

■ ILLINOIS ■

Beaubien Woods-Flatfoot Lake

PROJECT GOAL

Recover an ill-used county forest through environmental restoration, improved recreation facilities and programmed use by a Chicago-based youth fishing organization.



Once held in distant locations, Fishin' Buddies!—a youth mentoring organization—now holds fishing events for inner-city youth at Beaubien Woods' Flatfoot Lake within the City of Chicago. Courtesy of Fishin' Buddies, Inc.

formed between remnant sand dunes. European settlement and subsequent industrialization, however, brought dramatic changes to the landscape.

Over the years Beaubien Woods became overgrown with thick vegetation and, most

recently, unsafe for recreational use due to frequent illegal activities. When local residents raised concerns about the area's deteriorated condition through public surveys, an action plan for site improvements was prepared by the Forest Preserve District with assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The plan called for removal of excessive, non-native vegetation; refurbishing recreation facilities and restocking Flatfoot Lake with fish (a shallow lake created by the excavation of fill for a highway).

PROJECT RESULTS

- ▶ Cleaned up and stocked Flatfoot Lake for use as a local fishing area.
- ▶ Re-established safe public recreation and access to the Lake.
- ▶ Increased recreational use of the site by addressing safety concerns.
- ▶ Increased open space for area residents and provided a convenient site for Fishin' Buddies! youth programs.

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RTCA CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORY

Conservation works today at the local level. Citizens in thousands of grassroots groups are protecting places that are important to them: nearby rivers, open space for the community, and trails linking town and country. The Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA) supports this grassroots movement as an important part of the National Park Service mission to protect America's natural and cultural resources. The Service increasingly is being called on to support the conservation efforts of state and local governments and citizens' organizations.

RTCA becomes involved when formally asked by the landowners, local officials, and citizens who share the desire to protect—or to improve—their communities. All projects are founded on cost sharing, cooperation, and community initiative. In these partnerships, the Service's role is to help achieve goals set collectively by the partners.

About The Project

Beaubien Woods, an area of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, is located on Chicago's far south side adjacent to the Calumet Sag Channel. The pre-historic coastal plain of Lake Michigan, the area had been a vast sand prairie dotted with small pockets of diverse wetland vegetation in the swales



Fishin' Buddies! "conservation kids" complete picnic facilities using newly-acquired work skills while learning important "life skills" through interaction with a variety of natural resource professionals. Courtesy of Bob Long, Jr.



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Fishin' Buddies! "conservation kids" experience "hands-on" environmental education by assisting with natural resource inventories; here fish species, size and condition are recorded under the guidance of a Forest Preserve District fisheries biologist. Courtesy of Cook County Forest Preserve District.

At the same time, Fishin' Buddies! youth fishing club was looking for a location to sponsor fishing events. Fishin' Buddies! provides inner-city youth with opportunities for recreational fishing and interaction with adults as positive role models. Before "discovering" Flatfoot Lake, the fishing club transported kids to suburban fishing areas because a suitable city location did not exist. Fishin' Buddies! contacted the Forest Preserve District proposing improvements to Flatfoot Lake so that it could be used for their events.

With interest high in both organizations, the Forest Preserve District and Fishin' Buddies! received a grant from the Urban Resources Partnership of Chicago to complete site improvements.

Through this unique partnership, the 2-acre area has been dramatically improved. Beaubien Woods is now a place enjoyed by hundreds of area residents. Project partners picked up garbage and cleared non-native vegetation. Native seeds and plants were identified for future use. Debris in and around Flatfoot Lake was cleaned up, water quality was tested, and fish were stocked. A service road and fishing pier were constructed, picnic shelter built, existing facilities refurbished, and access to the waterways established.

Recreational use of Beaubien Woods has risen significantly since the enhancements were completed. Partners have also used the site for public school environmental education

classes where students learn about water quality and local ecology. As a result of this project, Fishin' Buddies! has established environmental programs for inner city youth while developing the capability to successfully complete restoration activities in the future.



Removing non-native vegetation improves wildlife habitat at Beaubien Woods, while inner-city youth of all ages learn about nature. Courtesy of Bob Long, Jr.

LIST OF PARTNERS

- Chicago Ornithological Society, Chicago State University, USDA Forest Service, Shedd Aquarium, and The Nature Conservancy provided educational assistance to the volunteers.
- Fishin' Buddies! Youth Fishing Club conducted community outreach and managed youth work crews.
- Forest Preserve District of Cook County, site owner and manager, provided funds and technical skills, built new facilities, and conducted environmental education seminars.
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources provided fishing information and stocked Flatfoot Lake with bullhead, catfish, and hybrid sunfish of catchable size.
- National Park Service, as part of the ChicagoRivers Demonstration Project, provided survey data regarding public concerns and recreation needs.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Chicago Metro Wetlands Office partnered with the District to create an action plan, worked with youth crews, and provided technical assistance.
- Urban Resources Partnership in Chicago provided technical assistance through partner organizations.

For more information contact:
National Park Service
77 West Jackson Boulevard
WW-16J
Chicago, Illinois 60604
(312) 886-1437