

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.

[Hayette] 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:

On pollution of the Skokie Lagoons and ongoing dredging efforts:

[Babette] Yea, but I think the dredging that's been done, it's been going on for three years, partly from the droppings of all the millions of geese that's being cleaned out—and deer—they're trying to get the water so...they're recycling it somehow. I'm not sure...

On the smell of the North Shore Channel and the discontinuance of water chlorination:

[Larry] I really don't think it's the canal that you're smelling. In the Howard-McCormick area what you're really smelling is the sewage treatment plant. They used to chlorinate the water until recently, when they felt that the cost of treating it was prohibitive so they discontinued it; that has increased the smell.

And on the operation of the Cal-Sag “waterfalls”:

[Pat] They said they'd have that waterfall operating but they didn't turn it back on until about the beginning of May. I thought: “Gee why isn't it working year 'round?” It would keep aerating the water and it would probably do so much more. Somebody has to sit there and watch it, and if you're paying someone to watch it, it seems like the thing should be working. To sit and watch something not work for six months would drive me mad.

Although discussion of these topics formed a relatively small part of the overall focus group discussion, it did uncover some potential challenges planners might face in dealing with public perceptions about the river. First, some individuals and groups have a low level of awareness about the Chicago River, both as a system and as a water body that flows near their homes. Part of this low awareness might result from the many different names given to different reaches of the river. Second, the river may not be a salient part of some people's lives, especially for those who live further away from the river. And, as with other less striking issues or objects, people's knowledge and awareness are often reduced to a few simple facts—some of which may be misconstrued. In contacting individuals and community groups on river issues, care should be taken not only to clarify the locality of the reach in relation to where people live, but also to convey that the reach is connected to the larger system.

RESIDENTS' OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THE RIVER

One of our principal objectives was to find out what those who did live near the river felt about it as a resource. To begin to address this, we followed up the free association task with another worksheet that had participants rate on a 0-100 (low-high) scale how they felt about the Chicago River in their neighborhood, along with other park and open space landmarks. The variation in responses across focus groups was quite revealing, as shown in the plot of mean ratings in Figure 2.2. Mean ratings were lowest for the Ravenswood-Albany Park group, followed by the Pullman-Blue Island and Lathrop groups. Ratings were highest for the Loop group, followed by the Glencoe, Metro East, and Lake Forest groups.

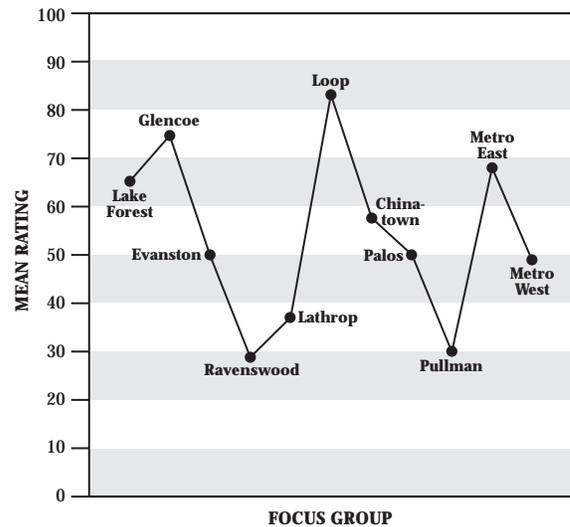


FIGURE 2.2
Plot of mean ratings of “The Chicago River in Your Neighborhood” exercise, all groups

Participants' overall feelings for the river in their neighborhoods were further explored in a subsequent worksheet. Participants were each given a box of crayons and asked to draw the river as it flowed through their neighborhood. When they were finished drawing, they were told to turn the sheet over and complete the sentence: “I am the Chicago River in your neighborhood; I am...” Samples of these drawings are shown on pages 15-19. Drawings for the highly rated reaches of the Middle Fork and Skokie Lagoons showed abundant trees and greenery; the water was usually colored blue, and the scenes often included wildlife. Loop participants focused on the urban scenery of the Main Branch—skyscrapers, bridges, boats, and formal tree plantings. Drawings for the lowest rated reaches showed a bleak view of the river; the river tended to be colored black or brown, and drawings often showed floating debris, pollution outflows, and few signs of green shoreland vegetation.

Representative comments from the “I am” part of the worksheet reflect this wide variation in people's images of the river as it flowed through their different neighborhoods.

Two points about these statements should be underscored. The first, already mentioned and confirmed by people's drawings and ratings of the river, is that the statements illustrate the sometimes radical variations in perceptions of different river reaches. Participants in the far northern reaches of the study area and the Loop were for the most part pleased with how the river currently is and hopeful that it will be preserved and improved. This outlook differed from those of focus group participants in other reaches, who tended to be much more negative and despairing about the future. This was particularly the case for the Pullman-Blue Island group, whose statements coincided with the lowest ratings given by any of the groups in assessing the river in their neighborhood.

MIDDLE FORK/LAKE FOREST



Middle Fork. A house along the stream surrounded by trees and greenery; a bicyclist pedals nearby.

- *I am part of a large river that has a history and has been here for a long time. I provide water to animals and plant life.*
- *I have been neglected until recently when interest arose to develop the land, fighting between developers and people wanting to preserve vegetation.*
- *I am quiet, gentle, relaxed. I am nature undisturbed.*
- *I am a treasure, do not abuse me. I can provide pleasure for the human race as well as animals and wildlife. If I am lost, I cannot be replaced. Take care of me.*
- *I am a tiny little drainage creek, but I add some feeling of solitude to my neighborhood. If I was bigger, maybe the community would give me a better name.*



Middle Fork. Houses, a pond, and the Middle Fork with trees and other greenery, with Everett Rd. crossing the stream near the neighbors' houses.

SKOKIE LAGOONS/GLENCOE

- *I am so happy that so many people come to sit by my banks and enjoy the beautiful surroundings. I am happy that I have fish for people to catch. I wish that there could be a way to clean up a little.*
- *I am a dirty yet grumpy old pond that keeps overflowing. I would like to be cleaned up, yet I corrode all the boats that try to help clean me up.*
- *I am happy that people of all races, creeds, and backgrounds enjoy me; fishing, hiking, running, seeing the flora and fauna I support, picnicking, and in winter skiing, sledding, etc.*
- *I am a place for families to come to and enjoy picnicking, sailing. It is a place to get away from the stress of everyday life and unwind.*



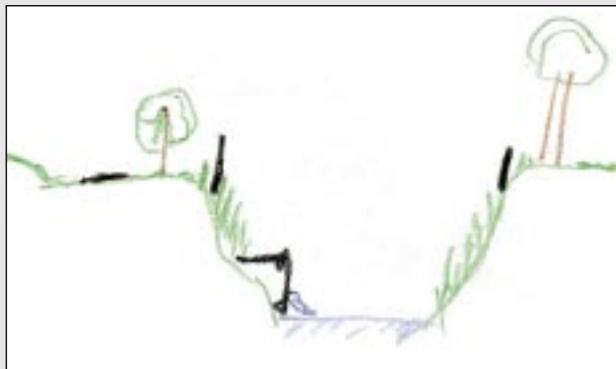
Skokie Lagoons. Lagoons with trees, flowers, a fish, and a deer; a bicyclist pedals along the forest preserve trail.



Skokie Lagoons. A residential neighborhood surrounded by trees and inhabited by a multitude of wildlife.

NORTH SHORE CHANNEL/EVANSTON-SKOKIE

- *I am dirty but trying to clean up.*
- *I am trying to clean up my act, please people also help. Keep me clean. I'm not just a sewer; I help you control your flooding.*
- *I am deep, dirty, and dangerous. I've many unguarded areas. In winter, children try to cross on the ice. Derelicts sleep under my bridges.*
- *I am a moving, viable body. Birds and ducks enjoy my water. I help avoid flooding in areas. Landscaping my banks is wonderful.*



North Shore Channel/Evanston. Steep, tree-lined canal banks are fenced off. A boat is docked at a pier.



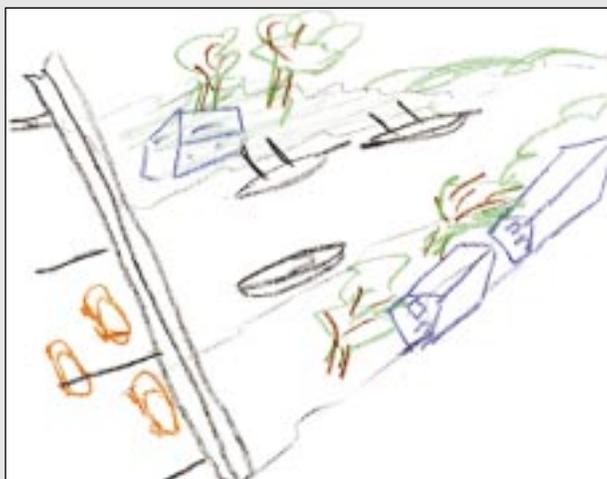
North Shore Channel/Evanston-Skokie. A tree-lined corridor and McCormick Avenue

NORTH BRANCH/RAVENSWOOD-ALBANY PARK



North Branch/Ravenswood. One river bank is green and tree-lined and the other is fenced off and residential. A tire floats in the river.

- *I am the Chicago River, get me out of here. I'm being used as a dump site. Everywhere around me there is pollution. I would not be surprised if underneath me there were cars, bodies, you name it.*
- *I'm so dirty. Please don't throw things in me. God didn't give me to you for a garbage dump. Would you like to swim in me like this?*
- *I am the Chicago River running through Ravenswood Manor. I am beautiful visually, but I am still badly polluted and need a major cleaning effort.*
- *I am a river. I want to be clean and clear. I want fish to live in my waters. I do not want to be a receptacle for everyone's castoffs—such as shopping carts, etc. I want people to stroll my banks. I want animals and birds to reside nearby. I want to be an asset to the community.*



North Branch/Ravenswood. A green, tree-lined residential river corridor shows boats docked by houses and a bridge.

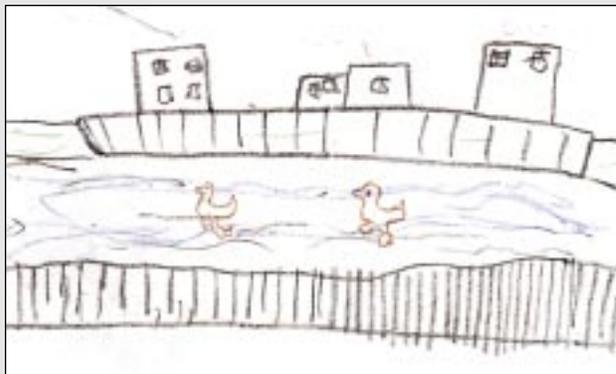
NORTH BRANCH/LATHROP

- *I am the Chicago River in the Lathrop Homes, and I am the most disgusting, dangerous, foul, and dirty body of water in the Chicago area. I want and need to be cleaned. Please save me before it's too late.*
- *I am so dirty, I stink, and I am tired of people throwing all that trash in me, and children play in me even though they know I am dangerous. And so many rats, they die here and pollute my water. I wish the city would clean me up.*



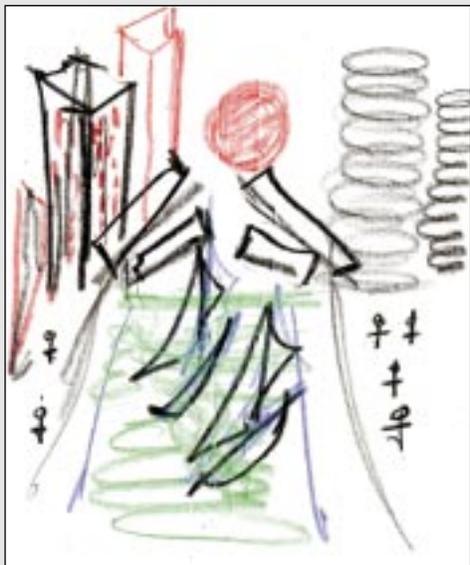
North Branch/Lathrop. The river is fenced off and bordered with houses and a bridge crossing. Bottles, a shopping cart, and other debris float in the river.

- *I am near death. Too much filth and scum are constantly poured into me. I look best on St. Patrick's Day when "da Mare" pours green dye into me. Fish would much prefer to be elsewhere. It would be nice to be back to the state I was in before Chicago became a city, where one could see a few feet into me. Chicago already has enough sewers.*
- *I am tired of the dirt, garbage, and there's a dead rat. Boy! I need to get cleaned up. The land around me needs a lot of work. Too many weeds, no one can even see me with this garbage and tall weeds. I'd love to be clean and blue as I was before the bad chemicals made me cough.*



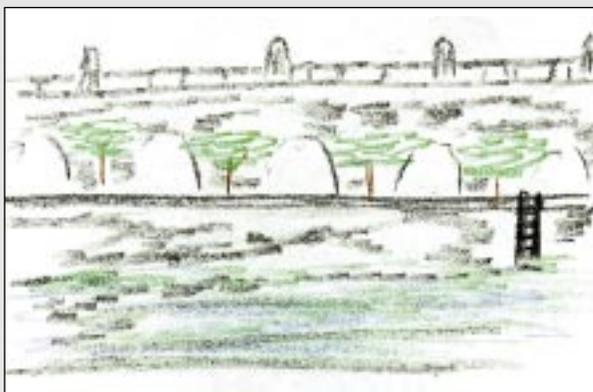
North Branch/Lathrop. The riverbank is walled and fenced off, and bordered by a road and the Lathrop CHA homes. Ducks float in the river.

MAIN BRANCH/LOOP



Main Branch/Loop. Bridges rise as sailboats move down the river. People are shown on the riverwalk near Marina City and other high-rises.

- *I am wishing the buildings recognized me more. The occasional small spills at the marina fuel dock are choking me because the flow is slow on the Main Branch. Thank you Friends of the Chicago River for your efforts.*
- *I am a creation of God. Ultimately you have power to change my course, hurt me, use me, or rape me. But the God that created everything will judge you on the last day...[and] I will be used to judge you all.*
- *I am the flow of life and beauty, sound and breath off the lake and winds holding back the teeming millions to stop and reflect, look, listen, smell.*
- *I am the Chicago River. The former mayor, Richard J. Daley, used to talk of its potential. But that potential has yet to be realized. I am a great resource to Chicago for business and for entertainment, but I am undeveloped as yet.*



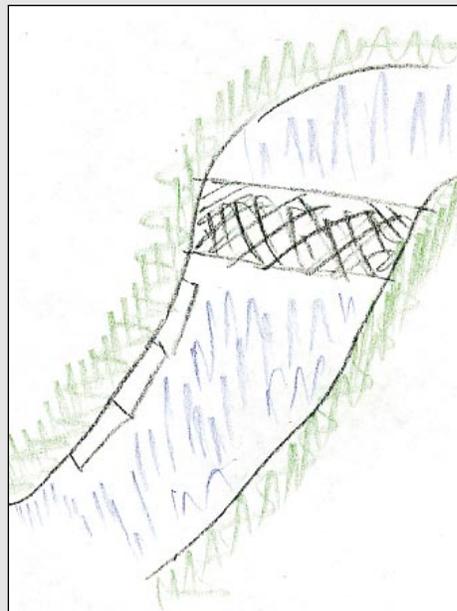
Main Branch/Loop. The riverwalk along Upper and Lower East Wacker Drive. Evenly-spaced trees line the river bank.

SOUTH BRANCH/CHINATOWN



South Branch/Chinatown: An exhaust-spewing car crosses the bridge, throwing garbage into the river. Pollution, a dead fish, and junk float on the surface.

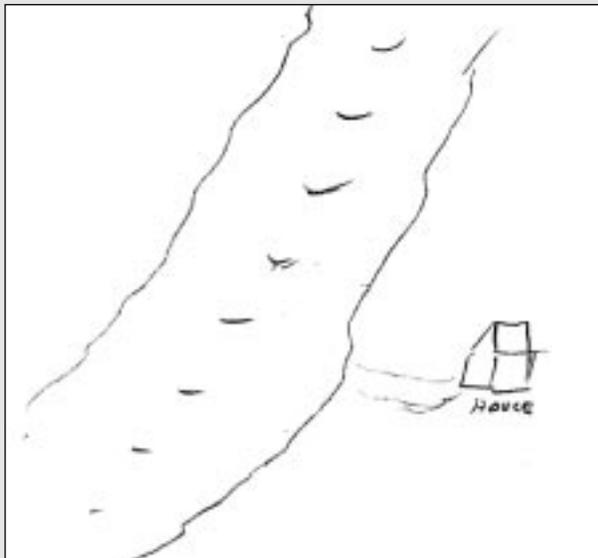
- *I am the Chicago River, I help the city's population survive every season of the year. Without me, they will have no water to quench their thirst or for sanitation.*
- *I am happy about people coming to the riverside to barbecue, etc.*
- *I am the Chicago River. I feel I have been neglected, poisoned, used, and abused. I have provided a means, a highway for transport. What have you done for me?*
- *I am filthy and sick of being in this neighborhood of yours. Why can't I just stick to the Chicago downtown area? I wish I were dead. After all, no one enjoys me here. All people do is drive across the bridge and soil me.*



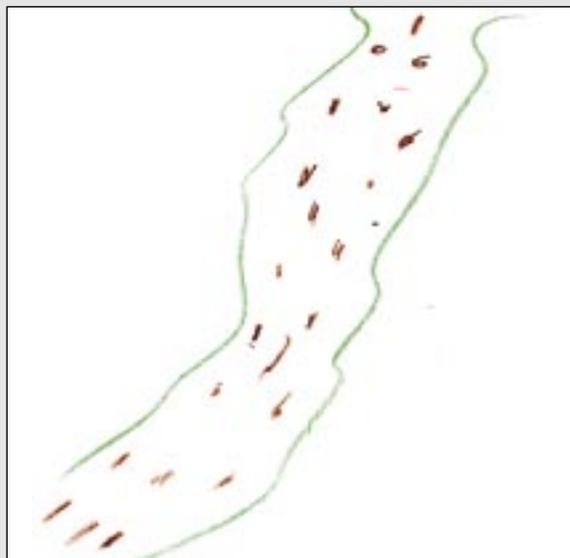
South Branch/Chinatown: A green riverbank and bridge crossing are shown.

CAL-SAG CHANNEL/PALOS

- *I am feeling that Chicago is a beautiful city. I am happy through it.*
- *I am the Chicago River and am a historic engineering marvel. I run backwards.*
- *I am a river serving seven million people. They do not all treat me properly, but I still try to serve them.*
- *I am a massive belch, a putrid, offensive scar on the earth.*

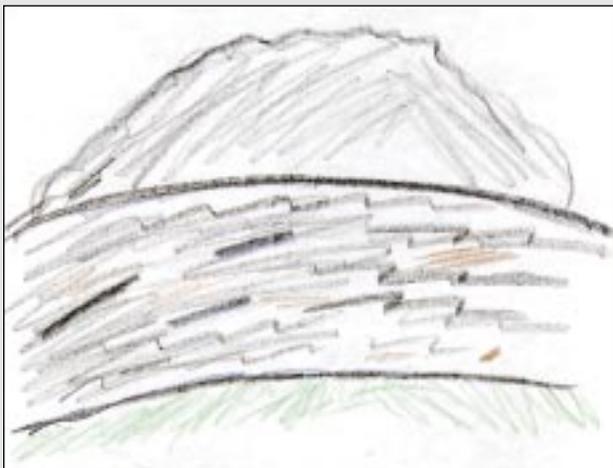


Cal-Sag/Palos. A house with access to the river is shown.



Cal-Sag/Palos. Green riverbanks are shown with brown particles floating in the water.

CALUMET RIVER/PULLMAN-BLUE ISLAND



Cal-Sag/Pullman. River flowing past the landfill. Other side is colored green (Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve?), but the river itself is colored black and brown.

- *I am dying, help me.*
- *I am in pain, please help me. I can't breathe, I'm dying, help.*
- *I am very sad, dirty, and I wish there was a way everyone or someone would help clean me up. Please help me, don't pollute.*
- *I am trying to breathe, please give me clean air.*



Calumet River/Pullman. Landfill is drawn with flames burning off the methane gas emissions. River is colored brown and blue.

The second major point from this exercise is that these statements convey, in vivid and sometimes poetic terms, the full range of perceptions and emotions many people hold toward the river. These include many positive aspects about the river—its history, wildlife, and beauty—and what these aspects give those who experience the river, such as enjoyment of many different activities, a sense of solitude, and feelings of rootedness or connection with the river and communities along it. The negative perceptions and emotions, however, are what stand out most. By giving a voice to the river, people were able to personify the effects of pollution and mistreatment using such emotional terms as pain, illness, hurt, rape, and death—words that powerfully convey what stacks of statistics about water quality seldom can. Above all, these statements—whether positive or negative—demonstrate the high level of concern that participants have for the river, a concern for how good or bad they see the river today, but more importantly, a concern for how it could be tomorrow. This concern seems to hold even for those who know little about the river, including those from the two metropolitan-wide groups.

Together, the rating, drawing, and imagery exercises were helpful in identifying the spectrum of issues for further discussion. In subsequent discussions, the facilitator keyed in on the concerns expressed by participants, allowing us to identify and explore current perceptions of the river in greater detail. In the following sections, we examine specific issues and their implications for river planning and management.

ANALYSIS OF KEY QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

To identify important issues regarding current perceptions of the river, we first looked at the percentage values of general issues codes for statements whose contexts referred only to current conditions, perceptions, and uses of the river (See Table 2.3.2).

For all groups, the issues most often brought up concerned the current condition and maintenance of the river landscape, river characteristics, activities that participants currently engaged in on or near the river, and current aspects of river development. Other issues that figured importantly in some group discussions included the reputation of the river for the two metropolitan-wide groups, river access for the Ravenswood-Albany Park group, and safety for the Evanston-Skokie, Ravenswood-Albany Park, Lathrop, Loop, and Palos groups. These data gave us clues about which aspects of the discussion to investigate more closely. An analysis of these issues follows.

HOW DO PEOPLE USE THE RIVER?

To understand how people currently used the river, we looked at those specific issue codes dealing with recreation activity and river development. Participants mentioned 39 different activities they engaged in along the river; of these, top mentioned activities included land-based corridor activities

such as walking and bicycling, and varied children's activities. Water-oriented recreation, however, dominated people's conversations about river-oriented activities; these activities included boating, watching the river and activities on it, and fishing. The largest subcategory of comments referring to boating dealt with tour boats, which several participants mentioned as a unique way to experience the river and one that is accessible to everyone:

From the Glencoe group: *[Dan] It's not like you're being bussed, it's not the normal kind of tour where they say: "Look out your windows now on your left and your right." I mean you're on the boat and it's different, you get to see all the buildings from different sides than you would if you were on land.*

From the Loop Group: *[Chuck] I drove architecture tours on the river for years and never got tired of going down that river. People just love it and there's good reason, by day or by night, spring, summer, or fall.*

From the Metro East group: *[Monique]...As a matter of fact, I go down the river once a year. I take a tour boat with a friend, mother, dad, or one of the kids; my husband is tired of looking at it...I will skip lunch to make sure I have the money. I get in the boat from the river and go into the lake and it's very uplifting.*

In categorizing comments on river development, we found that more than two-thirds of them dealt with open space and recreational facilities. Participants in the Lake Forest, Glencoe, Palos, and Pullman-Blue Island groups talked about forest and nature preserve sites they had visited, while those in the more urban reaches focused on park and riverwalk areas. In terms of facilities development, trails were mentioned by many groups, while boating facilities, restrooms, and bridges were important topics of discussion in selected groups.

Linear activities: Discussion about activities and river development most often focused on the linear nature of the corridor. Comments from participants in groups where facilities are currently available illustrate how the corridor provides multiple activities throughout the year:

From the Glencoe group: *[Sheldon] I'm quite familiar with the Skokie Lagoons and Botanic Gardens. I'll start from my street and I'll jog through up around the Botanic Gardens until I get to the north end of the gardens, back around through the whole garden, back out and down the trail. I do that when it's nice. I also cross country ski during the winter, not through the gardens but there's a bike path around there. And I also bike ride.*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Phil] The Sculpture Park is excellent for biking and walking. That whole area.*

From the Loop group: *[Chris] I have a boat I park in front of the building so I boat quite a bit on the river.*

From the Palos group: *[Joseph]...I bike at Lake Katherine and along the I&M Canal—a marvelous area—and I golf in the area wherever I can pick up a match free.*

Special places: But just because the river is a linear resource doesn't mean that it is used or needs to be used solely for linear activities. Much of the river use we heard about was confined to certain locations on the river, often for passive activities:

From the Lake Forest group: *[Brian]...I take my little boy into the grassy areas and walk around back there with him. There's a little wooden bridge where he sits down and watches the water go by and it's great, I love it.*

From the Loop group: *[Mary Anne] We feed the ducks, we picnic along the river frequently. In various spots there are little park-like areas although a lot of people don't know about them so that is part of the fun of kind of exploring the river in the area and you are only a few feet away and you see just millions of people streaming by and you're real isolated in a very beautiful little area. You see a lot of people drawing and painting, taking pictures, and film-making.*

From the Palos group: *[Pat] There is one section of Lake Katherine where you can sit and watch the boats go by. I like the barges and the boats.*

From the Metro East group: *[George] If I have to do something downtown—like go where you pay your traffic tickets—and you walk across the bridge, that's a nice view.*

Visual use: And for some participants, river use didn't require direct access or on-site activity at all; to those living near the river, visual access is important and can often result in positive benefits:

From the Glencoe group: *[Michael] It's right behind my house, I just have to look out my window...*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Georgette] It's the area I look out at from my bedroom window.*

From the Lathrop group: *[Maxine] I can only see it from the bridge, and my kids wave at the boats when they go by...*

From the Loop group: *[Ann]...My balcony floats over it and I sit mesmerized just about every summer evening. Sometimes there's a blimp, and there's trains. The horses used to go across the Kinzie Street bridge, and it's just fun to see all the different things. It's heavenly, really.*

HOW DO PEOPLE CHARACTERIZE THE RIVER?

What about the Chicago River matters to people? What elements of the Chicago River are important to people's enjoyment and use? In our discussions, we found that the river environment has many facets, each of which is important in characterizing "the river" (See Table 2.3.3). A few people mentioned the physical characteristics of the river and its shoreline, implying it is significant because its size and extent. Others, especially in the Loop group, thought the built environment was a big part of the riverscape, and they appreciated the buildings, bridges, and other architectural elements that give the river its distinctive character. The most significant aspects of the river, however, were its natural characteristics and the aesthetic and functional benefits it provides.

Characteristics of the Natural Environment: One of the highest percentages of comments about the characteristics of the Chicago River referred to the natural environment. Most codes pertained either to vegetation or wildlife; both of these elements of the river landscape were usually referred to positively, adding to people's experience of the river no matter which reach they lived near. In the most urbanized sections of the river, landscaped areas of trees, grass, flowers, and general greenery increased the appeal of the river:

From the Loop group: *[Chuck]... You know, it's nice to live nearby. [Across the river, on the other bank] you've got those nice green trees. It's the only green we've got around there...*

From the Metro East group (in reference to the new park along the south bank of the Main Branch): *[Monique] It's one of Chicago's best hidden secrets because we are in a big industrial city and when you discover little areas like this... The man is right how they've cleaned it up. And in that location they've put trees that give it a different outlook. It even gives you the feeling that you can be safe and enjoy.*

Groups from along the less developed stretches talked mainly about the natural landscape, as shown by the high percentages reported for the Lake Forest, Glencoe, and Palos groups in Table 2.3.3. This focus is illustrated by the following two discussion segments about wildlife and native vegetation from the Lake Forest group:

[Facilitator] What can you tell me about the Middle Fork Savanna?

[?] Is that the Open Lands property?

[Phil] It was known as the Halligan Estate, or the Circle H Ranch. Then it was sold to a developer, and a lot of public pressure was put on. So the city and the Lake County Board bought it, and now we're safe...

[Vern] It's one of the very few places where the situation is the same as the settlers found it when they came here.

[Mark] It's just never been built on.

[Vern] The Illinois prairie is really what it is.

[Meredith, and others] Birds,...deer.

and from the Glencoe group:

[?]...I think probably what I do more than anything is watch the wildlife and really track that, and today we had a baby deer born in our neighbor's yard.

[?] I've seen a fox in there.

[Michael] About two months ago we saw a coyote in our backyard.

[Robbie] I saw two snapping turtles today.

[?] In the Botanic Garden there's a little pond and every couple of days I watch the frogs and tadpoles in it.

[Babette] We are so lucky!

Vegetation and wildlife along the river were also referred to in some negative ways. In some focus groups, unmaintained vegetation was cause for concern, as was dense vegetation and its implications for safety. These topics will be discussed in more detail in separate sections on maintenance and safety. People in several focus groups mentioned problems with rats along the river, and some attributed mosquitos and other pest insects to the river. The Skokie Lagoons presented an interesting case of the benefits and problems with urban wildlife. While most participants in the groups loved to see deer and geese, they also recognized that the current high populations of these animals was cause for concern. More will be mentioned about wildlife and the Skokie Lagoons in a subsequent section on issues specific to particular reaches.

On the whole, however, the natural environment was an important, positive characteristic of the river environment. In both wild and developed reaches, vegetation and wildlife can be an important attraction to those who live and recreate near the river. In listening to those living near significant natural areas, in particular the Lake Forest, Glencoe, and Palos groups, we came away with the feeling that the quality of their lives had been significantly and positively affected by daily interactions with nature along the river.

Evaluative Characteristics: The highest percentage of comments about the current characteristics of the river referred to participants' evaluations of the range of benefits the river provides to individuals, neighborhoods, and the region as a whole. Most comments here were aesthetic in nature: the beauty and scenery afforded by river views, the peace and solitude of being down by the river's edge, and the presence of the river as a contrasting element within the urban fabric:

From the Loop group: *[Mary Anne] Well I just have a real fondness for the river and Olive Park and the beach in that particular area because you have all the tranquility and peacefulness of being right on the water and yet, this extreme contrast of the incredibly busy city with the beautiful skyline.*

From the Chinatown group: *[Ken] I like it for the water scenery about it and its contrast with all the commercial and factory development. At least you can see something, you can look out and see the water rather than looking at the factories; people looking at that day in, day out, they get tired of it and this is a change of pace or setting and they feel better.*

Less often mentioned but noteworthy were the many functional or utilitarian benefits the river provides:

- **As an intake and outlet for industry:**

From the Chinatown group: *[Gene]...about all it does is provide water. It's dirty, I mean it's like a pollution dump for the factories. And there isn't much use for it.*

- **For drainage and flood prevention:**

From the Lake Forest group: *[Phil] I realize how important it is—you're talking about the Chicago River... That's our drainage; we'd be lost without it.*

- **As a location for industry and residential land use:**
From the Metro East group: *[Mike]...it's a working river, it's not a river of beauty, so to me it's just like industry's there, homes are there, they're part of the river.*
- **As a transportation route:**
From the Lathrop group: *[Lee] Well I think it is very good—I mean it could be improved by all means, but I feel that it's OK. We transport things through that river, too, so although we have the negative part about it [pollution], we have the positive part, too.*
- **As a sanitary system:**
From the Palos group: *[Joe]...It was built as a relief for the Chicago River system. To accept all the sludge and pump it on down to somewhere.*
- **And as a problem not good for anything:**
From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Dorsey] I don't see any purpose of the canal. That whole area should be just completely closed. It should be filled in and then make an embankment on both sides.*

Some of the most thought-provoking comments came from several participants who had difficulty reconciling their appreciation of the beauty of the river with their knowledge of its current condition and misuse:

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Tom]...It's visually appealing although it's still very polluted, because it's very wide and in the summertime there's trees all over and you look down and see homes, you see these terraces going down to the river, some of them have gardens all over them, and then you have the boats down there. It looks real cute, like you're in the countryside. For three blocks or so you can pretend you're not in the middle of Chicago, and you can pretend it's not the Chicago River, although you don't even want to touch it.*

From the Loop group: *[Alan] How do you answer that question? I think it's really polluted but it's a beautiful view and I think there is a big difference between here and just a few blocks away.*

As these two comments illustrate, people can perceive the river in both positive and negative ways. These seemingly conflicting perceptions are important to understand, for they can affect how people will use the river. Although most people we talked with felt the river provided some positive benefits, many limit their use because of significant problems they perceive. Most of these negative perceptions relate to the current condition and maintenance of the river and its corridor, the subject of the next section.

WHAT IS THE PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF THE RIVER LANDSCAPE?

Discussions about the current status of the river focused mainly on perceptions of river condition and maintenance. The heart of this topic was water quality condition and maintenance (See Table 2.3.4). The condition and maintenance of the adjacent landscape and facilities and the vegetation were also talked about, but were less central to this part of the discussion.

Water Quality Condition and Maintenance: Two important findings about current perceptions of water quality condition and maintenance should be pointed out. The first is the very strong perception among focus group participants that the water near where they live is polluted. This was evidenced by a high percentage of participants' comments referring to the word "polluted" and its variants (e.g., "dirty," "filthy," "gross") in describing the current condition and maintenance of the river landscape. However, most Loop participants felt the water of the Main Branch was, if not pristine, then at least not seriously polluted.

A second important finding was that "pollution" meant different things to participants in different reaches. Representative quotes illustrate how pollution was interpreted by the different focus groups:

- **As natural debris:**
From the Lake Forest group: *[Phil] We have mosquitos, but I have to stand up for that ditch; it's not a dirty thing, it's a good thing. Our problem managing that ditch is that people don't want their particular bank cleaned. There's a tree that they loved and then it falls over into the ditch and they don't want it removed.*
- **As turbidity:**
From the Glencoe group: *[Robbie] Well, I have no problem, even with the water, because that's just the way it is. I mean even in nature where no one's ever been sometimes the water's gross just because of the mud around it or whatever. A lot of it's just runoff and there's nothing you can do about it. I think it's really beautiful, but it could be kept up better.*
- **As odor:**
From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Bernadine] My first instinct was to put down odor and pollution because that's the perception I have of it from when I was growing up around there. You couldn't drive down McCormick without having to roll your windows up because the odor was suffocating. But in recent years it has gotten better.*
- **As dumping and littering:**
From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Rakesh]...you see people coming home from my school, they drink a pop or something and the can—they just throw it in, or a food bag. It doesn't look like a river, it looks like a landfill.*
From the Lathrop group: *[Theresa] There is so much debris thrown in and I don't think they ever take time to clean it out.*
- **As water color:**
From the Loop group: *[Chuck] When the river is high the sluice gates in the locks aren't flushing as much water through, and so the Main Branch water slows down so you get the brown water and all the garbage that would normally be flushed away, it just hovers around.*
- **And as hazardous waste:**
From the Pullman-Blue Island group: *[Jennifer] If you go into Hammond where the [Grand Calumet] goes into Illinois, they have signs up that say "Hazardous Water—Danger" along the river. And that's scary, it doesn't even look like water. There is a lot of pollution being put in that way.*

Two other key issues of water quality condition and maintenance included flooding and fish. Flooding was an issue for the Lake Forest and Evanston-Skokie groups, the latter group in reference to the Deep Tunnel stormwater storage project. The subject of fish was touched on by several of the groups. The relationship of fishing to water quality and condition is important, for many saw fishing as a sign of improved water quality:

From the Lathrop group: *[Terell] Some people fish in there; they swear that there's catfish in there, but I just don't know.*

From the Palos group: *[Jim] The fish are starting to come back. I was out for a walk [along the river] last summer and I saw a couple of guys at nighttime, they were floating by and they had fishing poles and I said: "Hey, how'd you guys do?" and they said: "Well, we got a couple of carp" and I said: "Where were you at?" and they said they were fishing in the Cal-Sag and I said: "No you weren't; nothing can survive there."*

Although many saw the presence of fish in the river system as a positive sign, the specter of pollution remained in most people's minds when they thought about eating fish caught in the river:

From the Glencoe group: *[Nerissa]...I like to see people fishing there but I saw one group barbecuing fish, and I could never do that, because they live in such polluted...*

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Dawn]...It's not that bad—I mean I wouldn't swim in it or anything, I wouldn't want to eat any fish that came out of it, either.*

From the Lathrop group: *[George] Then what's the point of fishing if you've got poison in the water? I mean the fish are our barometer for the toxins they are going to ingest.*

As shown by these quotations, many of the pollution-related problems that concerned focus group participants were ones that impacted their senses. These sensory experiences can create strong and lasting images for people, images they may continue to carry even if the situation improves.

In some cases, recent cleanup and maintenance efforts have gone unnoticed by focus group participants, especially those from the two metropolitan-wide groups who do not see the river frequently. For the most part, however, at least some of the participants in each group were aware of cleanup and maintenance efforts near where they lived. Those efforts most often referred to included dredging at the Skokie Lagoons, the Deep Tunnel stormwater storage project along the North Shore Channel in Evanston and Skokie, the skimmer boats that clean floating debris from the Main Branch, and the Sidestream Elevated Pool Aeration (SEPA) plants or "waterfalls" on the Cal-Sag. These representative quotes reveal the positive signs of encouragement that come with awareness of such activities:

From the Glencoe group: *[Michael] Well, it's being cleaned right now. It's in its last year. It's been cleaned. They've been putting in fish. It was dirty, and it still is a bit dirty, but it's being cleaned.*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[Larry] Well yes, it will help [the flooding problem], and the Deep Tunnel will also give residents new streets and curbs, etc. It's a good deal for the residents, the benefits are outstanding compared to the short term problems with construction.*

From the Palos group: *[Joe] It's very promising if the waterfall was more effective. The ultimate goal is to pump enough oxygen in there so the carp can live, and in the process, clean it up.*

From the Pullman-Blue Island group: *[Bill]...I'm enthused about the way they're trying to clean it up. I've said they've polluted it for 200 years, now it could take that long to clean it up, but at least they're working on it.*

Landscape/Facility and Vegetation Condition and Maintenance: Comments in the other two categories dealing with condition and maintenance of the river landscape were much fewer in number than those dealing with water quality, but are nonetheless important to note. People commented on how nicely some of the grounds along the corridor were maintained; these places included the Skokie Sculpture Park and Ladd Arboretum along the North Shore Channel, the homes in Ravenswood Manor along the North Branch, and the riverwalk downtown along the Main Branch. Places mentioned that were poorly maintained included the River Park ballfields on the North Branch, the river edge near Lathrop on the North Branch, and the Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve boat landing along the Calumet River. Many of the comments about lack of maintenance dealt with a pervasive but relatively easy to correct problem: litter. This dialogue from the Glencoe focus group illustrates how different participants viewed the problem:

[Robbie] It is pretty dirty; the only reason I gave it high marks is because at least it is a place with trees and greenery, and a lot of people don't even have that opportunity. So I gave it a 65 but there is so much trash there.

[Allen] But that's a spring and summer occurrence isn't it? When they throw the beer cans?

[Babette] Yea, I think they keep it pretty well picked up.

[Michael]...When we go out there we don't throw things around because we know that the next time we go out there, it'll still be there. But when people come from other places, they throw their stuff everywhere because they know they are never going to see it again.

[Babette] I think that's interesting, because considering how many people do use it, I really feel that people pretty much do use the trash cans.

WHAT OTHER ISSUES CURRENTLY CONCERN NEARBY RESIDENTS?

Of the remaining issues discussed within the groups, two stand out as important despite the relatively few comments about them. These issues are safety and access.

Safety: The issue of safety had many dimensions as it was discussed within the context of current perceptions of the river. More than two-thirds of comments about safety dealt with issues of personal safety. The bulk of these comments came

from participants in the Evanston-Skokie, Ravenswood-Albany Park, and Loop focus groups, and centered on concerns about criminal activities that occurred along the river and on the effect that vegetation has on perceived safety. Representative comments included:

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[David] It seems that on the Evanston side there's more of the trees, the dense forest, it's more closed, and when it's like that people can hide and do things. You get more of an element coming into those areas. On the Skokie side, it's more open, more sunshine, fewer trees, it's more visible and it's more safe. If you're going to have an area it's going to have to be more like the Skokie side.*

From the Ravenswood-Albany Park group: *[Rakesh] We used to go to the parks but not anymore because there's too many gangs out there. River, Gompers, Horner Park. We'll play baseball there but only if you go over with the whole team, not as an individual and not when there's shooting going on...*

From the Loop group: *[Chuck] There's two ways of looking at the river. There's the river down at river level and then there's the river where you're up above...[When] you have to go down the stairs, that's where the security problem comes up, because anybody can come along Lower Wacker Drive and quickly go out...*

Most of the remaining comments about safety involved physical safety. These comments focused mainly on people's fears of children falling in the river or on the consequences of direct body contact with the water:

From the Lathrop group: *[Theresa] I've seen children being pulled out that have drowned and that isn't a very nice scene.*

From the Loop group: *[Bradley] I know it looks very beautiful, but I have friends that work on the barges and they have to continuously get tetanus shots and check-ups. It is a very polluted area...the sewage treatment in the city is decent up to a point, but it's a very dirty river and I think only the carp survive there. If you ever fell in it you would have to go through a lot of tetanus shots and you wouldn't want to get a mouthful. It's not like a spring creek, you know.*

From the Palos group: *[Jim] I can remember reading an article ten years ago that really stuck in my mind. They said that if you were to fall into that canal just by accident, and swallow a mouthful, you were dead.*

Access: Access was another topic with few but very insightful comments. The focus groups identified many dimensions of what it means for the river to be accessible. These dimensions included convenience and proximity of getting to the river by car or on foot; physical versus visual access to the river; the mix of public and private land along the shore and the adequacy of public open space; access and the pros and cons of fencing; the ability to walk along the river edge and the continuity (or lack thereof) of riverwalks in the downtown and other areas; and the disparity of access to facilities and enhancements on some stretches of the river. In those groups where it was discussed, most felt that public access to the river was a priority. However, as this comment from the Ravenswood-Albany Park focus group shows, some recog-

nized the fine balance that must exist between providing public access and protecting the interests of individuals who own land along the river:

[Tom] My neighbors have their boats parked down there; it's very nice. The only thing is, rumor has it that people are beginning to wonder if the river is public and if so, why are there boats parked on the river while the public pays for it? There are also rumors that there is going to be a major bicycle path coming down from the north along the river and will hit Lawrence, where it will have to stop because it all becomes private homes and people have concrete terraces down to the river and boats down there. It's kind of nice that people are living on it, but it blocks and you can't walk through there because it's all fenced off. It's denied public access so there's some talk about it. Legally, I suppose they can just put the bike path through. Legally, we should be able to walk anywhere on the river because it's public. But it isn't set up that way. It goes back and forth because the neighborhood looks nice there and the people keep it clean because the people are using it as their private property. But at the same time you are denying everyone access to it. If the public did get access, the homeowners would lose enormously in terms of property values.

HAVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE RIVER CHANGED?

Another central issue about current perceptions of the river has to do with change. During our conversations with focus group participants, it became clear that although many spoke of serious problems and concerns with the present state of the river, many also felt that significant improvements had been made. Nearly every focus group referred to improvements in water quality, landscaping, and/or facility development:

From the Glencoe group: *[Dan] Well, when I found out they were cleaning [the Skokie Lagoons], a year later I saw that it was actually cleaner. I took a close look at the water.*

From the Evanston-Skokie group: *[David]...the Sculpture Park is real nice. The area is much improved from when we first moved out to the area.*

From the Lathrop group: *[Theresa] I believe they have improved it somewhat because years ago, as I said, children used to go down there and they would lose their balance and fall in the river. Now they have a high fence around it.*

From the Loop group: *[Mary Anne] I've been in the area for so many years and I've seen, compared to how it was 12-15 years ago, it's amazing, the difference along the river now.*

From the Palos group: *[Dick] I think they are doing a terrific job on it and if they continue on it, it's going to be even better. The number of pleasure boats alone that are in there [are a sign of its improvement]...of course, they are not helping the quality of the water. The increase in them in the last couple of years has been tremendous.*

From the Metro East group: *[George] Aesthetically, I have to say, too, over the years the river looks a little cleaner the few times that I've passed by, and I would like to know how they monitor that. Who's in charge of that? Is there an environmental agency that gets after them or what?*

From the Metro West group: *[Rudolf]...clean up efforts are underway and they show promising results. I get a lot of*

company from Europe so every year at least once or twice we go downtown sightseeing. The Chicago River is part of the sightseeing and it really became a lot cleaner. You can see at least two feet down now. Before it was a soup, now you can see. And I also heard that some fish are in there, but I wouldn't want to eat them...

But this perception of improvement was not universal among groups, and the following comment is more representative of the feelings of participants in the Pullman-Blue Island group:

[Jennifer] I put 100% scummy, dirty. I see nothing since growing up in that area that I would call a sign of improvement...It seems to be getting worse as the years go by—smellier, dirtier, thicker—[laughter].

WHAT PERCEPTIONS AND USES OF THE RIVER CHARACTERIZE PARTICULAR NEIGHBORHOODS AND REACHES?

Looking at participants' perceptions on a group-by-group basis can help characterize particular neighborhoods and reaches.

- **Middle Fork/Lake Forest:** Several of the participants did not know the "correct" name for the Middle Fork; most referred to it as "the ditch." Few were aware the Middle Fork connects with the greater Chicago River system. Residents appreciated the area for its natural aesthetic qualities, affording solitude and a place for passive activities like walking with children and dogs, and exploring nature from people's backyards or where roads dead ended at the river. Considerable discussion time on places and activities was devoted to the new Middle Fork Savanna preserve under development near participants' homes. Most knew it was a rare and valuable plant community and were pleased to have it as part of their neighborhood. Concerns about river landscape condition and maintenance focused on turbidity and natural debris in the water as a threat from flooding. Although both of these conditions are "natural" occurrences, they contributed to some participants' perceptions that the water was polluted:

[Sharon] The reason [I gave it a low rating] is I remember a few years ago the people who live back there, it overflowed and their basements and everything were flooded.

[Meredith]...I have no objection to the drainage ditch at all. It doesn't smell, there's no odor from it at all. It's brownish water and that's why when I said "pollution," I don't know that you'd go down there and drink it, you know it's not a Colorado creek kind of water but it doesn't bother me one way or the other...

- **Skokie Lagoons/Glencoe:** Participants in this group identified very closely with the forest preserves that surround the river and their homes, and they use them frequently for walking, bicycling, skiing, and other activities. Specific places mentioned along the river included the Lagoons and forest preserve areas in Glencoe along Forest Way, and the Chicago Botanic Gardens. The natural environment of the Skokie Lagoons setting—including its plants and wildlife—

was highly regarded, and the landscape as a whole was cherished for its picturesque qualities. Both the aquatic and terrestrial environments of the Lagoons, however, are suffering problems, and participants knew about these problems and efforts to rectify them. Many felt the Lagoons were polluted, but saw signs of improvement from the ongoing dredging project. One participant succinctly described the magnitude and complexity of trying to restore the natural dynamics of the wildlife-vegetation communities of the Lagoons area:

[Nancy]...It's a long term plan that involves culling the deer and then restoring the plant life. The wildflowers that used to be in the woods are gone, they're all trampled, and the forest has been taken over by a certain vine. I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but there are many dead trees, very few leaves. It's just changed.

- **North Shore Channel/Evanston-Skokie:** Focus group participants referred to the channel by several different colloquial names, but most called it the "canal." Most of the participants used the recreational trail along the canal for walking and biking; other activities included ball playing, nature exploration, and harvesting of wild edibles. The lands along the canal were generally well liked, and participants thought they were for the most part well maintained. Specific places mentioned by participants included the sculpture park in Skokie and the arboretum in Evanston. Many in the group felt that the canal was polluted, and although some thought there was an odor problem, others felt significant improvements had been made in this area. Completion of the Deep Tunnel stormwater storage project was seen as a plus to participants, who recognized its benefits but are affected by road closures, noise, and other construction impacts. Some in the group felt the high density of vegetation on the Evanston side made for unsafe conditions, while for others the vegetation was one symptom of a greater problem in safe park use:

[June] Right off the street behind my house there's a very nice park that goes all the way to the canal. It's roomy, it's got a few pieces of equipment there, and it would be an ideal place to go because families could make their own picnics, make your own fun, but then you're interrupted by so many outside things until you just don't feel really comfortable.

[Lashar] The first thing I wrote down [about the canal] was "It's dangerous for children."

- **North Branch/Ravenswood-Albany Park:** Participants from this section of the North Branch felt fortunate to have many parks with good facilities near them, including Gompers, River, and Horner. However, their use of these parks was limited by gangs, crime, and poor maintenance. The Ravenswood Manor residential neighborhood has well-maintained homes along the riverbanks, and although no one in the group owned property here, they had mixed feelings about plans to develop a public trail through this stretch. Some participants liked the natural aesthetic

quality the river lends to this urbanized landscape, but most perceived this stretch of the North Branch to be very polluted from people dumping things in it. Over all of the focus groups, Ravenswood-Albany Park participants rated the river the lowest; most explained their 0-100 (low-high) ratings in terms of their perceptions in water quality:

- 80 *River creates Ravenswood Manor neighborhood.*
- 60 *Although it smells bad and is dirty, it gives the neighborhood character and 'possums.*
- 30 *Polluted, needs to be cleaned up so the ducks that live there will survive.*
- 30 *Used for dumping. River banks undeveloped and unsafe.*
- 0 *Very dirty.*

- **North Branch/Lathrop:** There is little public space along the river in this stretch, and most of the participants stated that they went outside the community to recreate. Focus group participants mentioned more pollution-related problems with the river here than in any other focus group—general pollution, smell, turbidity, hazards of eating the fish, shoreside dumping, and instream debris. In contrast to the Evanston-Skokie, Ravenswood-Albany Park, and Loop discussions, the issue of safety was brought up here only in the context of the potential hazards of children falling into the river. Focus group residents generally appreciated the aesthetic and functional qualities the river provides, but felt their physical access to the river was limited by the lack of developed public space. In addition, some participants in the Lathrop group felt that even their visual access was restricted because much of the fencing along the shoreline was overgrown with weeds:

[Maxine]...you can't really see the river. On the Levitt Street side, you can see it because there's concrete in front of it, but over here the weeds are so high and trees and everything that you can't really see unless you go over the bridge. [The vegetation] needs to be cut down and that would also help people see if their kids are going in there...

- **Main Branch/Loop:** Loop participants rated the river in their neighborhood higher than any other group; they had many positive things to say about its aesthetic qualities and the range of recreational opportunities it provides. Many participants used the river for walking, dog walking, jogging, bicycling, and picnicking, and a few owned or had friends who owned boats that they docked on the river downtown. Special places along the river mentioned by participants included Wolf Point, North Pier, the riverwalk, and the views of and from the high-rise buildings. Several participants remarked on the recent improvements in water quality, though some thought the litter in the water was a continuing problem. Personal safety along the riverwalk was also a concern to many participants, perceiving the water-level walkways hidden from view by trees as especially dangerous places and hangouts for muggers and the homeless. One thing Loop participants seemed to note more than other groups was the high degree of positive change happening—not just a matter of improvement over time, but also the contrast of change as a function of distance:

[Alan] When you go east of Michigan Avenue, that area is just being developed and a lot of the buildings there are less than two years old and everything is being built a lot different than it is west of Michigan. West of Michigan is more established, you have to walk down the steps and everything and it's like the palisades along the river. East there's the water cannon, the Centennial Fountain, it's a whole lot different but it's a brand new area. It's kind of undiscovered territory. Everything is wide open. East, along the river you've got the Sheraton, Cityfront Center, North Pier Terminal, and it's well built up, well lit, and pretty open. It's not better or worse, it's just different.

- **South Branch/Chinatown:** The Chinatown community area ranks among the lowest in the city in acreage of open space per capita, and focus group participants commented on the lack of space and facilities for recreation. No public open space exists along the river, although the Chicago Park District plans to develop a 12-acre riverside park on land it recently purchased. Participants generally welcomed this idea, but saw potential problems because of the polluted nature of the river. Current recreational use of the river is limited to viewing it; however, in contrast with other focus groups, Chinatown participants seemed to recognize the multiple uses and potentials of the corridor for aesthetics and recreation, for functional uses for industry, and for opportunities for further economic development:

[Brian2] I gave it a high rating because of the prospects for economic development. Hopefully riverboat gambling. I agree with what he said, it's a break in the scenery and it has prospects of recreation although it is polluted. It isn't being used for recreation now.

- **Cal-Sag Channel/Palos:** Much like those in the Skokie Lagoons focus group, Palos participants cherished the natural qualities of the environment surrounding the Cal-Sag Channel and Sanitary and Ship Canal, especially the wildlife and scenery of the Palos Forest Preserves. They used these wildlands for hiking, biking, picnicking, and other activities, and they also used nearby trails on the I&M Canal and at Lake Katherine. Barge use here was seen as a positive aesthetic element as well as a functional use. Although most thought the water was quite polluted, several were aware of efforts to clean it up. Participants in the Palos group had a somewhat different perspective on safety; many participants in the group were of retirement age, and although they pursued active recreational activities, the potential hazards of being alone in remote sections of the forest preserves concerned them:

[Joseph] The I&M Canal is a little hazardous because you're out there all alone. But Lake Katherine has the peace and the quiet with a general semblance of safety.

[Pat] I like Lake Katherine; I walked around it since before it was built when they were just digging a hole in the ground. I've usually walked around it by myself, however; I don't go into a forest preserve by myself. I would have qualms about that.

- **Calumet River/Pullman-Blue Island:** Participants living near the Calumet River had few good things to say about it; most felt that the water and adjacent shore were severely degraded. Participants rarely used the river directly or indirectly for recreation, but a few have gone boating on it and the Cal-Sag or knew friends who did, and some mentioned marinas in the area. The odor of the water was the principal indicator of pollution for several participants, while others referred to its color, toxics, and hazards of eating fish or body contact. The landfills across from Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve were another major cause for concern, because of their increasing size and the smell and other forms of pollution they bring to the land and water. Most participants accepted the industrial nature of the corridor, but did not accept the need for barges and factories to pollute the water. One person in the group was very positive about the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's new Sidestream Elevated Pool Aeration station near his home in Blue Island and hoped it and other plants would improve the water quality of the channel. On the whole, however, the Pullman-Blue Island group was the most pessimistic of all focus groups about river improvements:

[Jerry] We originally bought in that area because they had grand plans of cleaning up all those boatyards and it was all supposed to be made into modern marinas. That was twenty years ago. We had a home built right there. It never came, none of the plans came to fruition...The river itself is polluted, there is no way that you can do anything right now. It will take a really long time, I think, to clean it up.

PART III FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR THE RIVER

Our discussions with participants about their current perceptions of the river established the context for looking at how they would like the river improved for recreation and related values. We combined structured exercises and open discussion to get at what people thought about the future potential of the river and how it might meet their needs for recreation.

IDEAL SETTING FOR RECREATION

We began our discussion of the future potential of the corridor with an exercise that asked participants to describe their "ideal recreation setting." Because the context of that exercise was general and did not focus on the river corridor, we do not detail those results here (see Table 2.3.5 for a statistical summary of responses). The exercise did, however, set the stage for discussions of future river enhancement options, and we thus note that participants' responses mentioned these key factors as important for making an ideal setting for recreation:

- Natural, scenic, pleasant surroundings
- Good maintenance

- Varied open space and facilities that support a range of passive and active pastimes
- Convenient, open access to all
- Safety

TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT PREFERRED ALONG THE CORRIDOR

ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF RIVER DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

A subsequent exercise related to ideal settings focused people's attention directly on the river corridor. In this exercise, participants passed around a set of seven 8" x 10" color photos depicting various places along the river and were asked to rate each on a 0-100 (low-high) scale of "overall appeal." These photos are shown on pages 28-30, and include: 1) a boat ramp across from a landfill site; 2) a small downtown plaza with a man seated on a bench; 3) a section of the Chicago Riverwalk downtown with formal tree plantings; 4) a concrete walk alongside a downtown factory/warehouse with no vegetation; 5) a paved bike path along a naturally vegetated river channel; 6) a footbridge crossing a small stream in a natural wooded setting; and 7) an aeration facility on the North Shore Channel with open grassy banks and walled shore.

The mean ratings for these photos, averaged over all individuals and groups, are shown in Figure 2.3. The highest rated scenes included the two that were the most natural appearing (scenes 5 and 6), and the downtown riverwalk scene (scene 3). The lowest rated scene was of the downtown factory/warehouse (scene 4).

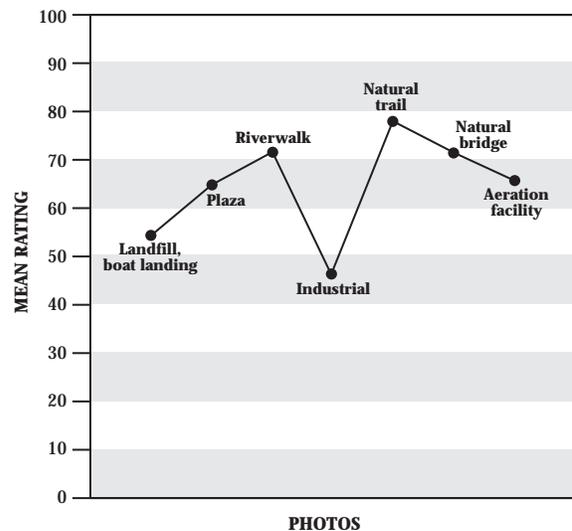


FIGURE 2.3
Mean score ratings for photos,
averaged over all groups