



Rouge Park's "ski hill" is "polluted dirt surrounded by fences and warning signs," says one resident.

Winter sports project may be an uphill battle

City says lack of money means more delays

By Jeremy Pearce
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In an imaginary lift line on the western edge of Detroit, Terry Minnick is waiting for entrance to the city's only ski hill.

It's been a long wait. Five years have passed since city officials allowed developers to dump a mound of polluted dredge from the Detroit River in Rouge Park. Officials planned to cap the dredge with clay and create a hill that could be used for skiing, sledding and other winter sports.

"The whole thing is totally asinine," said Minnick, who has lived across from the park since 1948. "Nobody can get to the 'ski hill' and it's totally fenced off. Every time I drive by the thing, I wonder when they'll finally clean it all up," she said.

City parks officials admit the hill is contaminated with lead and other heavy metals, but say the site is safe and that pollutants can't leach out into the Rouge River, which runs past the hill and through the park.

"The project has been on our back burner, but we do have plans for the hill," said Ernest Burken, director of Detroit's Parks and Recreation Department. "We still want to make it a winter sports area. It's a question of money."

But it's also been a question of time, some residents said last week. "We're not in any particular hur-



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RESIDENT TERRY MINNICK

years. "There's no real demand for a ski hill here."

Dredge from St. Aubin Marina and Porterfield Wilson Marina Village was deposited at the site in 1991. At the time, lead contamination at both sites was reported to exceed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards.

Parks officials expect the mound with "about a foot" of clay. Later, they seeded the hill with grass and plants of small trees and shrubs to prevent the clay from eroding.

Detroit police maintain stables and an indoor pistol range near the hill. Fences and warning signs now keep the public at bay.

If city officials secure funds to finish the project, they said they'll probably truck in clean soil from highway excavations to make the ski hill higher and somewhat steeper.

But Minnick suspects the city's ski hill may never materialize and that the mound will remain contaminated.

"I've seen this area and the whole city deteriorate," she said. "I'm going to move out somewhere. I don't want to stay here much longer."

ry," said Richard Hantau, chief landscape architect for city parks. Recently, residents have responded with calls and letters to city council members to complete the hill or clean the site up, but say they've yet to see any action on the project.

"This was once a lush, beautiful, tree-covered area," said David Mahalab, a resident who has opposed the ski hill since the soil first arrived.

"Now that area is a big pile of polluted dirt surrounded by fences and warning signs," Mahalab said.

Other residents question the need for a ski facility in a city not traditionally connected with downhill racing or Olympic hopefuls.

"Who skis?" asked Loutchka Hill, who has lived near the park for eight



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