

were chief among the suggestions for new recreation facility development in the corridor; increased park and open space was a priority along some reaches (e.g., South Branch, Cal-Sag) where such areas are currently sparse.

4. **Increased safety and access are also needed before more people will perceive and use the river as a recreational resource.** Current problems with safety were cited as impediments to wider use in nearly every focus group. Suggestions for increasing safety varied according to the specific safety concerns. Solutions ranged from heavier vegetation, fencing, and railings to keep children from falling into the river; to better lighting, less vegetation, and more patrols to ward off crime. In a similar sense, various strategies might improve access to the river, from clearing weeds and other vegetation to enhance views of the river to purchasing land and developing facilities to promote close, convenient physical access.
5. **The diversity of the corridor is both a strength and a challenge that must be acknowledged in future development efforts.** The natural and social diversity existing within the corridor prevents any generic approaches to development. By recognizing this diversity, corridor planners and managers might more successfully work within the constraints and opportunities it allows. Those participants who talked about the corridor as a whole mentioned the need to balance recreational development with industrial, commercial, and residential land uses. In the case of recreational development, this balance requires a sensitivity to the “context” of development and the degree of naturalness or level of development that is appropriate to the urban or suburban setting. This information may help planners and managers understand local problems and priorities and in turn help their constituencies understand the corridor as a diverse but interconnected system.
6. **Outreach efforts can promote local awareness, interest, and action in river improvement activities.** A final point gleaned from discussions about the future potential of the river dealt with how river improvement efforts are communicated to the public. Participants who were informed about river cleanup projects tended to have a much more positive outlook on the river than those who were not aware of these projects. In fact, for several of the attendees who knew little about the river, participation in the focus group exercises and discussions helped improve their perceptions of the river. These findings show the critical need for, and power of, better public communications by agencies, municipalities, and advocacy groups. From the many experiences recounted by participants, it is clear that awareness can build interest and concern, and in some cases, even lead to individual and grassroots community action in river improvement projects. Many of the participants who used the river in their neighborhood showed a high concern for it and a willingness to take at least partial responsibility for ensuring its protection and improvement.

## BY-REACH SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Participants’ current perceptions and uses of the river in their neighborhood, as well as their recommendations for future improvements, are summarized in Table 2.1 for each focus group.

## PART I INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Research on urban corridor recreation opportunities has shown that most who visit a local trail or greenway tend to come from nearby residential neighborhoods, often less than a mile away (Young and Flowers, 1982; Furuseth and Altman, 1991; Moore et al., 1992). Nearby residents are often the most frequent users of trails and greenways, and their support can affect the ultimate success of a greenway as a recreation resource (Gobster, 1995). Most importantly, those who live near park and open spaces often have an intimate knowledge of these resources, their assets and shortcomings. For these reasons, the project investigators felt it important to find out more about how nearby residents perceive and use the Chicago River.

The objectives of this study were:

1. To include a sample of participants that reflects the geographic, age, gender, economic, and ethnic diversity of residents who live near the Chicago River corridor and in the surrounding metropolitan region.
2. To examine residents’ awareness, perceptions, and uses of the river corridor, its sites and reaches, and to solicit their ideas and opinions on improving the corridor for recreation and other resource values.
3. To suggest how study findings might be used to develop planning, design, and management strategies for the river corridor.

### STUDY METHODS

#### THE FOCUS GROUP AS A METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Focus group interviews were used to gather information on awareness, perception, and use from nearby and metropolitan residents. As a social science method, the focus group interview is being increasingly used to identify and explore people’s perceptions and behavior (Goldman and McDonald, 1987). Focus groups allow investigators to probe salient issues and uncover ideas and insights that may not surface through traditional mail and telephone surveys (Krueger, 1994). Although the qualitative nature of this method does

**TABLE 2.1**  
**Summary of current perceptions and future prospects by focus group**

<b>MIDDLE FORK/LAKE FOREST (REACH 2)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Passive, e.g., walking, sitting, nature exploration
• Places Used:	Backyards, road dead ends, Middle Fork Savanna
• Positive Characteristics:	Beauty and solitude, rare plants
• Problems:	Turbidity and natural debris in water, steep banks are hazards for children
• Improvements/Changes:	Purchase and development of Middle Fork Savanna
• Recommendations:	Remove downed trees and deal with flooding, increase safety, ensure appropriate level of development for Savanna
<b>SKOKIE LAGOONS/GLENCOE (REACH 3)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Frequent use for walking, biking, skiing, and other activities
• Places Used:	Forest Preserves, Botanic Garden
• Positive Characteristics:	Wildlife, natural vegetation, picturesque landscape
• Problems:	Turbidity and natural debris in water, deer overpopulation, exotic vegetation, littering
• Improvements/Changes:	Dredging of lagoons has improved water quality
• Recommendations:	Continue lagoon cleanup efforts, control deer population, restore native vegetation, remove fallen trees, “manicure” landscape near some use areas, reduce littering
<b>NORTH SHORE CHANNEL/EVANSTON AND SKOKIE (REACH 4)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Walking, biking, jogging, nature exploration, ball playing, harvesting of wild edibles
• Places Used:	Trails along canal in Skokie and Evanston, Sculpture Park, Ladd Arboretum
• Positive Characteristics:	Good maintenance, convenient access
• Problems:	Water pollution/odor, lack of safety in park areas with dense vegetation, steep canal banks are hazardous to children
• Improvements/Changes:	Pollution reduced, “Deep Tunnel” stormwater storage project seen as positive
• Recommendations:	Increase safety by thinning vegetation and by increasing lighting, patrols, and through traffic; balance nature with safety concerns
<b>NORTH BRANCH/CHICAGO-RAVENSWOOD AND ALBANY PARK (REACH 5A &amp; B)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Various park activities, but limited by crime and gangs
• Places Used:	City parks along the river: Gompers, River, Horner
• Positive Characteristics:	River lends “country” atmosphere to urban scene; good maintenance of yards by riparian residents
• Problems:	Water quality problems with pollution, odor, dumping; poor maintenance of park landscape and facilities; gangs and crime
• Improvements/Changes:	Few improvements or changes noted
• Recommendations:	Increase safety, increase cleanup efforts
<b>NORTH BRANCH/CHICAGO-LATHROP (REACH 5B)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Limited due to lack of public space; some fishing and viewing from bridge
• Places Used:	Bridges
• Positive Characteristics:	Aesthetic and functional (transportation) values
• Problems:	Little physical or visual access to river, severe pollution—odor and dumping, safety hazards to children
• Improvements/Changes:	Few improvements or changes noted
• Recommendations:	Clean up water and shoreline, make water more usable for fishing and boating
<b>MAIN BRANCH/CHICAGO-LOOP (DOWNTOWN AREA) (REACH 6)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Walking, jogging, biking, picnicking, viewing, boating
• Places Used:	Riverwalk, North Pier, Wolf Point
• Positive Characteristics:	Scenery—views of and from the river; contrast of nature with urban scene; good maintenance
• Problems:	Water quality—litter; personal safety
• Improvements/Changes:	Many positive changes noted in water and landscape quality
• Recommendations:	Develop continuous riverwalk, develop more restaurants and other riverside destinations reachable by foot or boat, mixed feelings about proposed riverboat gambling
<b>SOUTH BRANCH/CHICAGO-CHINATOWN (REACH 7)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Viewing; use limited by lack of public open space
• Places Used:	Bridges
• Positive Characteristics:	Aesthetic (contrast/change of scene) and functional (industry, economic development) values
• Problems:	Pollution, lack of open space
• Improvements/Changes:	Proposed park development along river could increase recreation opportunities for the community
• Recommendations:	Clean up pollution, develop park space and a riverwalk, develop shore with sensitivity to needs of the community
<b>CAL-SAG CHANNEL/PALOS HEIGHTS, PALOS PARK (REACH 10A)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Hiking, biking, picnicking
• Places Used:	Palos Forest Preserve, I&M Canal trail, Lake Katherine
• Positive Characteristics:	Wildlife, natural vegetation and scenery, barges and functional values of the canal
• Problems:	Water pollution, concern for safety when alone in remote areas of the forest preserve
• Improvements/Changes:	Sidestream Elevated Pool Aeration (SEPA) plants are a sign of water quality improvement; more fish and fishing noticed along waterways
• Recommendations:	Continue water cleanup efforts, keep corridor largely natural with some limited development for recreation (marina, stores)

**TABLE 2.1 (Continued)**  
**Summary of current perceptions and future prospects by focus group**

<b>CALUMET RIVER/CHICAGO-PULLMAN; BLUE ISLAND (REACH 10C)</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Some boating and other uses; use limited by lack of public open space but especially by poor water and landscape quality
• Places Used:	Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve
• Positive Characteristics:	Some areas with natural or pioneer vegetation
• Problems:	Severe water pollution—smell, toxics, etc.; landfill smell and pollution also constrain use
• Improvements/Changes:	Sidestream Elevated Pool Aeration (SEPA) station in Blue Island is a sign of improved water quality
• Recommendations:	Clean up water and landfills, enhance corridor for recreational and business opportunities
<b>METROPOLITAN EAST-CHICAGO</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Occasional tour boats and river tours; walking and bike riding
• Places Used:	Mostly downtown
• Positive Characteristics:	Views from bridges; downtown generally well kept
• Problems:	Water pollution—turbidity, smell, toxics, dumping; poor landscape maintenance
• Improvements/Changes:	Aeration plant near Devon Avenue
• Recommendations:	Clean up water; more bike trails, trees, and downtown riverside restaurants; maintain variety of settings in corridor
<b>METROPOLITAN WEST-WEST SUBURBAN DUPAGE COUNTY</b>	
• River Recreational Use:	Low awareness and use; some viewing, tour boats
• Places Used:	Mostly downtown
• Positive Characteristics:	Historical value; river dyed green on St. Patrick's Day; bridges and downtown views; use for transportation, industry
• Problems:	Polluted, unattractive
• Improvements/Changes:	Better sewage treatment
• Recommendations:	Improve water quality and shoreline aesthetics; increase recreation opportunities

not allow for generalizing study results to a larger population, the flexibility of the approach and the depth of understanding that can be attained make it an ideal method at the early stages of issue assessment and a particularly valuable complement to quantitative surveys (Fern, 1983). We worked cooperatively with Adam Davis of Decision Sciences, Inc., in developing the sampling design and interview questions, and implementing the focus groups for this study. Davis also facilitated all the focus group sessions.

**SITE SELECTION**

We conducted 11 focus groups in all—9 from neighborhoods close to the river and 2 from the Chicago metropolitan region at large. For the nearby resident groups, riparian and nearby (1-2 blocks away) residential areas throughout the river corridor were identified through large-scale maps. The nine neighborhood areas were chosen for their geographic, socioeconomic, and ethnic differences, and because of important local resources and current projects or issues. The two metropolitan groups were included to get a feel for how average metropolitan residents who do not live on the river think about and use the river, and how they might differ from nearby residents. The reaches and neighborhood areas are shown in Figure 2.1 and are characterized below:

**1. Middle Fork/Lake Forest (Reach 2):** This area, in the suburb of Lake Forest near the headwaters of the North Branch, is sparsely populated, predominantly Anglo American, and upper income. The river here is narrow and flows through a complex of residential, wetland, prairie, and woodland areas. A new oak savanna restoration project by the Lake County Forest Preserves and The Nature Conservancy is located here.

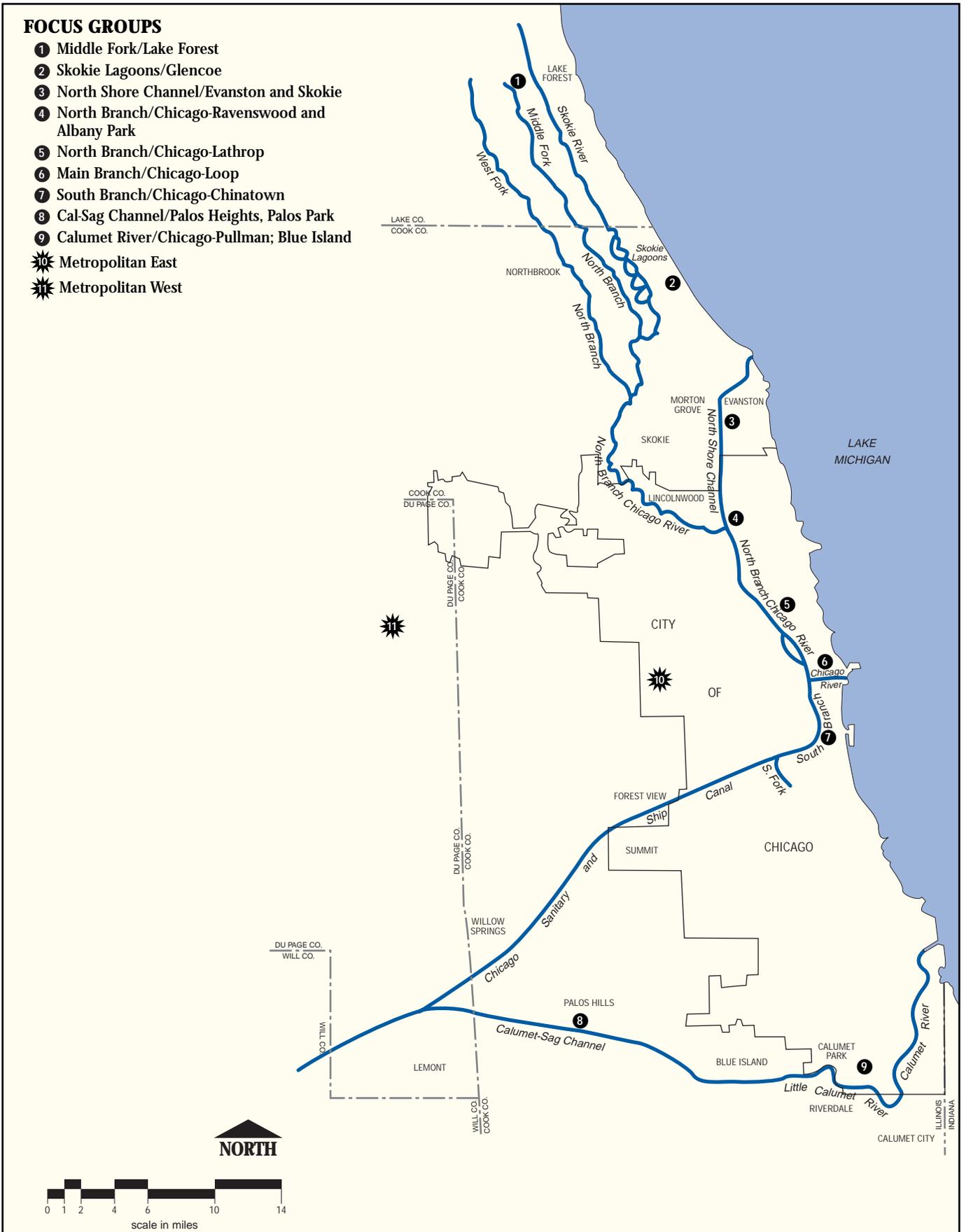
**2. Skokie Lagoons/Glencoe (Reach 3):** The Skokie Lagoons area includes 7 pools and 190 acres of water surrounded by a 400-acre woodland-marsh complex owned and managed by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Although the neighboring community of Glencoe is primarily Anglo American and well-off, the Lagoons area itself is an important regional attraction for an ethnically and economically diverse group of recreationists. At the time of the focus group interview, the lagoons were being dredged as part of a recreational and ecological restoration project.

**3. North Shore Channel/Evanston and Skokie (Reach 4):** The corridor is mostly park land in this section, owned by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and managed by the City of Evanston and the Village of Skokie. Adjacent neighborhoods are middle class and racially mixed. The Evanston side of the channel has many older trees, a paved trail, and picnic facilities. The Skokie side was recently improved for recreation with new plantings, a paved trail, and a sculpture park.

**4. North Branch/Chicago-Ravenswood and Albany Park (Reach 5A & B):** The river in this area flows through several parks and other open spaces, and is one of the few stretches where people have homes bordering the river. Neighborhoods are a mix of housing densities, incomes, and ethnicities. Public agencies and private groups recently made open space improvements and have plans for more. There has been a controversy over riparian residents who have built piers and decks on the riverbank without the consent of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, which owns it.

**FOCUS GROUPS**

- ❶ Middle Fork/Lake Forest
- ❷ Skokie Lagoons/Glencoe
- ❸ North Shore Channel/Evanston and Skokie
- ❹ North Branch/Chicago-Ravenswood and Albany Park
- ❺ North Branch/Chicago-Lathrop
- ❻ Main Branch/Chicago-Loop
- ❼ South Branch/Chicago-Chinatown
- ❽ Cal-Sag Channel/Palos Heights, Palos Park
- ❾ Calumet River/Chicago-Pullman; Blue Island
- ☀ Metropolitan East
- ☀ Metropolitan West



**FIGURE 2.1**  
**Map of study reaches with location of focus groups**

5. **North Branch/Chicago-Lathrop (Reach 5B):** The river here is channelized, its fenced-off banks have little natural vegetation, and riparian land use is mostly commercial and industrial. The area includes Lathrop Homes—a Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) development—and surrounding blocks of mixed-density housing. Residents are low-and middle-income African Americans, Anglo Americans, and Hispanics. There is little access to the river, although public agencies and private groups are working on a project at Lathrop Homes that will increase open space and recreation opportunities.
6. **Main Branch/Chicago-Loop (Reach 6):** The Loop refers to downtown Chicago and includes the Main Branch of the Chicago River and short segments of the North and South Branches. The river here is wide and channelized, and its banks are developed with high-rise office and residential buildings. Loop residents are mostly upper income Anglo Americans. Open space along the river is mostly hardscape plazas and cafes, and there is a riverwalk along here that will eventually be made continuous through the Loop. Recreational boating and fishing are becoming increasingly popular.
7. **South Branch/Chicago-Chinatown (Reach 7):** This stretch of the river is mainly commercial and industrial, though abandoned areas have grown up with pioneer vegetation. Chicago’s Chinatown, which fronts the river here, has a high proportion of the city’s Chinese American residents and has one of the lowest amounts of open space per capita. Chinatown residents are working with the Chicago Park District on plans for a 12-acre park along the river’s east bank.
8. **Cal-Sag Channel/Palos Heights, Palos Park (Reach 10A):** The neighborhood area is just east of the Palos-Sag Forest Preserves, one of the largest contiguous open spaces in Northeastern Illinois. Barges and tugs use the channel, as do some recreational power boats. The suburban residents of Palos Park and Palos Heights are primarily upper middle class Anglo Americans. The Lake Katherine Nature Center was recently developed along the channel in a unique public-private development partnership, and recreational use could be expanded on the Cal-Sag and nearby Sanitary and Ship Canal corridors.
9. **Calumet River/Chicago-Pullman; Blue Island (Reach 10C):** The river, less channelized here than along the Cal-Sag, is actively used for commercial and recreational boating. Land use is mostly heavy industrial and commercial, with some open space and forest preserve areas nearby. Some working class Anglo American and African American residential neighborhoods are located along the river in this area. Some river fishing occurs on this stretch, and there are plans to increase wildlife and recreation opportunities.

The two regional metropolitan groups included:

10. **Metropolitan East:** Residents from various neighborhoods in the City of Chicago.

11. **Metropolitan West:** Residents from west suburban DuPage County.

Although these focus group descriptions identify both reaches and neighborhood areas from which participants were selected, the targeted sampling approach makes the neighborhood area a more accurate label for the groups and will be used for the rest of the report. Because participants were asked to think about and respond in terms of “the river in your neighborhood,” findings from a given focus group may not reflect perceptions of resource conditions for an entire reach.

#### **PARTICIPANT SELECTION**

Maps identified residential streets near the river, and residents’ names and phone numbers were identified by reverse telephone directories. Phone numbers for the nearby resident focus groups and the regional metropolitan groups were called at random, and an adult male or female from those households was selected to balance group composition by gender. We also included teen-aged participants in some of the focus groups, to help expand the issues and perspectives that would be discussed. Some recruitment in Lathrop CHA homes was done through networks established from previous studies, where it was found that many residents did not have telephones. To minimize any biases that people might bring to the groups, individuals were solicited without divulging the nature of issues to be discussed.

Fourteen participants were recruited for each focus group. From our past experience, we’d learned that an ideal group size of 8-10 would show up and that groups larger than this could inhibit the pace of the discussion and flow of ideas.

The actual results of the sampling procedure are summarized in Table 2.2. The 11 focus groups ranged in size from 6 to 13, with a mean size of 9. In all, 98 people participated in the study. Most groups were balanced with respect to gender and age. Each group reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the neighborhoods described in the previous section on site selection. Background questionnaires filled out by participants showed a wide variety of occupations, from professionals to laborers to homemakers, retirees, and students. In some cases, the characteristics of the areas from which focus groups were solicited reflected a particular socio-demographic orientation. Few participants from the Palos and Loop groups had children living in their households, the Lake Forest and Glencoe groups were upper income, and the Pullman-Blue Island and Lathrop groups were lower income.

#### **FOCUS GROUP FORMAT**

Each focus group session was held in a convenient neighborhood location and lasted about 1½ hours. Three major topic areas were addressed in the sessions:

1. Outdoor activities participants do in their free time, and the settings where they do these activities.
2. Awareness, perceptions, and uses of the Chicago River in general, and in participants’ neighborhoods specifically.
3. Attitudes toward river development and enhancement in their neighborhood, reaction to development “prototypes,” and recommendations for river enhancement.

**TABLE 2.2**  
**Focus group composition**

Variable	STUDY AREAS											
	Middle Fork Lake Forest	Skokie Lagoons Glencoe	N. Shore Ch. Evanston-Skokie	N. Branch Ravenswood-Albany Park	North Branch Lathrop	Main Stem Loop	South Branch Chinatown	Cal-Sag Palos	Calumet Pullman-Blue Island	Metro East	Metro West	All Groups
<b>GENDER</b>												
Male	4	6	5	2	6	6	5	4	2	5	4	49
Female	5	5	7	5	7	2	1	4	5	3	5	49
<b>AGE (YEARS)</b>												
<18	–	4	–	1	1	–	1	–	–	–	1	8
18-34	1	1	1	3	4	3	4	–	2	2	2	23
35-54	6	1	4	1	7	5	1	1	3	3	4	36
>55	2	5	7	2	1	–	–	7	2	3	2	31
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>												
Anglo American	9	11	5	6	3	8	–	8	5	6	9	70
African American	–	–	7	–	7	–	–	–	2	1	–	17
Hispanic American	–	–	–	–	3	–	–	–	–	1	–	4
Asian American	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	–	–	1	–	7
<b>HOUSEHOLDS W/ CHILDREN</b>												
Yes	8	7	8	4	9	1	6	2	5	4	5	59
No	1	4	4	3	4	7	–	6	2	4	4	39
<b>EDUCATION</b>												
Less than H.S.	–	2	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	4
Some H.S.	–	2	–	2	3	–	2	–	1	2	1	13
H.S. Grad	–	1	–	1	3	–	1	2	2	3	1	14
Some College	4	2	3	3	3	1	–	3	2	2	1	24
Tech. Degree	–	–	–	–	1	1	1	–	–	–	1	4
College Grad	1	2	7	–	–	4	2	3	2	2	4	27
Post College	4	2	2	1	1	2	–	–	–	–	1	13
<b>GROSS ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>												
<\$30,000	–	–	1	4	12	2	3	–	5	4	2	33
\$30,000-39,999	–	–	2	–	–	2	2	4	1	–	–	11
\$40,000-49,999	–	–	–	–	1	1	–	1	–	1	2	6
\$50,000-59,999	1	1	4	1	–	2	–	1	–	2	2	14
\$60,000-69,999	1	–	2	–	–	–	–	1	1	–	–	5
>\$70,000	7	5	3	2	–	1	1	–	–	1	2	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>98</b>

Topic areas were addressed through a combination of worksheet exercises filled out by each individual, serial questioning between the facilitator and each participant, and interactive discussion among participants. Initial worksheets and questioning got participants thinking about their outdoor leisure generally, without reference to the river. Once participants were comfortable talking and expressing their feelings, successive questions zeroed in on progressively narrower issues relating to the river. A copy of the moderator guide is shown in Appendix 2.1.

#### ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data from the worksheets were summarized for each group. Each focus group was videotaped and audiotaped, and discussions were transcribed for analysis. Although analysis of the worksheet data was relatively straightforward, the richness and sheer amount of textual information in the tran-

scripts (over 170 pages of text) entailed a more involved approach to analysis. A computerized scheme was developed to code each person's responses according to the response itself, the context in which it was made, and the pertinent issues it conveyed (Fielding and Lee, 1992; Silverman, 1993). A complete description of the coding process, including a coding example and the codebook for focus group comments, appears in Appendix 2.2.

Using data summary and sorting procedures, the coding system allowed us to establish some basic quantitative measurements of issue importance and saliency, such as the percentage of comments referring to "water quality" as an issue, and to compare these issues between groups. Although this information provided a partial basis for our discussion of the focus group findings that follows, a full account of the statistics themselves is less central to the presentation and is

thus provided in Tables 2.3.1 through 2.3.7 in Appendix 2.3. Table 2.3.1 provides an overall accounting of how responses were distributed among all context and issue codes. Tables 2.3.2 through 2.3.7 detail response data for particular contexts and issues.

The coding system enabled us to identify and explore the breadth of issues that arose out of the discussions and to probe the various facets of these issues. In this way, participants' comments could be organized in ways that helped to reveal a higher level of meaning than might be attained from reading the transcripts one-by-one (Wolcott, 1994). The coding system also was an efficient way to retrieve quotations on a particular issue, and to separate them by context, group, and/or individual. We have included quotations in this report to help the reader better understand the depth of issues discussed and the range and variety of perceptions that exist.

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

We present and discuss our findings here in two parts—the first focusing on what the Chicago River *currently is* in the minds of people, and the second on what the river *could be in the future*. Within each of these contexts, we describe relevant issues using the worksheet and text code data where appropriate, and we discuss and illustrate the issues with representative quotations. Together, this information provides the basis for recommendations on how to plan and manage the physical and social aspects of the Chicago River environment.

## PART II CURRENT PERCEPTIONS AND USES OF THE RIVER

### GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE RIVER

#### CURRENT LEVEL OF AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE RIVER AMONG RESIDENTS

We began focus group discussions of the Chicago River with a free association task, to get a first look at how people generally perceived the river. Using a worksheet, focus group participants were asked to put down the first thing that came into their minds when presented with a list of area park, open space, and water landmarks. Among these was “the Chicago River in your neighborhood.” Nearly half of the responses included such words as “dirty” or “pollution,” conveying that many people had a negative impression of the river. What was somewhat surprising, however, was that more than one-third of the participants had “no association,” or simply put down neutral words such as “water,” “green,” or “boats.”

Subsequent discussion of this question showed that some people were confused when asked about the Chicago River in their neighborhood, especially those who lived along the far northern and southern reaches of the corridor, as exemplified by these responses:

From the Lake Forest group: *[Brian] My thought of the Chicago River is downtown. This is the first I've known that these ditches are even connected to that.*

From the Glencoe Group: *[Babette] I was wondering whether the Lagoons are in fact part of the North Branch of the Chicago River and I'm not sure they are.*

From the Palos Group: *[Pat] It's not in my neighborhood.*

For some, part of this confusion was due to the many different names given to different reaches of the corridor. In addition to the “official” names of the reaches, local residents may refer to their part of the Chicago River by a variety of colloquial names, such as these from the Lake Forest group:

*[Mark] Skokie Ditch.*

*[Kati] The creek on Everett Road.*

*[Monica] Until Philip said what it was, I had no idea what it was, I didn't even know it had a name.*

...the Evanston-Skokie Group:

*[David] We call it the canal.*

*[Halette] The Sanitary District Canal.*

*[Georgette] Everyone has a different name to call it. I grew up calling it the North Branch, it goes from Wilmette Harbor where the locks are...*

...and the Ravenswood-Albany Park Group:

*[Brenda] About four blocks from where I live...[near] California and Roscoe, there is a branch and I guess it's the North Branch but it's like a channel...*

*[?] I live about a half block on the other side of Horner Park, the other side of the river, and we just call it the river.*

The perceptions of those in the regional metropolitan groups are particularly interesting. This dialogue from the Metro West group provides an inkling of what the average person's knowledge and awareness of the river might be if he or she does not live near the river:

*[Facilitator] What is the first thing that came to mind when I said Chicago River?*

*[Rudolf] The first thing that came to mind was that it is still polluted with stockyard waste.*

*[Brian] A movie that John Belushi was in where a car went flying out of a parking lot and into the river.*

*[Julie] It's dirty and polluted. I grew up boating on the river every summer and I just remember it was nothing but dirt all along the sides—pollution, cans, papers, dirt and junk. This was at Marina Towers.*

*[Louis] Green river on St. Patrick's Day.*

*[Michelle]...I only associated it with that Lower Wacker Drive area where you get on the boats.*

*[Louis] Well it has some historical value because that's where Old Fort Dearborn was located, where the Michigan Avenue bridge is.*

In other cases, the knowledge that people did have of the river, in their neighborhood or elsewhere, was inaccurate. Misperceptions about cleanup efforts, sources of pollution, and other aspects showed up in nearly every focus group. Misperceptions are underlined in the following quotes: