State grant, county match will pay for study on health of Rouge River Watershed

The Wayne County Commission voted unanimously July 16 to accept a grant from the state that will help the county monitor the health of the Rouge River and its branches.

The State Clean Michigan Initiative Grant is for $35,830, with the county adding $11,943 of existing storm water general permit money. The combined $47,773 will pay for the “Rouge River Insecticide Monitoring” project, with the grant contract running from July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2017.

The Commission’s Committee on Public Services voted unanimously July 7 to send the item to the full Commission for final approval.

“This project is important because the health of the Rouge River and its branches is tied to the overall environmental health of the region,” said Commissioner Tim Killeen, D-Detroit, a Committee on Public Services member and former science teacher. “It truly is a barometer of not only the watershed’s health, but the health of the county and southeast Michigan as a whole.”
The Rouge River Watershed comprises 467 square miles primarily in Wayne County, but also in Oakland and Washtenaw counties. The Upper and Middle Rouge Rivers merge near the Dearborn Heights-Dearborn boundary, and they merge with the Lower Rouge River in Dearborn. The combined Rouge River empties into the Detroit River at Zug Island, along the Detroit-River Rouge boundary.

“I am always pleased to see the county receive grants that improve water quality,” said Commissioner Diane Webb, D-Livonia, who chairs the Committee on Public Services and whose district includes Dearborn Heights. “I’m glad we’re able to take advantage of the opportunity. Ensuring the health of the Rouge River and its branches is so important.”

The Friends of the Rouge nonprofit volunteer group and the Alliance of Rouge Communities will be involved in the project.

The project’s goal is to determine if the pesticides pyrethroid and fipronil and their degradates are at a level considered toxic for the river’s macroinvertebrates. Samples will be collected over two years at 32 surface water sites and eight sediment stream bottom sites.

Macroinvertebrates are organisms without backbones that are visible without a microscope, including species like beetles, mayflies, dragonflies, aquatic worms and snails.

Pyrethroids are synthetic chemical insecticides, with one of the primary uses as a spray to kill mosquitoes, while fipronil is a family of white powder pesticides that kill insects when they eat them.