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Gompers Park Wetlands

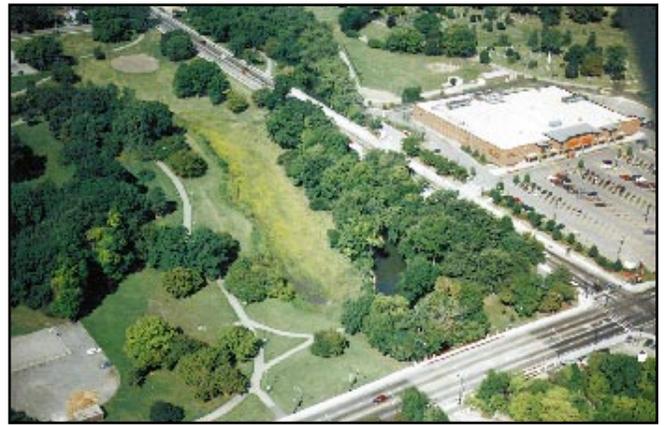
PROJECT GOAL

Establish a functioning wetland ecosystem in a city park along the North Branch of the Chicago River and provide community education opportunities on the values of floodplains and wetlands.

About The Project

Gompers Park is in the North Mayfair neighborhood located on Chicago's northwest side. The 2-acre area of the park selected for restoration was thought to have once been a small, marshy wetland within the Chicago River floodplain. What is known about the site is that in the late 1930's a lagoon was built, creating a runoff stream, which still flows to the river through the project area. A berm, or raised border of land, was constructed to separate the park from the river. In the 1960's, the wetland area was filled in and replanted as lawn.

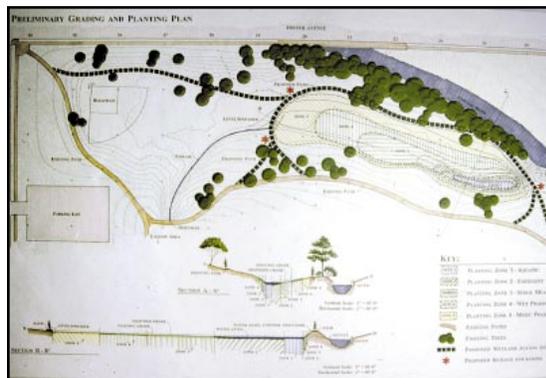
The Chicago Park District, the landowner, selected Gompers Park as a restoration site. At the same time, Friends of the Chicago River was locating possible areas for river-related restoration and noted the potential of Gompers Park and the adjacent North Branch of the Chicago River. Community residents have a



Aerial view of Gompers Park one year after project completion. Photograph by Richard E. Carter.

history of getting involved and making things happen at Gompers Park. For this project, people had already expressed interest in seeing the site as a wetland and in taking part in ecological restoration work. The Park District took the lead, working with the many partners to develop a site plan.

Gompers Park is a wetland that will act like a sponge by soaking up and holding excess water, removing some pollutants from storm water runoff, and helping reduce



The site plan for Gompers Park provided information needed for both the contractor and neighborhood volunteers to successfully complete this complex project. Courtesy of Chicago Park District.

PROJECT RESULTS

- ▶ Developed a wetland and enhanced natural flood management.
- ▶ Created a hands-on environmental education program with local schools at the site.
- ▶ Enhanced natural habitat for various birds, small water animals (macro invertebrates), turtles, fish, and an increased frog population.
- ▶ Increased community support by involving local volunteers in the project.

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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.



R



Dedicated neighborhood volunteers worked under extremely hot and dry weather conditions planting the wetland area. Courtesy of Chicago Park District.

downstream flooding. To create this wetland, the Chicago Park District hired a contractor to remove fill and regrade the site. This shaped the land contours so that the area would hold an appropriate amount of water and expose hydric (wet) soils, which are important for growing wetland plants.

Volunteers then planted native wetland and prairie vegetation to capture and retain water. The wetland plants also naturally filter out the pollutants and sediments in storm-water runoff to improve water quality. The wetland now provides habitat for a variety of birds, turtles, and fish, and frogs.

A water level control structure was built which manages the amount of water flowing onto the site. The water level can be lowered to facilitate maintenance for plantings or sediment removal. Periodically, when the Chicago River rises, a bypass pipe allows river

water to flow into the wetland. The combination of a water control structure and the improved ability of the area to hold moisture will help reduce impacts from downstream flooding.

Community training sessions introduced volunteers to wetland restoration as well as planting techniques for native vegetation. An ecological education program has also been created for area schools with students planting native vegetation, performing sampling and analysis of the amount and quality of water, and doing weeding and mapping of the site.

Workshops for teachers were also conducted to integrate the Gompers Park wetland into the educational curricula of area schools. Future plans include work with volunteers who will survey and identify plants and do additional plantings.



A Chicago arts educator worked with seven Amundsen High School students to complete this mural depicting the Gompers Park wetland, called "Dragonfly Slough" by the students. Courtesy of Friends of the Chicago River.

LIST OF PARTNERS

- **Amundsen and Roosevelt High Schools** incorporated Gompers Park into their school curriculum.
- **Chicago Academy of Sciences, Field Museum, Museum of Science and Industry, Shedd Aquarium, and North Park Village Nature Center** formed a partnership to assist classroom education and field demonstrations.
- **Chicago Park District** assisted with coordination including community involvement, restoration plans and volunteer activities. Continuing involvement ranges from education programs to site management.
- **Community Volunteers** helped with planting and continue involvement through maintenance and educational tours.
- **Friends of the Chicago River** assisted with community involvement, volunteer activities and site dedication.
- **National Park Service**, through the ChicagoRivers Demonstration Project, facilitated the selection of Gompers Park as a wetland demonstration.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service** conducted soil analyses and provided engineering design and construction oversight.
- **North Mayfair Improvement Association and Gompers Park Advisory Council** conducted community forums for planning, education programs and volunteer activities.
- **Urban Resources Partnership in Chicago** provided technical assistance through partner organizations.
- **US Army Corps of Engineers** completed the hydrological analyses of river flows.
- **US Fish and Wildlife Service** helped with site design, management plans, and volunteer training.

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