas provide 1,415 campsites to the camper. Other state parks and recreation areas within a short distance of the watershed expand both camping and day-use opportunities.

Five parks within the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Park system border the Huron River. These parks, like many of the state recreation areas, offer many day-use activities such as interpretive programs, hiking trails, boating, canoeing, picnicking, etc.

In addition to boat and canoe access at the Huron-Clinton parks along the Huron, six state public access sites are available. Thirty-six public access sites are located on lakes within

the watershed and offer the recreationist with opportunities for fishing, boating and swimming.

Other public facilities or areas of interest in the watershed are Pointe Mouillee State Game Area, Chelsea State Game Area, Unadilla Wildlife Area Pinckney Recreation Area and the Gregory State Game Area.

D. Fishing

The Huron River above Barton Pond is classified as top quality warmwater. Although game fish are common and species will vary from area to area, generally rock bass is most abundant; bluegill, sunfish, small and large mouth bass are common and northern pike is occasionally taken in the area. Kent Lake is heavily fished and provides an excellent winter fishery for bluegills and black crappie.

A short segment of the upper mainstream near Milford has received attention and special management for trout in recent years. The planting and "catch and release" harvesting of trout in this area has proved to be very popular with the angler.

It should be mentioned that rough fish such as suckers and carp are present throughout most of the river system and probably make up a large part of the entire fish population.

Rough fish populations caused serious competition to game fish populations in the river and impoundments below Barton Pond. Fisheries managers initiated chemical treatment of Barton Pond in 1972. From the initial treatment until 1974, the lower river and impoundments were treated down to Flat Rock Pond to eliminate or reduce rough fish. Restocking with game fish has produced a varied fishery which should be good to excellent for a number of years.

In general, the following species are found in the impoundments and river to Flat Rock: northern pike, walleye, tiger muskie, large and smallmouth bass, channel catfish, bluegill, hybrid sunfish and black crappie. The river from Lake Erie to Belleville Dam receives fall and winter runs of Coho (most abundant), chinook and steelhead. Spring spawning runs of walleye, northern pike and white bass also contribute to the fishery.

E. Wildlife Observation and Hunting

Wildlife resources of the Huron River basin are typical of those found in southern Michigan. They include species of farm game, forest game, waterfowl, furbearing animals and non-game species. Population density depends on the quality of the habitat which varies significantly from area to area throughout the watershed.

Farm game species occur throughout the basin, however, areas of heavy residential development have depreciated wildlife habitat. Species of farm game that occur in the basin are cottontail rabbits, pheasants and fox squirrels which are relatively abundant. Quail are found in the basin, but their numbers are limited.

Forest game species include primarily whitetail deer and ruffed grouse. Deer are numerous and the herd continues to increase. Deer-car collisions occur frequently with significant property damage and personal injuries resulting. Ruffed grouse populations are limited due to limited acreage of suitable habitat.

Furbearers are distributed over the entire watershed. Aquatic species such as muskrats and mink are restricted to the watercourses and associated marshes. Muskrats are abundant and mink, while not numerous, are common. Raccoons and red fox are numerous throughout the area.

Waterfowl are also generally distributed over all of the watercourses and wetlands of the basin. Mallards, black ducks, wood ducks and blue-winged teals constitute a breeding population. Limited numbers of diving ducks, such as scaups and ringneck ducks, use the impoundments and lakes of the watershed for resting and feeding during spring and fall migrations.

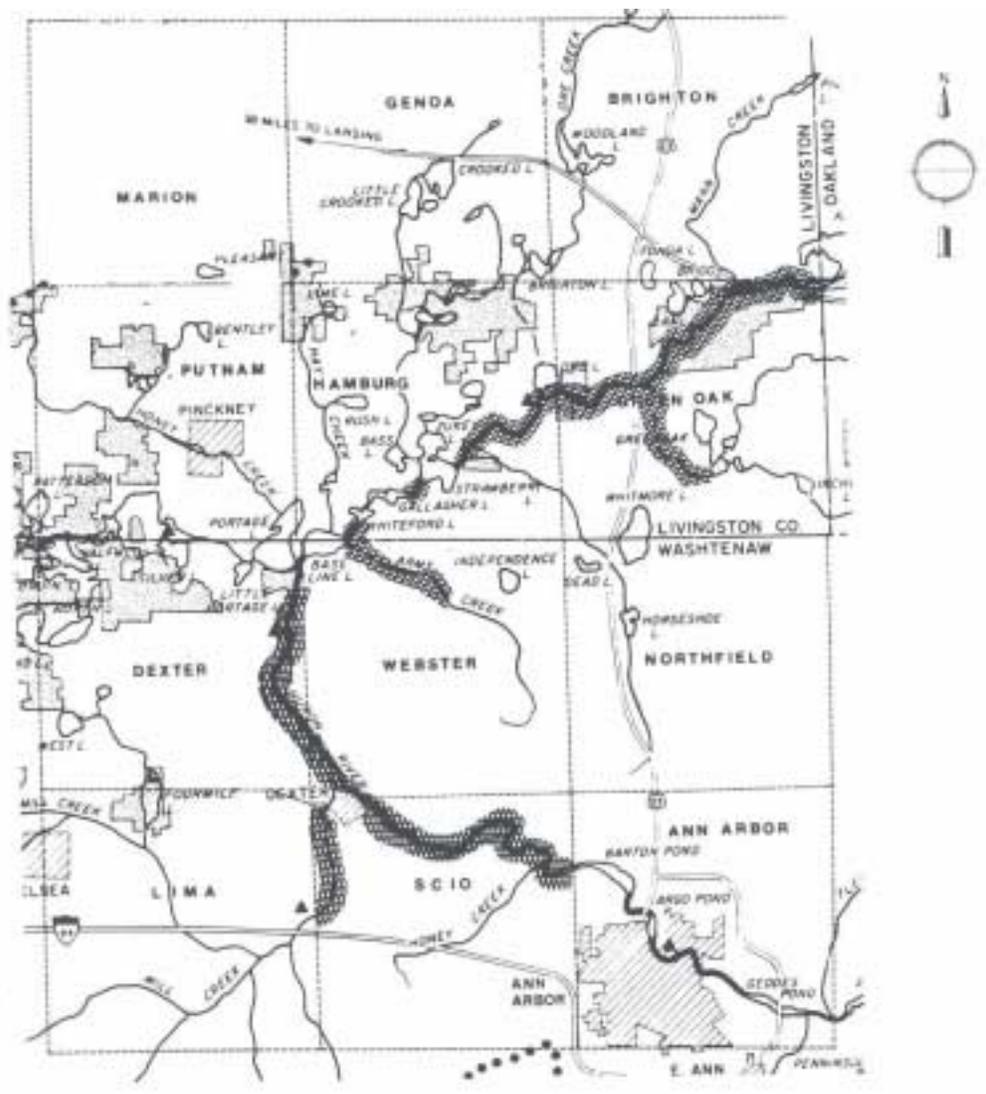
In addition to the game and furbearing animals, a large number of non-game wildlife species are founding the river basin. These include a large variety of songbirds, shorebirds, rodents, birds of prey, reptiles, amphibians, etc. At least one bird of prey found along the Huron, the red shouldered hawk, has been placed on the endangered species list.

F. Canoeing and Boating

Although much of the Huron River is canoeable, the area between Kent Lake Dam and Barton Pond is one of the best stretches. From Kent Lake Dam to Ore Lake a moderate current, undeveloped shore and mixture of marshes, lowland hardwoods and upland vegetation makes this an enjoyable area to canoe. Below the water control dam at Portage Lake, down to Delhi Mills, a number of rapids makes canoeing more interesting for the average canoeist. Except on the impoundments, the river is marginal for boating as it is quite shallow, especially during low summer flows.

G. Historic Archaeological Sites

Hinsdale's Archaeological Atlas of Michigan indicates six possible archaeological sites along the Huron River in the vicinity of Ann Arbor. Their locations are only approximate and it is presently unknown whether they still exist, however, there were five Indian villages and a mound located along the Huron. A professional archaeological survey of the Huron River and adjacent lands would undoubtedly uncover many more sites.



HURON RIVER

 segments proposed for Natural River designation

