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Huron-Clinton Metroparks Seeks Public Input to Guide New Regional Water Safety Initiative

Working with nationally recognized consultant and partners, Metroparks seeks to create a regional swim program to address alarming water safety statistics. First step is asking for responses on a regional survey.

[Southeast, Mich.] – Drowning is among the top three causes of unintentional death for persons 29 years old and younger¹. 79 percent of children in households with annual incomes less than \$50,000 do not know how to swim² and studies have shown that 70 percent of Detroit children have little to no swimming ability. The alarming reality is that Southeast Michigan has a multitude of opportunities to enjoy both natural and constructed water activities, but the disparities in swim ability and water competence lead to a higher risk of drownings in the region. In swimming pools, Black children aged 5-19 are 5.5 times as likely as white children in the same age group to die from drowning; among ages 11-12, this rate increases to 10 times as likely³.

The Metroparks are teaming up with partners and a nationally recognized consultant to address and start changing that reality.

“Southeast Michigan has some of the best recreational water opportunities in the state, and we want everyone to be able to safely enjoy those opportunities” says Metroparks Director, Amy McMillan. “Statistics say that learning to swim through formal lessons may reduce the likelihood of drowning by 88 percent⁴. That’s why the Metroparks think it is so important to develop a regional swimming program plan with the goal of improving swimming ability and water competence.”

This summer the Metroparks partnered with City of Detroit Parks and Recreation and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy to launch the new Swim in the D program offering free swim lessons to 504 Detroit youth ([Learn more here](#)). Now Metroparks is working with aquatics consultant Counsilman-Hunsaker to develop a regional swimming program development plan by the end of this year. This plan, focused on public swimming programs and facilities across the five-county region⁵, will involve three key components:

1. Existing Conditions – “State of Swimming” Report
2. Development of swimming-related goals/objectives for the region

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6319a2.htm?s_cid=mm6319a2_w#tab

² <https://www.usaswimming.org/parents/learn-to-swim>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6319a2.htm?s_cid=mm6319a2_w#tab

⁴ <https://www.usaswimming.org/parents/learn-to-swim>

⁵ Five County region includes Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties.

3. Development of a programming action plan. The final program plan will address the unique needs of Southeast Michigan and Detroit and the systemic disparities in swimming ability and water competence.

Project Director from Councilman-Hunsaker, Miklos Valdez, states “At Councilman-Hunsaker, our mantra is *Aquatics For Life*. We recognize the value and importance of the Southeast Michigan Swimming Program Development Plan and believe deeply in providing opportunities for everyone in the community to access aquatic education and training programs. We want the programming action plan to be a reflection of Southeast Michigan and Detroit and are working to identify the local needs, issues and opportunities that will drive the goals and objectives of the project.”

Calling on the Public to Provide Survey Responses Now

Metroparks and Councilman-Hunsaker are now asking for the community’s help in the first phase of the project. They are conducting a representative survey across Southeast Michigan, with a particular focus on the city of Detroit, to get a baseline determination of:

- Swimming abilities in the region
- Barriers to access for swimming in the region
- Barriers to access for learning to swim
- Other factors that may contribute to systemic disparities in swimming ability and water competence

Responses are needed from every corner of Southeast Michigan. The Survey can be taken online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HuronClinton>. If internet access is a barrier to survey participation, printed surveys will also be available at a list of selected locations throughout the region. Those locations are available upon request and on the Metroparks website. The survey was developed by market research firm, Left Brain Concepts, with help on question development from Councilman-Hunsaker and Metroparks.

The survey is just the start of the conversation about water safety and competence. Survey results will be shared and discussed at a series of public community meetings to help guide the project solution later this year. The Metroparks are also looking for organizational partners committed to solving the problem of drowning through education, access and fixing the systematic disparities in swimming ability and water competence. Interested organizations wishing to be part of the development of this regional plan, please reach out to Nina Kelly, Metroparks Chief of Planning and Development, at nina.kelly@metroparks.com.

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About Huron-Clinton Metroparks

One of America’s premier metropolitan park systems, the Huron-Clinton Metroparks have served the people of Southeast Michigan since 1940. Managed by the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, the Metroparks are made up of 13 properties in Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties. Available activities include fishing, swimming, boating, hiking, nature study, biking, golf, winter sports and more. The Metroparks also provide educational resources on science, nature, history and the environment. Learn more at Metroparks.com.

About Counsilman-Hunsaker

Counsilman-Hunsaker is a pioneering aquatics organization whose vast global experience and holistic, full-circle approach — from design, to execution, to operations — has established them as the trusted authority and respected thought leader on planning, design, operation and management of all types of aquatic facilities. They have created experiences that have shaped and inspired individuals and communities, from the neighborhood pool around the corner to large scale waterparks that draw thousands of tourists. Counsilman-Hunsaker is made up of an integrated team of aquatic professionals with unrivaled aquatic industry experience. The Counsilman-Hunsaker team has completed hundreds of Audits and Studies for the development of new or existing programs and will help complete the Southeast Michigan Swimming Program Plan efficiently.

About Left Brain Concepts, Inc.

Left Brain Concepts, Inc. is a 33 - year-old market research and consulting firm. Since their inception, they have conducted community surveys nationwide, from large cities to small towns. Based on direct input from their clients, they outperform virtually all other research firms with their custom research, data analysis, senior-level recommendations and for their client service. Their parks and recreation-focused surveys range from community-wide to department-specific, and have been conducted via mail, telephone and internet.