

# the river REPORTER

## Is it Getting Hot Out? Climate Change and the Chicago River

Well before former Vice President Al Gore made a movie, scientists across the globe were discussing climate change. Now regularly we see devastating images and read news stories of far-off tropical islands that will vanish under the waves as the polar ice caps melt. The result of nature impacted by people is real and happening before our very eyes.

Yet the story isn't over yet and as Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley exhorts in the Chicago Climate Action Plan, "If we address the climate change challenge together, with creativity and boldness, then our city will continue to

lead the world in designing a path to a more secure future."

### What is Climate Change?

In the simplest terms climate change is just what it sounds like: the worldwide rise in global surface temperatures. Its main cause is what's called the "greenhouse effect" which is when gases in the atmosphere slow down (or trap) heat that would normally be released into space. That heats the earth. Water vapor, methane, carbon dioxide are the top "greenhouse gases."

The worst offender, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is naturally occurring yet humans contribute significantly to it by burning fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas to generate power and petroleum products to run our cars, produce plastics and make asphalt. Since 1880, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have increased by 31%.

### What's Going to Happen Here?

While climate change is often portrayed as a global problem the impacts are realized by the people and wildlife that live in the Chicago River watershed. "The change in temperature is particularly worrisome for birds," says Abigail Derby, a conservation ecologist we spoke to at The Field Museum. "Last year, after a

Chicago River Summit:  
SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS TO  
CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

May 13, 2011, at the Merchandise  
Mart Conference Center.

Register at [www.chicagoriver.org](http://www.chicagoriver.org).

Keynote: Kevin Shafer, Executive  
Director, Milwaukee Metropolitan  
Sewerage District

mid-March warm up, white oaks leafed out and insects emerged approximately two weeks earlier than usual. Yet the insectivorous warblers that eat them do not respond to temperature cues but, rather, daylight, so they arrived from their southern wintering grounds when they normally do...this time, two weeks late."

In addition to the temperature issues, locally we are also already experiencing more isolated hard rains that overwhelm our sewer system and cause combined sewer overflows and flooding. That results in millions of dollars in damage, fish kills, threats to human health and greater soil erosion and runoff into the river - causing even more contamination. Erosion and the fluctuation of river levels could kill off native species and allow non-natives to encroach. Evidence supports the proposition that, without mitigation, Northeastern Illinois will become

*Story continued on page 5*



# What is a River Worth?

In the ongoing debate over the Chicago River's water quality standards playing out at the Illinois Pollution Control Board, one of the reasons that the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) says they should not have to disinfect sewage effluent is money.

Yet USEPA puts the total investment for killing bacterial sewage before it goes in our river at \$425 million over 20 years. That equals only \$1.94 per household a month, or less than half the price of a Big Mac.

Federal law says we have to clean up our waterways. Starting in 1972 and signed by President Nixon, the Clean Water Act states its goal as "restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters [to] support the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife and recreation in and on the water." In short, we must protect people and wildlife by cleaning up our water. This is not a law based on cost-benefit analysis like a corporate bottom line, but a national goal to protect basic public health.

To help meet that goal, the federal government provides money for large infrastructure projects. For example, the unfinished Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP or Deep Tunnel), has been paid for mostly with federal grants. There are also State Revolving Funds to provide loans. And though we are not required to by law, we can also consider the financial benefits of cleaning up the river.

Economically the Chicago River is a huge opportunity for Chicago and the region. The emerging Chicago

Riverwalk has added jobs and has the potential to develop true tourist allure like the San Antonio Riverwalk or Millennium Park. New river-edge residential and business communities add to our tax base and property values rise. Individually, students on crew teams row for college scholarships. Downtown and in the suburbs, parks, bike trails, boat launches, and places to fish are becoming a mainstay of the region's recreational infrastructure, boosting communities' value.

Further confirming disinfection is worth the investment, Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office commissioned a study to evaluate the economic benefits if the water quality's improved. It measured what Cook County households would be willing to pay based on preferences for recreational opportunities, health risk concern, and a sense of responsibility and stewardship. The result was \$1.05 billion over 20 years, or \$47 per household per year, over two times USEPA estimate of the cost.

Undisinfected sewage effluent isn't the only problem that faces the Chicago River, but we know we can make a quantum leap forward in water quality if we do it. We are not sure why MWRD is so against it or why they seem to fight it so hard. But we do know that the Chicago River is a wonderful, magical resource alive with wildlife and people, and a driver for the local economy and that makes it easy for us to see what a river is worth.

How about you?

*Margaret Frisbie*  
Executive Director

## STAFF & BOARD

The River Reporter is published by Friends of the Chicago River, located at 28 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1800 Chicago, IL 60604-2272  
Phone: (312) 939-0490  
E-mail: friends@chicagoriver.org  
Web site: www.chicagoriver.org

Friends' mission is to preserve, protect and foster the vitality of the Chicago River for the plant, animal and human communities within its watershed.

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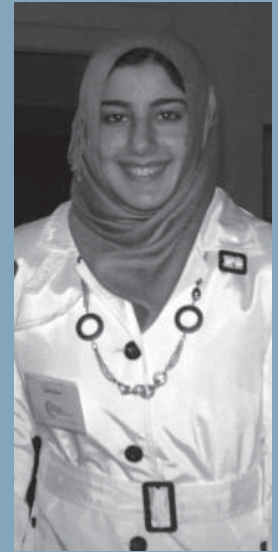
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All photos by Friends' staff unless otherwise noted

# Ninth Grader Makes a Big Splash at the Student Congress

Lena Sarhan, a ninth grade student at Universal School in Bridgeview, “fulfilled a dream” by presenting a workshop at this year’s Chicago River Student Congress held at Amundsen High School.

Lena’s interest in the Congress was sparked by her mom, a physics and astronomy teacher at Amundsen, who brought her along to the last eight Congresses. As a little girl, Lena would see the student presenters rehearsing in the hallways and couldn’t wait until she was old enough to lead her own workshop.

This year, as president of her school’s Environmental Club, Lena realized her dream. She and a friend developed a workshop about the environmental impact of bottled water. She loved seeing people’s faces light up when they learned something new. One student even threw her bottled water on the floor when she learned it was no different than tap water. Like a good environmental steward, Lena encouraged the student to recycle the bottle. Lena must have made an impression - middle school groups have already been in contact asking her to present for their classrooms.



Chicago River Student Congress presenter, Lena Sarhan

## RIFFLES & CURRENTS

### RAIN GARDENS WORK

A five-year study by the U.S. Geological Survey’s Wisconsin Water Science Center has confirmed that even simple, residential-style rain gardens can capture nearly 100 percent of stormwater runoff from the roof of an adjacent building, even in thick clay soils.

The key in temperate climates, they found, is to use native prairie vegetation because the long roots can penetrate the clay layer of the subsoil, like we have in the Chicago area. After testing two comparable gardens, one with turf grass and one with native plants, they found that the native plants were able to penetrate deeply. Turf grass did not.

“This study was unique because it looked at typical residential applications,” USGS Hydrologist William Selbig said. It confirmed that small rain gardens (with native plants) are extremely effective in preventing rainwater from running

into sewer pipes, nearby rivers and streams. Infiltrating rainwater into the ground like this reduces combined sewer overflows, runoff pollution, erosion and sedimentation and native plants provide habitat.



Volunteers excavate a raingarden at Edgebrook Woods, which will grow native plants nourished by stormwater runoff.

### PHILLY GOES GREEN FOR WATER QUALITY

The City of Philadelphia recently announced an ambitious plan to convert one third of its asphalt surfaces into green spaces, consisting of wetlands, flood plan restoration, rain barrels, porous concrete and green roofs. The aim is to transform its combined sewer

system and to protect clean rainwater, stem erosion, and stop sedimentation. Instead of throwing water away like we do to much of in Cook County, stormwater runoff in this \$1.6 billion effort will be filtered with processes mimicking natural systems.

The lead force in the program, the Watersheds Office in the Water Department, states that the green approach is more cost effective and sustainable than building underground storage tanks and tunnels. The department is also spearheading stream restoration efforts.

The Watersheds Office formal vision is to unite the City of Philadelphia with its water environment, creating a green legacy for future generations while incorporating a balance between ecology, economics, and equity. With a slogan “Clean Water - Green City,” they provide tools and information that promote watershed thinking.

# HIGH Water Marks

Friends of the Chicago River recognizes the generous contributions and support of members, donors, and program participants and partners at \$250 and above between December 2, 2010 and March 1, 2011.

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### \$2,000 and above

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We apologize if any names have been omitted, misspelled, or otherwise incorrectly listed. Please contact us at [friends@chicagoriver.org](mailto:friends@chicagoriver.org) so that we can correct our records. Thanks so much, again.

## The ALL NEW Flatwater Classic Paddle & Pedal, join us up north!

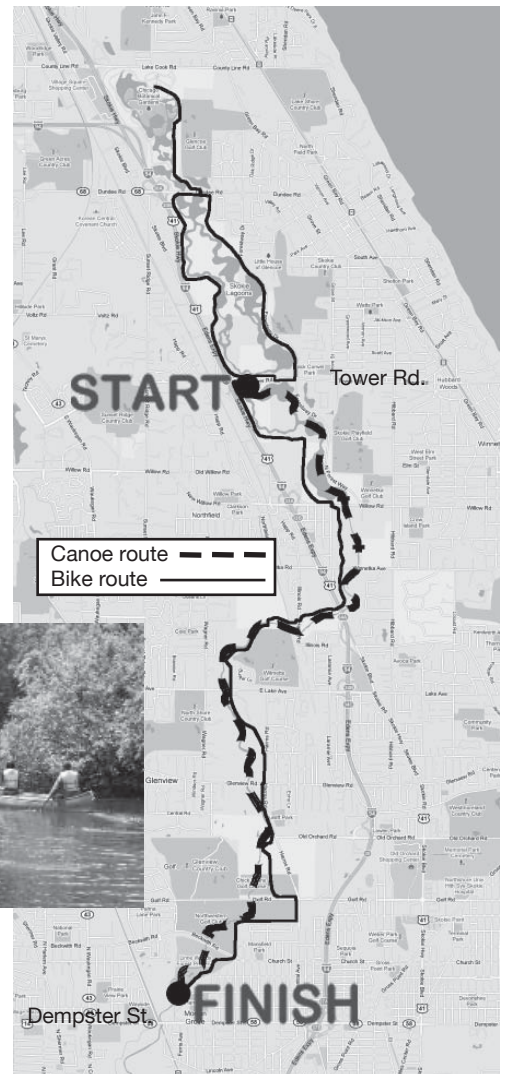
We've moved! This year 11th annual Flatwater Classic will be held on the scenic North Branch of the Chicago River.

For the past decade, Friends has hosted the Flatwater Classic through the downtown canyons as a fun way to create awareness about our river's water quality and who gets to use the river. And we were successful! Our ever growing presence on the Chicago River helped convinced the Illinois Pollution Control Board that we need new water quality standards and that we all have a right to use our river. It's a great step forward, and we won't stop there.

Now we've revised the Flatwater Classic's goals to promote the modification or removal of two dams on the North Branch to allow for fish passage and to increase paddler safety.

Join us on September 18, 2011, as we paddle the river or pedal along it from the Skokie Lagoons (Tower Rd.) to Linne Woods (Dempster St.). Perfect for pros and first-timers, this family friendly event is a perfect way to explore the North Branch – via the river or bicycle path.

Learn more about participating in the all new Flatwater Classic Paddle & Pedal at [www.chicagoriver.org/events/flatwater\\_classic/](http://www.chicagoriver.org/events/flatwater_classic/). Registration opens in May.



Canoeing the peaceful North Branch of the Chicago River

# BIG FISH BALL

The best place you can be this summer is outdoors along the Chicago River at Friends of the Chicago River's Big Fish Ball. Held on Wednesday June 8, 2011, this fun event raises significant funds to enable Friends to continue to improve water quality standards, ensure and enhance public access all along the river, build a broad base of public and private support and revitalize the river ensuring a rich abundance of native plants and animals can thrive throughout the watershed.

This year's Honorary Chairs are Illinois Governor Patrick Quinn and Christopher G. Kennedy, President, Merchandise Mart Properties Inc. Jacqueline Loewe, President, Sheridan Park Consulting is Chair of the event.

Guests will enjoy cocktails with surprise wild visitors, a sumptuous dinner, river-inspired activities and entertainment and an after-dinner boat cruise. Winners of the Blue Ribbon Awards for excellence in riverfront development will also be announced.



Great food, drinks and a fabulous downtown river-edge view.

Opportunities to craft a sponsorship to fit a corporation, business or individual's needs are available from \$25,000 to \$3,500. Individual tickets are \$325. For more information, to receive an invitation or find out how you can help make this year's event the best yet, contact Mary Beth Sova at (312) 939-0490, ext. 19, or [msova@chicagoriver.org](mailto:msova@chicagoriver.org).

Make your plans today to join others who cherish and celebrate this amazing natural resource and want to do what they can to support it – and have fun at the same time!

*Story Continued from page 1*

dryer and eventually have a climate much like Texas has today.

## What Role Does the River Play?

As a 156 mile-long blue ribbon that flows through dozens of communities, the Chicago River itself already plays a mitigating role. The river reduces the urban heat island effect providing cooling aura that is documented by heat maps of the region. EPA uses the term "heat island" to describe how built up areas are hotter than nearby rural ones. The annual mean air temperature of a city with 1 million people or more, like Chicago, can be 5.4°F warmer than its surroundings. In the evening, the difference can be as high as 22°F. EPA documents how heat islands can increase summertime peak energy demand, air conditioning costs, air pollution and greenhouse

gas emissions, heat-related illness and mortality, and water quality.

One of the strategies that can offset the heat island effect and the problems it causes is planting trees and other vegetation. The miles and miles of green open space along the river are already mitigating the immediate effects of climate change. And of course, with continued improvement in land management and support from the community these lands can accomplish much more in this fight. In addition, these river-edge landscapes remove air pollutants and store and sequester carbon dioxide. When they are healthier, native plant communities, they reduce runoff and improve water quality by absorbing and filtering rainwater as well.

## What About Me?

At Friends the kind of boldness Mayor Daley mentions leads to collaborative projects and on-the-ground efforts that mitigate climate change impacts and help the river. Friends' river-edge work sites at Edgebrook and Kickapoo Woods and Corporate Voluntee Days provide opportunities to work with

others to recover river banks adding native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs that build habitat, capture rain water and runoff pollution, and cool temperatures. Chicago River Eco-Warriors invites participation through volunteerism at sites as well as through watershed-wide activities that result in Beyond the Banks activities that bring these same benefits into neighborhoods, corporate campuses and other green spaces through out the 795-square mile Chicago River watershed. Chicago River Blue, for developers, does the same.

Working together we can impact climate. We can use tools like the Chicago Climate Action Plan and the shovels we use to plant rain gardens to take advantage of the Chicago River. And we can work through river improvement programs that directly offset the impacts of climate. Friends invites you to join us in using the river to address climate change and reduce our collective carbon footprints. In the end, this is a problem that will be solved using local solutions to address this global issue.



# Touring the Chicago River: A Legacy of Improvements



A knowledgeable river supporter, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley toured the Chicago River with Margaret Frisbie, Friends' executive director, and leaders of city departments and sister agencies to discuss priorities, issues, and opportunities almost every summer. With all kinds of wildlife, new parks and residences, boat launches and the Chicago Riverwalk, the Chicago River and our ability to enjoy it has improved dramatically since the Mayor took office 22 years ago.

Friends' executive director Margaret Frisbie and Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley take a hands-on approach while discussing the river's future.

## river LIFE

### Barred Owl *Strix varia*

Illustration by  
Jen Pagnini



A real river neighbor, this resident of our local forests is perfectly adapted to its habitat. At night, while people in the Chicagoland region hustle and bustle about, the barred owl sleeps. Barred owls live untroubled by people in wet woodlands, riparian areas next to rivers, and floodplains in the cavities of old dead trees, 70 feet up in the air.

Alternating bars of gray and brown around the neck and vertical streaking on the body make the owl perfectly camouflaged against tree bark. As a matter of fact, this is how the barred owl got its name.

Barred owls are very vocal. They can hoot, emit a cat-like scream or even a barking or laughing sound. In February and March, during their courting season, keep especially alert for these owls as they make all kinds of noises to impress a potential mate. These owls may also be spotted in the daytime being mobbed and teased by a flock of scolding crows.

Barred owls hunt for prey at night, waiting from their tree to hear or spot an unsuspecting mouse, snake, frog, or bird. Their dark eyes are their best secret weapon, large and able to bring in lots of light to see. Barred owl ears, like other owls, are long slits on the side of the face. Keen senses allow it to quickly navigate through low branches near a river to find its prey. It swoops down silently, captures and kills its prey with sharp talons.

The owl's sharp beak makes a great tool for ripping the meat apart, or it gets eaten in one gulp, bones and

all. About eating, the owl will spit up an "owl pellet," which includes all the things the bird's stomach can't digest: fur, bones and skulls. Sometimes you'll find them at the base of the nesting tree.

## Fun Facts

- The barred owl is a vocal bird. Its most distinctive call sounds similar to "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all."
- It stands about 21 inches tall, has a bulky head and neck with dark eyes and no ear tufts.

- A barred owl's right ear is higher than its left ear. Hearing from two different angles helps it pinpoint the location of prey.
- As the barred owl moves into the Pacific Northwest, it is breeding with its close relative, the Spotted Owl, to form hybrid birds.

# 2011 CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND TOURS

**Wednesday, April 20**  
**Friends Annual Meeting**  
**"The Climate Connection"**  
 5:15 to 7 p.m.

All members welcome and encouraged. Please call Kasi at (312) 939-0490, ext. 10, to register.

**Friday, May 13**  
**Chicago River Summit: Systemic Solutions to Climate Change**  
 9 a.m., Merchandise Mart's Conference Center

Find more information at [www.chicagoriver.org](http://www.chicagoriver.org).

**Saturday, May 14**  
**Chicago River Day**  
 9 a.m. to 12 noon

Volunteers work side-by-side to collect garbage and sort for

recycling, remove invasive vegetation, spruce up river-edge trails, plant native seedlings and more. See our flyer inside on page 8!

**Saturday, May 15**  
**McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum opens**

A one-of-a-kind opportunity to explore a historic landmark bridgehouse. Visit [www.bridgehousemuseum.org](http://www.bridgehousemuseum.org).

**Wednesday, June 8**  
**Big Fish Ball**  
 5:30 to 9 p.m.  
**Merchandise Mart's Riverside Drive**

Friends of the Chicago River's sixth annual gala event. This year's *Blue Ribbon Awards* will again be among the highlights. Visit [www.chicagoriver.org/events/big\\_fish\\_ball/](http://www.chicagoriver.org/events/big_fish_ball/).

**Sunday, September 18**  
**Flatwater Classic Paddle & Pedal**

We've moved to the scenic North Branch of the Chicago River! Join us and explore more of what the Chicago River can offer. Save the date.



**Give a gift that's forever and put Friends in your will.**

Make an investment for the long term through our endowment fund or a gift to the organization in your name. For more information, contact Mary Beth Sova at (312) 939-0490, ext. 19 or [msova@chicagoriver.org](mailto:msova@chicagoriver.org).

## YES! I want to help ensure a boundless future for the Chicago River!

I'm pleased to make a membership contribution to Friends of the Chicago River in the amount of:

- |                                  |                           |                                |   |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 | Gray Wolf                 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 | Blanding's Turtle / Business            |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250   | Yellow-headed Blackbird   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15  | Purple Coneflower / Teacher / Volunteer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$156   | Black-crowned Night Heron | <input type="checkbox"/> \$10  | Prairie Dropseed / Student              |
|                                  |                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | \$ _____                                |

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For recognition purposes, list my name or company as \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

- My check made payable to Friends of the Chicago River is enclosed.
- Charge my credit card (circle one) American Express Discover Mastercard Visa
- Card # \_\_\_\_\_
- Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ 3-4 digit security code \_\_\_\_\_
- Cardholder's name and billing address (if different than above) \_\_\_\_\_

- Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.
- The best way to reach me is by  Email  Daytime phone  Old-fashioned mail
- Please do NOT add me to your email communications list.

Your contribution is tax deductible as allowed by law. Please send it to Friends of the Chicago River at 28 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1800, Chicago, IL 60604-2272 or make your gift online at [www.chicagoriver.org/get\\_involved/](http://www.chicagoriver.org/get_involved/).

For all contributions over \$35, Friends of the Chicago River members receive:

- \* A subscription to Friends' River Reporter newsletter, filled with important information on issues that effect the Chicago River plus a calendar of river-related events;
- \* Volunteer bulletins and other opportunities for hands-on involvement;
- \* Invitations to special events like Chicago River Day and the Big Fish Ball;
- \* Discounts on Friends' canoe trips;
- \* Listing in our Annual Report;

And perhaps most significantly,

- \* The reward of knowing that your membership contribution has a direct impact on improving the Chicago River's health and vitality.

Business members also receive a certificate showing your customers and employees that you care about the environment and the Chicago River.

Donors of \$250 and above are eligible for additional recognition opportunities and more! Those with support of \$1,000 and above for the year are also included on an annual plaque at our McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum. Naming opportunities at the Bridgehouse Museum are available as well.

Friends of the Chicago River is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization.

# Friends of the Chicago River



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## BE A FRIEND OF THE CHICAGO RIVER!



## Get Out and Get Muddy with Friends!

Build strong teams, foster communication, and promote cooperation among your employees by joining Friends of the Chicago River for a **CORPORATE VOLUNTEER DAY** outside on the Chicago River.

This turn-key operation provides everything you need to work together on a mission-driven service project that benefits the Chicago River and your company teams. Our professional staff will design and execute an entire day of activities ranging from habitat restoration to climate change mitigation projects to guided canoe trips - all you have to do is show up and have fun!

Contact Meshawn Ayala at (312) 939-0490, ext. 18. Custom work days are available. Corporate Volunteer Days run April and through October.

**Start planning now!**



The River Reporter is printed on recycled paper.

Visit our web site, [www.chicagoriver.org](http://www.chicagoriver.org), for more information. Calendar of events and tours on page seven.

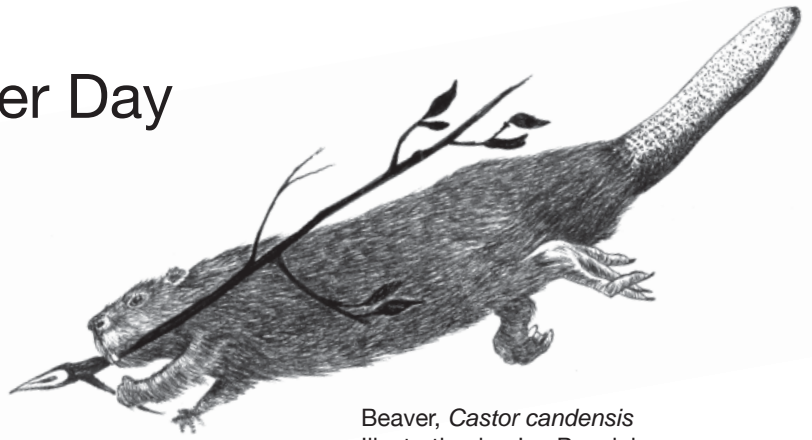


Your Invitation to the

# 19th Annual Chicago River Day

Saturday, May 14, 2011  
9 a.m. – 12 noon

Presented by



Beaver, *Castor canadensis*  
Illustration by Jen Pagnini

### GET YOUR GLOVES READY!

Join Friends and 4,000 other river enthusiasts at one of 65 sites along the river RAIN OR SHINE to help restore one of our most valuable resources by planting native wildflowers and grasses, removing invasive weeds, building trails, collecting garbage, removing debris, and much, much more.

### BRING YOUR FRIENDS!

Or meet new ones at our biggest ever day of service celebrating the Chicago River. Last year over 4,000 volunteers participated in making the Chicago River a better place. This year we've got new sites, new activities, and a new challenge.

### HELP US WIN!

Introducing the 1st annual Urban River Challenge! The Chicago River is taking on the Los Angeles River – but with an ecological twist! For decades, our two cities have hosted some of the largest volunteer-driven river clean-ups in the country – and this year, we're competing to be the best. Be a part of the Chicago team and help us make sure we win! (And become a facebook friend which helps us win as well.)

All Chicago River Day volunteers receive a T-shirt.

### BEYOND THE BANKS

Everyone in our watershed is connected to the Chicago River so five Beyond the Banks' sites provide hands-on learning where we will teach people easy and useful ways to continue protecting the Chicago River from your own back yard. Activities include constructing rain barrels, building wildlife habitat, designing a rain garden and tours of the Bridgehouse Museum.

### BECOME A SPONSOR

Contact Cynthia Fox at (312) 939-0490, ext 13, or email [cfox@chicagoriver.org](mailto:cfox@chicagoriver.org) for sponsorship opportunities

See page 9 for instructions on how to sign up for this event...



# CHICAGO RIVER DAY

Saturday, May 14, 2011

9 a.m. to 12 noon

## HOW TO SIGN UP

1. Go to [www.chicagoriver.org](http://www.chicagoriver.org) and click on Chicago River Day and then click Find a Site.
2. Pick a site near you or one of particular interest.
3. Email or call the site captain listed so they know to expect you.\*
4. Show up the morning of May 14 with a smile and shoes and clothes you don't mind getting a little dirty.

\* Groups larger than 10 people should call or email Cynthia Fox at (312) 939-0490, ext. 13, or [cfox@chicagoriver.org](mailto:cfox@chicagoriver.org) in addition to their site captain. This will ensure your group is placed in at a location that fits your needs.



## CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR UPDATES

There may be new or different site captain information, additional sites or activities, and sites that have reached capacity and have closed.

## 2011 SPONSORS

WHITE OAK

**Exelon**



SYCAMORE



## ASPEN

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Firestone Complete Auto Care  
Illinois EPA

## LEAD IN-KIND DONORS

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of Cook County  
Hefty® Brand  
Metropolitan Water Reclamation  
District of Greater Chicago



SIGN UP AT [WWW.CHICAGORIVER.ORG](http://WWW.CHICAGORIVER.ORG)

**Friends of the Chicago River**



## WHY

The Chicago River has come a long way over the years. Be a part of its continuing revitalization by joining Friends of the Chicago River for the 19th annual Chicago River Day day of service!

## WHAT

Activities include litter pick-up, sorting for recycling, invasive species removal, trail maintenance, planting native seeds, wild-flowers and grasses, water quality testing, river-focused art projects, and more.

## WHO

Everyone can help out! Friends welcomes individuals, families, schools, corporate groups, scout troops, community and conservation groups to take part in Chicago River Day.

## WHERE

There are over 60 sites located along 100 miles of the 156 mile Chicago River system! From North Chicago in Lake County to Blue Island south of Chicago, there is sure to be a site convenient for you!