

■ ILLINOIS ■

Prairie Wolf Slough Wetlands and Prairie

PROJECT GOAL

Restore wetland, prairie and savannah habitats in the Middle Fork of the Chicago River watershed to demonstrate effective natural resource solutions for problems commonly associated with urban growth.



The newly-established wetland effectively collects polluted storm water runoff from the adjoining business center. Photograph by Richard E. Carter.

About The Project

The Prairie Wolf Slough site lies in the upper reaches of the Chicago River watershed and is thought to have originally been a mixture of wetland, prairie, and savanna or open woods. European settlers to the area installed drainage tiles moving water off the land and into the river. Tiling made the land suitable for farming but also increased the amount of water flowing directly into the river, which increased flooding downstream.

The Chicago Rivers Demonstration Project conducted an assessment along Chicago Area Rivers to determine possible locations for locally-based conservation improvement projects. Through an evaluation process, the Prairie Wolf Slough site was selected as the best location for re-establishing a wetland. This 42-acre site is located in Lake County, Illinois, a rapidly growing suburban neighborhood

approximately 35 miles north of downtown Chicago.

Once the site was selected, the Friends of the Chicago River were successful in receiving the initial grant from the Urban Resources Partnership of Chicago. Working collaboratively with the site landowner and manager—the Lake County Forest Preserve District, the Friends formed an effective project team of local, State and Federal resource agencies to achieve the community-based goals of habitat restoration and water quality improve

ment. Successful completion of initial project phases resulted in additional funding from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency non-

PROJECT RESULTS

- ▶ Developed 7 acres of oak savanna and 5 acres of wetland and wet prairie involving the planting of more than 50,000 wetland plants.
- ▶ Created a loop trail connected to existing county land trails.
- ▶ Integrated effective involvement of Federal and local resource managers.
- ▶ Involved more than 700 volunteers and established a strong local volunteer network to maintain the site.
- ▶ Enhanced wildlife habitat for a variety of plant and animal species, including ducks, herons, muskrats, frogs, turtles, sedge wrens and northern harriers.
- ▶ Recipient of the National Wetlands Award sponsored by the Environmental Law Institute and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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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.



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point source pollution program and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers settlement funds.

Prairie Wolf Slough now contains 28 acres of restored wetland and wet prairie, as well as, 14 acres of improved forest, including oak savanna. The wetland portion of Prairie Wolf Slough will act like a sponge, soaking up and retaining excess water, managing storm-water runoff, and reducing downstream flood risks. Runoff from nearby parking lots and office roof tops flows through the wetland which filters out sediments and other impurities before reaching the river. This improves water quality and addresses residents' concerns about debris and sediment in the water. The drainage tiles were also broken up, allowing the land to absorb and store more water, reducing the amount of downstream flooding and flood damage. A water control structure was built to manage water levels and facilitate maintenance on the site. The water level can be lowered to do plantings or remove accumulated sediments and then returned to appropriate levels to sustain the wetland.

Other work involved clearing invasive plant species and planting wetland, prairie, and savanna vegetation. The increased variety of native plants attracts a diverse range of wildlife native to the area, while addressing desires for open space expressed by area residents. A path was built forming a link to existing trails on county lands. Local educators



A U.S. Department of Agriculture AmeriCorps worker removes non-native vegetation improving wildlife habitat. Courtesy of Lake County Forest Preserve District.

created an environmental education curriculum that uses the site. The multi objective approach used by project partners successfully accommodated the community's broad range of interests.

Future plans include development of a long-term site management plan; continued clearing of invasive, non-native vegetation; planting of native vegetation; and installation of educational signs. Project partners will work together to expand existing community involvement so vital to the project's long-term success. Area high schools will continue to use the site for ecological studies.



Over 700 volunteers—ranging from grade school students to retired adults—worked long hours placing more than 50,000 native plants. Courtesy of Friends of the Chicago River.

LIST OF PARTNERS

- **Friends of the Chicago River** assisted with project coordination, raised funds, and managed volunteer activities and education programs.
- **Illinois Environmental Protection Agency** provided funds for water quality aspects of the project.
- **Lake County Forest Preserve District**, site owner and manager, assisted with design and construction plans, obtained permits, administered funds, and worked with volunteers.
- **Lake County Stormwater Management Commission** conducted hydrology studies, provided funds, and supervised construction of the water control structure.
- **National Park Service**, through the ChicagoRivers Demonstration Project, facilitated project initiation to demonstrate wetland values and river enhancement.
- **US Army Corps of Engineers** directed a local developer to pay for a part of project activities through a civil settlement for alleged violations of the Clean Water Act.
- **US Fish and Wildlife Service** provided technical assistance for wetland design, supervised volunteer activities, and conducted seminars for area teachers.
- **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service** provided soil analyses, completed engineering plans and topographical maps.
- **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