

Summary of People and the River

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INTRODUCTION

Five principal studies (including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' telephone survey published in a separate report entitled, "Resident Use and Perception of the Chicago and Calumet Rivers") and three support studies give a comprehensive look at how people perceive, use, and interact with the Chicago River. This final chapter summarizes the main characteristics and findings of these social science investigations and attempts to draw some lessons for future planning and management of the river for recreation and related values.

SUMMARY OF STUDY CHARACTERISTICS

Table 9.1 summarizes the main characteristics of the studies in this report. These characteristics, detailed below, include the scope of the studies and their objectives, sample, and methods of investigation.

SCOPE

A multiple study approach enabled us to understand both the breadth and depth of issues affecting people and the river. At the broad scale, the corridor-wide survey conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided information from users and non-users across the entire river corridor. A more narrowly defined survey of individuals who had canoed, kayaked, or rowed in the corridor also provided information about perception and use of the corridor's northern half, down to and including the South Branch of the Chicago River. This broad scale "demand" information was complemented by information on the current and anticipated "supply" of recreation and open space opportunities in each reach as identified through interviews with resource experts.

Building on this corridor-wide understanding of demand and supply, additional studies provided more in-depth looks at specific places within the corridor. Studies of neighborhood residents, recreation habitats, and Chinatown and CitySpace residents examined recreation and open space demand and supply issues at the neighborhood level. The on-site user survey provided a closer look at perceptions and uses of important or popular sites in the corridor. Figure 9.1 shows the neighborhood and site locations included in these studies. These more local studies were essential to complete the picture sketched out by the corridor assessment.

OBJECTIVES

As stated in the introductory chapter, the overall objectives of the social science studies conducted under the ChicagoRivers Demonstration Project were:

1. To identify and characterize the major constituent groups, settings, and recreational opportunities in the corridor.
2. To identify patterns of recreational use, perceptions of issues, and preferences for recreational activities, settings, and experiences.
3. To examine commonalities and differences in uses and perceptions for different areas or for different users of the river corridor.
4. To make recommendations for enhancing the river for recreation and related values and for improving river corridor planning and management based upon research findings.

Together and separately, individual studies were designed to fulfill these overall objectives. Surveys of neighborhood residents, on-site users, corridor residents, boaters, and CitySpace and Chinatown neighborhoods each emphasized social questions about use, perceptions, and preferences (objective two), but did so for different user populations. In contrast, studies of resource experts and recreation habitats emphasized questions about the physical settings, the groups who own or manage them, and/or the recreational opportunities present or planned for them (objective one). Most of the studies examined similarities and differences in study uses and perceptions (objective three), but did so for different locations (e.g., reaches, sites, neighborhoods), social group (e.g., age, social class), or group types (e.g., riparians vs. non-riparians, recreational activity type). Finally, a majority of the studies included recommendations for river enhancement and improvements in planning and management (objective four), either by summarizing the comments from study respondents or by drawing conclusions based on other research findings.

SAMPLE

Following the challenge from the original "Voices of the Stream" symposia that provided the catalyst for ChicagoRivers, we cast a broad net to listen to all constituent groups and individuals. In the eight studies covering the social dimensions of the river, we talked with more than

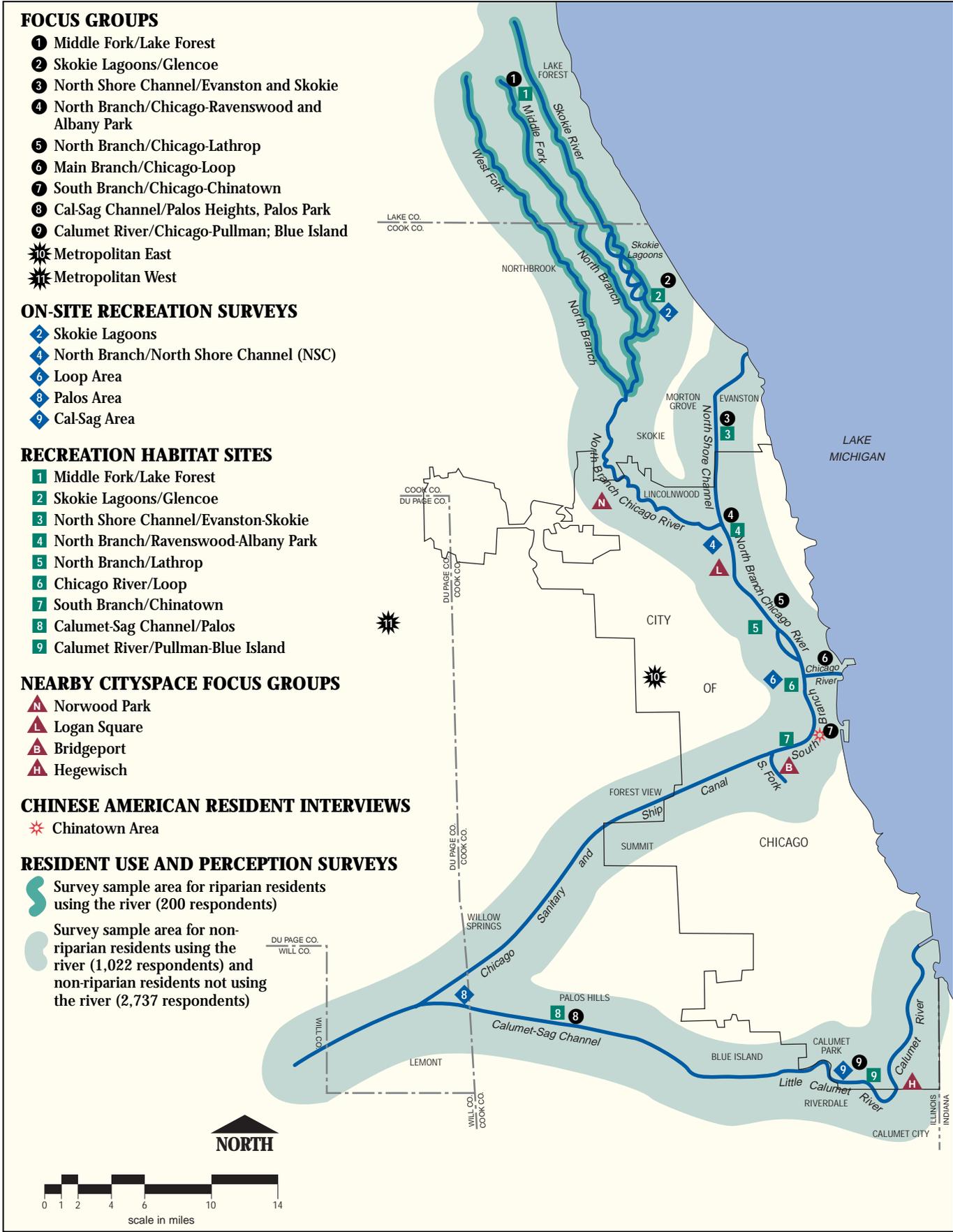


FIGURE 9.1

Map of study reaches with location of ChicagoRivers Demonstration Project Social Science Studies

TABLE 9.1
Characteristics of ChicagoRivers Demonstration Project social science studies

Chapter/Study	Scope	Objectives	Sample Size	Methods
PRINCIPAL STUDIES				
2. Nearby neighborhood residents	9 neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select representative river neighborhoods Examine awareness, perceptions, and use Solicit ideas for river enhancement 	98 Total (adults)	Focus groups
3. On-site recreationists	6 areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify full range of activities in corridor Examine use patterns Assess perceptions and river importance 	582 Total	On-site survey
4. Resource experts	Corridor-wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Profile key groups who influence the river Inventory current/potential recreation supply Summarize issues for key activities Identify strategies for river enhancement 	27 Formal ¹ 11 Informal 38 Total	Face-to-face interviews
5. Recreation habitats	9 neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classify physical aspects of river open space Determine user access to river Identify sociodemographics of neighborhoods Examine social-physical relationships 	629 Vegetative units 109 Census block groups	Census data; trace measures
Corridor residents ²	Corridor-wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain statistically representative user sample Assess use and non-use of river Identify perceptions, preferences, and uses Solicit ideas for river enhancement 	200 Riparians 1,022 Nonriparians 2,737 Non-users 3,959 Total	Telephone survey
SUPPORT STUDIES				
6. CitySpace neighborhood residents	4 neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify diverse Chicago communities Broadly describe current open space uses Assess importance of open space types Identify priorities for improving open space 	32 Teens 32 Adults 64 Total	Focus groups
7. Chinatown residents	1 community area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand Chinese American leisure needs Assess preferences for new park development Examine age, gender, generational differences 	25 Teens 178 Adults 39 Children 242 Total	Personal and group
8. Canoeists, kayakers, and rowers	Corridor-wide (Reaches 1-7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify use patterns and user characteristics Assess motivations, perceptions, preferences Solicit ideas for river enhancement 	138 Total	Mail survey
¹ The 27 formal interviews involved 44 people. ² Study appears in a separate ChicagoRivers technical report entitled, "Resident Use and Perception of the Chicago and Calumet Rivers.".				

5,000 people; these interchanges ranged from brief phone calls with corridor residents on why they had not used the Chicago River, to two-hour-long personal interviews with major providers and managers of open space.

Groups sampled in the individual studies have already been mentioned in the context of the study objectives discussed above. For comparison, Table 9.2 summarizes the major types of constituent groups included in the studies and identifies the kinds of subgroup comparisons made.

INVESTIGATION METHODS

Each study in this effort used the particular methods that would most effectively and efficiently address the individual and overall objectives of ChicagoRivers. These methods included:

- **Focus groups:** Focus group methods used in studies of nearby neighborhood residents, CitySpace neighborhood residents, and the Chinatown children's subsample (group

discussion) gave us the opportunity to explore issues in depth, generate ideas from the interaction among participants, and use creative visualization tools to uncover ideas and options for enhancing the river corridor.

- **Face-to-face personal interviews:** Face-to-face personal interviews used in the resource expert study and the Chinatown study also provided an opportunity for in-depth communication. The chief advantage of this tool, however, was that it provided access to groups who are often difficult to reach through mail or telephone.
- **On-site survey:** The on-site survey provided an important way to identify the current range of activities in the corridor, and a means to examine the use of sites along the river, independent of where people lived.
- **Census data:** Census data used in the recreation habitat study helped profile resident groups along the corridor from social, demographic, and economic perspectives, and helped characterize and compare corridor reaches (via census tracts) and neighborhoods (via block groups).

TABLE 9.2
Groups sampled and subgroup comparisons made in the studies

Groups sampled	Subgroup comparisons
Nearby neighborhood residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those living in different neighborhoods along the corridor
On-site Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those recreating at different places in the corridor • those engaging in different activities—walking, biking, motor boating, sitting/relaxing, eating lunch
Resource Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public land managers, private non-profit groups, private commercial recreation providers, and private commercial and industrial users
Corridor residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • users and non-users of the river • riparians (live right on the river) and non-riparians (live off the river but in the corridor) • those living in different reaches along the corridor
CitySpace neighborhood residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those living in different neighborhoods along the corridor • teens and adults
Chinatown residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age, generational status, and other social and demographic factors
Canoeists, kayakers, and rowers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paddlers and rowers • club members and sponsored trip participants

- **Observed trace measures:** Trace measures of access, previous land use, and environmental disturbance provided clues about how open spaces along the river are or could be used for recreation (recreation habitat study).
- **Telephone survey:** The telephone survey method obtained a random, statistically representative sample of corridor residents. This makes it possible to project findings from the sample to the study population within a measurable margin of error.
- **Mail survey:** Surveys mailed to past river boaters identified from organization mailing lists made it possible to efficiently contact a sample from a specific population that would be difficult to obtain on-site or assemble for focus groups because of their small numbers and scattered locations.

SUMMARY OF STUDY FINDINGS

When we examined research findings across all these studies, three major interrelated themes emerged: places, activities, and issues. First and foremost, when people talked about river and river-based activities and issues, they did so with reference to specific places to which they have physical, social, and emotional attachments. Discussions about places focused on people’s awareness and knowledge of the river, places often used or otherwise regarded as special, and the meaning and values people held for the river or the sites, areas, or settings with which they were familiar. Second, recreation is often thought of as an activity-based pursuit, and the discussion of existing and desired opportunities for recreation usually took place within the context of a given set of activities. Thus, activities—use types and related patterns of use—formed another major theme in the findings from the different studies. Finally, discussions about providing activity opportunities often hinged on whether a certain set of condi-

tions was being or could be met. These conditions defined issues that mostly fell into five broad categories: water quality, scenery and nature, facility development and maintenance, safety and user conflicts, and access.

In the remainder of this section, we attempt to synthesize the findings from all of the studies with respect to the themes of places, activities, and issues. Tables for each of these themes highlight principal findings, while the discussion in the text focuses on common and divergent findings among the studies.

PLACES

People’s concept of place was fundamental to how the river was perceived and used. For most people, the Chicago River was not a 156-mile-long corridor that traverses the metropolitan region. Instead, it was the “ditch” in their backyard, the stream flowing under the bridge they sit on in their neighborhood park, or the stretch of water they enjoy while eating lunch at a downtown cafe or canoeing or bicycling at a county forest preserve. In other words, people know the river as a place with a specific location and limited extent, usually defined through direct experience. This is evident in the findings on “place knowledge” summarized in Table 9.3. People usually did not make connections between their place and the larger system of interconnected river reaches; when they did, it was often more on an intellectual and functional level than on a personal and emotional one. Thus, what was central to most people’s conception of the Chicago River corridor was the place or places to which they had close personal ties.

Many of these specific locations along the river, as identified by experience, familiarity, and use, were considered “special places” to those who talked about them. A few of these special places were well known and had almost a symbolic or iconic status to those with whom we spoke in the different

TABLE 9.3
Summary of findings—place knowledge

NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS	
• Place Knowledge:	Little knowledge of river beyond neighborhood and downtown, not seen as a connected system; different, colloquial names for reaches
• Special Places:	Nearby neighborhoods, local parks and preserves, downtown
• Place Values:	Passive use, scenery, symbolic values of nature (Middle Fork of the North Branch of the Chicago River, Skokie Lagoons), history (downtown)
ON-SITE USERS	
• Place Knowledge:	Most saw river as “very important” to their activity that day
• Special Places:	Nearby neighborhoods, river parks, forest preserves (LaBagh Woods, Skokie Lagoons), bike paths, downtown, marinas, restaurants
• Place Values:	Nearby nature/open space access, water use and appreciation, facilities, scenery, solitude and escape from the city
RESOURCE EXPERTS	
• Place Knowledge:	Experts had detailed knowledge of their properties and reach; felt recreationists saw river as important to use, if even as a backdrop
• Special Places:	Many sites in every reach
• Place Values:	River provides full spectrum of values, including nature, scenery, history, culture, recreation, economic
RECREATION HABITATS	
• Place Knowledge:	Inventory of vegetative, land use, and demographic characteristics of 9 neighborhood areas (same areas as neighborhood residents’ study)
• Special Places:	Identifies areas of closed forest and other important vegetative types
• Place Values:	Quality vegetation, good access and good maintenance indicate quality “habitat” for recreation
CORRIDOR RESIDENTS	
• Place Knowledge:	Non-riparians visited Chicago River, Skokie Lagoons, and North Branch of the Chicago River most often; riparians most often visited reach on which they lived
• Special Places:	Most favored sections were Chicago River, Skokie Lagoons, North Branch of the Chicago River.
• Place Values:	Scenery, place for activities, escape from city, nature, history, quiet
CITYSPACE NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS	
• Place Knowledge:	Varied by location: some unaware of river in their neighborhood; for others, river is a central part of their outdoor experience
• Special Places:	Local places of significance
• Place Values:	Nature, scenery, wild/undeveloped, escape/unsupervised
CHINATOWN RESIDENTS	
• Place Knowledge:	Most aware of river site for proposed new park
• Special Places:	Local park and private spaces in the community, some parks outside community but nothing currently on the river
• Place Values:	Passive use, natural environment, recreation facilities for children and adults
CANOEISTS, KAYAKERS, AND ROWERS	
• Place Knowledge:	Most had boated 2 or more sections in past 3 years; most often visited stretches were North Branch of the Chicago River, Chicago River, Skokie Lagoons
• Special Places:	Favored stretches were North Branch of the Chicago River (paddlers), Chicago River (rowers)
• Place Values:	Nature, exercise, wildlife, solitude, show support for river, learn, adventure, something new, escape urban pressure

studies. Places such as the Skokie Lagoons and the Chicago River downtown were such places. More often, however, special places were highly localized and in many cases were mentioned by only one person or a few people. We heard about hundreds of such places, some with official names such as the Middle Fork Savanna and the I&M Canal trail, and others with colloquial names known only to local residents, such as the “Amazons” and the “Coal Hills.”

These special places were valued for many reasons. Some settings had outstanding natural or cultural attributes that made them special. Other places looked “ordinary,” but provided a special area of solitude or escape from the city and from other people. Some special places were even more personally defined by the memories of experiences of those who used them. A few people in the studies refused to reveal the locations of special places for fear that their discovery by others would ruin the very qualities that made them special.

In summary, although planners often find it useful to think of corridors and open spaces as interconnected systems, we must consider the standpoint of people’s everyday experience and recognize the importance of viewing the Chicago River System as an aggregate of discrete places. Planning that focuses on places—and the qualities and values that make them special—will help ensure that planning strategies are responsive to local needs and desires. At the same time, however, planners and managers can also help constituents see the big picture by tying local needs to overall strategies for protecting and enhancing the corridor.

ACTIVITIES

Although people’s concepts and feelings toward place often reveal some of the most significant information for planning and managing sites, areas, and reaches along the corridor, people often most directly identify their concerns and desires for a place in terms of the activities they pursue or would like to pursue there.

The studies revealed a great diversity of activities and activity types along the corridor (Table 9.4). In its most narrowly defined sense, the river is used for water-based recreation activities like fishing and boating (and in a very few cases, swimming). The amount of this water-based use is small in comparison to overall corridor recreation activity, but it is increasing, and such activities should be considered in planning for the future of the river.

A much greater proportion of river corridor use is dedicated to land-based recreation that depends in part on the river as an important setting for activities. Many “passive” recreation and leisure activities fall into this use type, ranging from eating lunch or picnicking with the river as a scenic backdrop, to birdwatching and other nature-related activities possible only because the river provides the habitat for plants, animals, or entire ecosystems that are present. The use patterns

associated with these activities are similarly diverse, ranging from short daily visits to nearby places to day-long outings in remote areas. For some, especially those who live on or near the river, passive use extends beyond what one might consider recreation activity, and daily viewing/experiencing the river contributes to these individuals’ overall quality of life. In planning for these diverse passive activities, attention should be placed not only on providing spaces and facilities that enable use to take place, but also on doing so in a manner that enhances people’s appreciation for the river and its setting.

In some cases, the river corridor supplies space for the pursuit of recreation activities that seem to depend little on the adjacent water environment. These activities include athletic team sports like baseball and soccer, and passive activities like reading and card playing. Findings show that the use patterns for these activities vary with respect to frequency and length of use, as well as along other important parameters such as group size. Despite these variations, findings from the on-site survey suggest that although some of those who engage in such activities may feel the river is not important to the enjoyment of their activity, many more think it is at least somewhat important. Because of this and because these activities are legitimate uses of urban park and open space, it is important to consider river appreciation in planning and managing for these activities.

ISSUES

The concerns and desires for improving places and activities in the corridor centered on five broad issue categories: water quality, scenery and nature, facility development and maintenance, safety and user conflicts, and access (Table 9.5). In most studies, water quality was the foremost concern. Respondents felt the waters of the Chicago River corridor were polluted, and although many saw recent signs of improvement, they felt much more work needed to be done. In several of the studies, it was apparent that people held an idealized image of what a “clean river” should be. This image—clear and fast-moving like a mountain stream—might limit the extent to which efforts to improve the water quality of the Chicago River can ever meet people’s expectations. Perceptions of water quality differed with location, types of pollution, user group, and activity type. For example, respondents in the southern reaches of the corridor generally felt the river had more and worse kinds of pollution problems (e.g., toxic wastes, dumping) than did respondents in the northernmost reaches (e.g., natural debris, turbidity), and those who engaged in water-dependent recreation activities like boating often showed higher concerns about pollution than those who only walked or relaxed along the river. These findings indicate that there is no blanket solution for addressing water quality concerns, and they suggest that activities to improve water quality (or inform people about improvements) must be targeted to the particular locale or interest group.

TABLE 9.4
Summary of findings—activities

NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS	
• Use Types:	Range from viewing river to passive nature-oriented activities to active sports; main focus on walking, biking, and passive activities
• Use Patterns:	Frequency ranges from daily to rarely. River used both as a corridor (trail recreation) and for distinct places (picnicking)
ON-SITE USERS	
• Use Types:	Fifty activities categorized: walking/hiking, biking, motor boating, fishing, sitting and relaxing, eating lunch, other passive, other active
• Use Patterns:	Most use was individual or in small groups; most drove to reach site; most use was from nearby neighborhoods or offices, but Skokie Lagoons, Palos, and Cal-Sag were regional attractions; half visit river weekly or more, and most visits were less than one hour long
RESOURCE EXPERTS	
• Use Types:	Four main activity types examined: boating (canoe/kayak, rowing shell, motor boat, excursion boat), fishing (shore and boat), trail recreation (walking/hiking, biking), and natural and cultural resource-based recreation and education (appreciative, educational, stewardship, and consumptive)
• Use Patterns:	Varies greatly by activity
RECREATION HABITATS	
• Use Types:	Examined historical indicators of land use and present features that facilitate or constrain use of the river
• Use Patterns:	Not examined
CORRIDOR RESIDENTS	
• Use Types:	Top mentioned activities included walking/jogging, sightseeing/tour boating, picnicking, bicycling, motor boating, observing wildlife
• Use Patterns:	Frequency of use highest for birdwatching, observing other wildlife, and walking/jogging; for non-riparians, most visited reaches were the Chicago River, North Branch of the Chicago River and Skokie Lagoons; riparians most often visited reach near their homes
CITYSPACE NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS	
• Use Types:	River used by adults for viewing, trails, and aesthetic appreciation; use by youths included these activities and nature/adventure exploration, parties, boating, fishing, and even swimming
• Use Patterns:	Varies by neighborhood and age group from frequent to rarely
CHINATOWN RESIDENTS	
• Use Types:	Little river use at present; non-river activities include relaxing, ball playing, swimming, and taiji; desired uses for new park include passive nature appreciation, facilities for swimming and ball playing
• Use Patterns:	Frequency ranges from daily for relaxing and taiji to occasionally for sports activities; variations in frequency by activity and age
CANOEISTS, KAYAKERS, AND ROWERS	
• Use Types:	Primary use for canoeing/kayaking and rowing; related activities include nature exploration, exercise
• Use Patterns:	Most individual rowers used river daily or weekly, while most of those on organized trips were “first timers”; 1/3 had used river during 3 or more seasons; group size varied by group type; most outings were round trips (i.e., same put-in/take-out location); most trips were on the Chicago River (rowers) or North Branch of the Chicago River (canoeists/kayakers)

TABLE 9.5
Summary of findings—issues

NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS	
• Water quality:	Most felt water was polluted, but indicators of pollution varied by group; water cleanup was the chief issue for most groups
• Scenery/nature:	Natural beauty was important in all locations; cultural scenery—buildings, bridges—was a positive feature in the downtown area
• Facilities/upkeep:	Maintenance of existing facilities and landscape is important; new facilities are also important, but should be appropriate to the setting
• Safety:	Included personal safety and the effect of vegetation on crime; physical safety from drowning or contact with polluted water
• Access:	Dimensions included: convenience/proximity to river, public ownership of property, fencing, continuity of access along the corridor, disparity of access/facilities between different reaches
ON-SITE USERS	
• Water quality:	Biggest problem discussed: over ½ saw water quality, dumping as problems; ⅓ said odor a problem; problems biggest for boaters, Cal-Sag groups, but these groups also saw biggest improvements
• Scenery/nature:	Scenery & nature most-liked river features; lack of natural areas rated as problem by ⅓ overall, highest for downtown group
• Facilities/upkeep:	Lack of facilities biggest problem after water quality and dumping; need for cleanup, trails, restrooms, boat launches, fish stocking, trees
• Safety/Conflicts:	Personal safety a problem for ⅓ overall, highest for walkers, North Branch & Palos groups; graffiti/vandalism a problem for ¼, but high for North Branch group; conflicts less a problem, but higher among boaters and anglers, North Branch and Cal-Sag groups
• Access:	⅓ overall felt lack of open space was a problem; fences a problem for ¼ in Chicago parks; best access/open space at Skokie Lagoons
RESOURCE EXPERTS	
• Water quality:	Recent improvements have increased use, especially for fishing; less an issue for other uses, though particular aspects can affect certain groups (e.g., in-stream debris affects North Branch boaters)
• Scenery/nature:	Natural and cultural scenery are important attributes of corridor for in-stream and streamside activities; design and engineering of river improvements can enhance or degrade aesthetics
• Facilities/upkeep:	Major discussion topic, especially as relating to trail development
• Safety/conflicts:	Major topic, especially for boating; many physical safety/conflicts between motor/non-motor recreational boats, commercial/recreational boats; fish consumption is a health concern; personal and physical safety are concerns at some locations in corridor
• Access:	Major topic for boating, fishing, trail activities; dimensions include access in and out of water, access to shore, visual access, fencing, equality of access for different users/different areas of the corridor
RECREATION HABITATS	
• Water quality:	Not addressed
• Scenery/nature:	Units identified with special or unique vegetative cover; exotic vegetation, soil compaction and erosion; low income-minority areas had less closed forest and more erosion
• Facilities/upkeep:	Units identified with dumping, trash, and vandalism; low income-minority areas had less upkeep
• Safety/conflicts:	Not addressed
• Access:	Units identified with roads and paths providing access to the river, fences blocking access; low income-minority areas had less access

TABLE 9.5 (Continued)
Summary of findings—issues

CORRIDOR RESIDENTS	
• Water quality:	Murky water, dumping, smells, “other” are problems for >¾ non-riparians on most-visited reach, less for riparians (upper reaches)
• Scenery/nature:	Aesthetics highest-ranked value for most visited reach; lack of natural areas a problem for >½ non-riparians and ⅓ riparians
• Facilities/upkeep:	Lack of developed facilities a problem on most-visited reach for >½ non-riparians and about ¼ riparians
• Safety/conflicts:	Personal safety a problem on most-visited reach for >½ non-riparians and ⅓ riparians; conflicts were least-mentioned problems
• Access:	Lack of shore access a problem on most-visited reach for nearly ½ non-riparians; not problem for most riparians
CITYSPACE NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS	
• Water quality:	South Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River called “highly polluted” by Bridgeport groups; Hegewisch teens mentioned jumping off bridges into Little Calumet, and Hegewisch and Norwood Park teens fish and boat
• Scenery/nature:	Most felt the river contributed to the aesthetic and nature/wildlife values of their neighborhood; even abandoned industrial wildlands had an aesthetic appeal and attracted children for nature exploration
• Facilities/upkeep:	North Branch of the Chicago River forest preserves well-maintained; river lacked facilities and was poorly maintained in most other neighborhoods
• Safety/conflicts:	Some areas used by gangs and teens for drugs and drinking
• Access:	Access to river poorest in Logan Square; Bridgeport and Hegewisch groups could use more public park space
CHINATOWN RESIDENTS	
• Water quality:	River polluted to the extent that it could deter use of proposed park
• Scenery/nature:	New park should provide scenery/natural environment values
• Facilities/upkeep:	Present recreation facilities are minimal
• Safety/conflicts:	Areas outside Chinatown core (including new park) seen as dangerous
• Access:	New park will serve community recreation/open space needs
CANOEISTS, KAYAKERS, AND ROWERS	
• Water quality:	Pollution/garbage top-ranked dislike
• Scenery/nature:	Nature and outdoor experiences top-ranked like
• Facilities/upkeep:	Lack of bathrooms and emergency stops are problems
• Safety/conflicts:	Obstructions, difficult portages, and powerboat wakes are problems
• Access:	Lack and difficulty of access points

The importance of other issues varied both within and across the study samples. For example, in the focus groups of near-by neighborhood residents, personal safety was a principal concern for the Evanston-Skokie and Ravenswood-Albany Park groups, but protection of the natural environment outweighed safety concerns in the Lake Forest and Glencoe focus groups. Like water quality, the issues of safety and access were frequently multidimensional in nature: safety concerns included both personal (e.g., fear of crime) and physical safety (e.g., concerns of falling in the water), while access concerns included convenience, visual-physical access, public land ownership, equal access among groups,

access into and out of the water, and other issues. It is clear when looking within and across studies that many disparities exist among groups and locations on most issues. Many of these, such as water quality and the natural environment, result from the physical nature of the corridor and the historical evolution of development across the metropolitan region, not from any deliberate attempt to shortchange one area or group to benefit another. Still, assets and shortcomings identified by individual studies and by comparison of findings across studies can help planners and managers identify how positive outcomes might be repeated elsewhere in the corridor and where current gaps might be filled.

CONCLUSIONS

In this last section we make some brief concluding comments about each of the principal objectives addressed in the studies:

- **Characterization of groups, settings, and opportunities:** A great diversity exists in the corridor, not only of resources and facilities available or proposed, but also of constituents who have an interest in them. The resource experts and recreation habitat studies were most directly aimed at identifying current and proposed opportunities for recreation and environmental enhancement; these studies can provide a solid basis for future corridor-wide planning and for development of realistic options and priorities for specific reaches or neighborhoods. Likewise, the entire set of studies in *People and the River* comprehensively characterizes the major constituents in the corridor, and such information can be helpful in implementing local and regional projects.
- **Demand for activities, settings, and experiences:** The summary of study findings on places, activities, and issues above provides substantial range and depth of demand information. Comparing this with information on supply suggests that in most cases planners and managers are on the right track, and that the corridor is ripe for further recreational enhancement if the appropriate precautions are taken and improvements are made. Serious problems remain with water quality, safety, and other issues and will take many years of concerted effort to alleviate. However, in most studies we found people had seen positive change occurring and were confident things could be further improved.
- **Variations in perception and use:** Research objective three examined variations in uses and perceptions for different areas or for different users of the river corridor. In many cases both within and between studies, we found differences in how people perceived and used the river and in what issues and concerns they found important or problematic. On a general level, however, people agreed much more than disagreed about what was important. In most cases there was a high degree of concern for the river at the local neighborhood level, a desire to see a diversity of activities and appropriate support facilities, and a demand for improved water quality, safety, access, and natural scenery. The information on variations in perceptions and use can help target planning and management efforts for specific locations and groups, keeping in mind that most people want to see the same general kinds of improvements made.
- **Strategies for enhancing Chicago rivers for recreation and related values:** Finally, conclusions about objective four for recommending improvements in planning and management activities show a need for taking a broad look at the river corridor to coordinate activities among the many groups, agencies, and businesses that have an interest in the future of the river. As far as understanding how people perceive, use, and interact with the river, however, future efforts will be most successful if they focus on local problems, issues, and opportunities at the neighborhood and community scale. Research showed that the highest knowledge, awareness, and concern lie at this scale, and hinted that commitment toward individual and group action is most likely on projects close to home.

The future of the Chicago River depends upon many individuals, groups, and agencies, acting singly and in cooperation, to realize the many bright possibilities described in this report. We hope that this report, by heightening awareness of people's interactions with the river, will help planners, managers, and other readers find ways to promote action at local and regional levels. If those in other metropolitan areas can see commonalities in the places, activities, and issues discussed in these pages, they may be able to transfer our findings and recommendations outlined to the rivers they seek to guide toward enhanced futures. Above all, as we rediscover our urban rivers, it is hoped that we might also rediscover the functional, aesthetic, and spiritual values through which people and the river were originally linked.