

REACH 4 NORTH SHORE CHANNEL

RESOURCE CHARACTER

Location: The North Shore Channel flows south from the locks (closed to boat traffic) at Wilmette Harbor on Lake Michigan through the suburbs of Wilmette, Evanston, Skokie, and Lincolnwood to the City of Chicago, where it ends at its confluence with the North Branch of the Chicago River just south of Foster Avenue (Figure 4.3). The total length of this reach is 17.5 miles.

Land Use/Vegetative Cover: The corridor of the North Shore Channel is owned by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. Properties along the corridor are leased primarily to park districts, except for isolated parcels that are in institutional, industrial, and commercial use. Open space parcels are generally wooded along the banks, with mowed lawn and scattered trees on the level ground above the banks.

Channel Character: Although the banks of the river appear very natural, the dominating straightness of the channel and steepness of its banks leave little doubt that this is a human-created waterway. Average width of the channel is about 150 feet, and the depth is about 8 feet.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

Current and potential recreation and open space opportunities in Reach 4 are described in Table 4.7 from north to south, and are keyed to Figure 4.3 with numbers in the first column of the table. Major activity types are discussed in the following sections.

Boating: The North Shore Channel is navigable by both non-motorized and motorized recreational boats. Access by both types, however, is difficult; the steep, wooded slopes and frequent fencing block access by canoes and kayaks through much of the reach, and there are no launch facilities anywhere on the channel for motorboats. Those who paddle the channel will usually put in at the grounds of the Bahai

TABLE 4.7
Current and potential recreation-open space opportunities, Reach 4
(See Figure 4.3 for site locations)

SITE NUMBER AND NAME	MUNICIPALITY/OWNERSHIP	ACCESS, FACILITIES/NOTES
61 Gilson Park/Wilmette Harbor/Yacht Club	Wilmette/MWRD-Wilmette Park District	60 acre full service park; yacht club, no river access
62 Jans Community Golf Course	Evanston-Wilmette/MWRD Evanston-Wilmette Park District	90 acre public golf course
63 Chandler Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	3.2 acre neighborhood park
64 Leahy Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	4 acre neighborhood park
65 Ladd Arboretum	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	18 acre arboretum
66 Evanston Ecology Center	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	4 acre environmental education center
67 Canal Lands Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	4 acre neighborhood park
68 Mc Cormick Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	3 acre neighborhood park
69 Eggelston Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	2 acre playground
70 Twiggs Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	9 acre neighborhood park
71 Butler Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	11 acre neighborhood park
72 Beck Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	5.5 acre neighborhood park
73 Fel-Pro Park/Northshore Sculpture Park	Skokie/MWRD-Skokie Park District	29 acre bike and jogging trails; sculpture park
74 Canal Lands Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	6.9 acre neighborhood park
75 Harbert Park	Evanston/MWRD-Evanston	6.6 acre neighborhood park
76 Canal park	Lincolnwood/MWRD-Lincolnwood	25 acres, passive use
77 U.S. Army Reserve	Lincolnwood/MWRD-U.S. Government	Vehicle parking
78 Thillens Field	Lincolnwood/MWRD-private	Baseball fields
79 U.S. Army Reserve	Chicago/MWRD	Training center
80 Devon Aeration Station	Chicago/MWRD	No access
81 Canal park	Chicago/MWRD	River path
82 Legion Park	Chicago/MWRD-Chicago Park District	48.35 acre bike trail, playlot, ballcourts and fields
83 U.S. Army/Marine Reserves	Chicago/MWRD	Training center
84 River Park (part)	Chicago/MWRD-Chicago Park District	30 acre full service park, trail

Abbreviations: FPD—Forest Preserve District; URP—Urban Resources Partnership of Chicago; MWRD—Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

Temple in Wilmette or at Oakton Avenue in Skokie. A dock behind the Evanston Ecology Center was used in the past by a voyageur canoe club and has been used more recently by the Chicago River Aquatic Center for its Iron Oars Rowing Marathon, but the dock itself is not open to regular public use. Water turbulence caused by an aeration facility at Devon Avenue warrants some caution from paddlers; otherwise, the relatively flat water of the channel makes it easy to paddle in either direction. Motorboats using the North Shore Channel come up from the North Branch and must return that way.

Fishing: Bank fishing and fishing boats are occasionally spotted along the North Shore Channel, but such sightings are uncommon, except near the confluence of the channel with the North Branch. Overall, the recreational fishery is viewed as limited but improving.

Trails: Segments of a bike trail network exist in channel parks in Evanston, Skokie, and Chicago, but the system lacks continuity. Some sections of this 7-mile paved trail were routed in a serpentine design, making it tedious for bicyclists. In addition to the bike path in Skokie, there is a cinder jogging path.

The Chicago section of the trail was recently improved as a bicycle route, and there are plans to link all trail segments to form a continuous trail system along the North Shore Channel. This trail would link with the North Branch Riverwalk to the south (see Reach 5) and with the Green Bay Trail and Evanston lakefront bikeway to the north.

Natural and Cultural Resource-Based Recreation and Education: The Evanston Ecology Center and Ladd Arboretum provide a variety of indoor and outdoor environmental education opportunities for Evanston residents. Although the wooded part of the corridor is a very narrow band along the banks, it provides sufficient habitat for small mammals and birds to make it a popular area for wildlife observation.

Other Recreation: The parks along the North Shore Channel provide some facilities for active recreation, but the narrowness of the corridor precludes extensive development. Most use remains passive. The Jans Community Golf Course provides public golfing opportunities for residents of Evanston and Wilmette.

REACH 5 NORTH BRANCH OF THE CHICAGO RIVER

RESOURCE CHARACTER

Location: The main stem of the North Branch of the Chicago River begins just south of Golf Rd. in Morton Grove, where the Middle and West Forks come together in Cook County's Chick Evans Forest Preserve Golf Course (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). The North Branch continues south through the suburb of Niles, then turns east and flows through Chicago's northwest side neighborhoods to its confluence with the North Shore Channel just south of Foster Avenue. This upper

section of the North Branch (Reach 5a) is about 10 miles long. From this junction, the lower section of the North Branch (Reach 5b) turns southeastward and flows another 7 miles until it meets the Main Branch and South Branch at Wolf Point in downtown Chicago.

Land Use/Vegetative Cover: The upper North Branch lies predominantly within an open space corridor of forest preserves, parks, and cemeteries, with some residential and school properties just above its confluence with the North Shore Channel. Open space land cover is predominantly wooded through the forest preserve sites and mowed grass with scattered trees where the river flows through parks and institutional grounds. Below the North Shore Channel, the river flows through a series of large and small parks and the Ravenswood and Albany Park neighborhoods; it then becomes largely commercial and industrial through the rest of its course. Open space land use is mostly mowed grass with scattered trees and hardscape.

Channel Character: The banks and channel of the North Branch remain natural in character through the forest preserves, although in places stormwater outfalls, runoff, and resulting periods of high and low water have scoured and denuded the banks. The river has adequate flow through much of the year except through LaBagh Woods, where it can get shallow during periods of low flow. Below LaBagh Woods, the riverbanks have been cut vertically and lined with stone, and the river is fenced off through most of the Chicago Park District parks. There is a 4-foot dam on the North Branch where it meets the North Shore Channel; it is known as Chicago's only "waterfall." Below the confluence, the river widens and deepens, the banks are somewhat higher, and the bank slope is steeply inclined in some places and a vertical cement or steel wall in other places, especially along the lower part of the subreach. At North Avenue the river widens to form a turning basin, and the channel splits to form Goose Island. The human-created North Branch Canal flows shallow around the east side of the island, then rejoins the main channel above Chicago Avenue

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

Current and potential recreation and open space opportunities in Reach 5 are described in Table 4.8 from north to south, and are keyed to Figures 4.3 and 4.4 with numbers in the first column of the table. Major activity types are discussed in the following sections.

Boating: The river is accessible by canoe and kayak for most of the year. Low water, especially through the LaBagh Woods Forest Preserve, may require paddlers to wade or portage some sections. Fallen logs or other vegetative obstructions might also require wading or portaging for short distances; major obstructions are usually cleared once a year. A low dam south of Howard Street can be hazardous to those who try to run it. A 4-foot dam located where the North Branch meets the North Shore Channel must be portaged. Below this point, the North Branch is wide and deep, and navigable by motor-

TABLE 4.8
Current and potential recreation-open space opportunities, Reach 5
(See Figures 4.3 and 4.4 for site locations)

SITE NUMBER AND NAME	MUNICIPALITY/OWNERSHIP	ACCESS, FACILITIES/NOTES
85 Linne Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove, bike and horse trails
86 Wayside Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove, bike trail, restoration site
87 St. Paul Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic groves
88 Miami Woods/Indigo Oak Openings ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove, bike trail, restoration sites
89 Unnamed forest preserve ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Bike trail
90 Tam Golf Course	Niles/Niles Park District	9-hole public golf course
91 Bunker Hill/Yates Flatwoods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic groves, bike trail, restoration sites
92 Caldwell Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove, bike trail
93 Whealan Pool ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Swimming pool
94 Edgebrook Golf Course ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Golf course
95 Quinn Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	.76 acre passive park
96 Edgebrook Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove
97 Indian Road Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove
98 Billy Caldwell Golf Course ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Golf course
99 Forest Glen Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove
100 Sauganash Prairie Grove ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Restoration site
101 LaBagh Woods ¹	North Branch Division/Cook County FPD	Picnic grove
102 St. Lucas Cemetery	Chicago/private	Cemetery
103 Gompers Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	39 acre full service park, river path, fishing pond, URP/ChicagoRivers wetland demonstration project
104 Bohemian National Cemetery	Chicago/private	Cemetery
105 Eugene Field Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	12.78 acre full service park, river path
106 Von Steuben High School	Chicago/Chicago Public Schools	Playfields
107 Kiwanis Playground Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	2.05 acre, playcourts
108 North Park College	Chicago/private	Campus riverwalk
109 North Park College	Chicago/private	Playfield
110 Ronan Park	Chicago/MWRD-Chicago Park District	11.01 acre park, bike path
111 Pumping Station	Chicago/MWRD	Passive recreation
112 Jacob Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	.39 acre playlot
113 Sunken Gardens Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	.16 acre passive recreation area
114 Horner Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	58.84 acre full service park, bike path
115 California Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	13.52 acre full service park and bike path
116 Gordon Tech. High School	Chicago/private	Private, undeveloped river bank
117 Clark Park	Chicago/MWRD-Chicago Park District	9.76 acre passive recreation area
118 Lathrop Homes	Chicago/Chicago Housing Authority	Potential river edge treatment and environmental education project
119 A. Finkl and Sons	Chicago/private	Employee passive recreation area
120 Turning basin overlook	Chicago/private	Public access; passive recreation area
121 Montgomery Ward	Chicago/private	Employee passive recreation area
122 Chicago Tribune Freedom Center	Chicago/private	Employee passive recreation area
123 East Bank Club	Chicago/private	Private dock-level walkway
124 Park #444	Chicago/Chicago Pk. Dist.-City of Chicago	.89 acre passive recreation area

¹Note: Forest Preserve District of Cook County does not break down acreage of holding by site; approximate total acreage for its North Branch holdings is 1,823 acres. Abbreviations: FPD—Forest Preserve District; URP—Urban Resources Partnership of Chicago; MWRD—Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

boats. An exception to this is the east channel around Goose Island, which is only about 2 feet deep. Some riparian residents in the Ravenswood neighborhood have appropriated MWRD riverfront property as their own and have constructed boat docks for private access to the river. Commercial boats and barges come north as far as Belmont Avenue, though traffic is not as heavy as on reaches to the south. Several private boat yards along the lower section of the North Branch cater to larger motor and sail boats as a place for winter storage.

Fishing: A stocked fishing pond at Gompers Park is popular with children and adults for panfish and catfish. A 1-day event developed by the Chicago Police Department called “Get Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs” introduced more than 200 children to fishing at the park during its second (1995) season of operation. The “waterfall” dam, where the North Branch meets the North Shore Channel, is a popular fishing spot on the North Branch. Some fish the area by boat, but most access it from River Park, where the waterfall is located. This access is not sanctioned by the park district, and anglers must climb under the fence and stand atop the dam or on the steep shoreline below the dam. Bullhead and carp are common species caught. The site is used mainly by an ethnically diverse group of local male youths.

Trails: The Forest Preserve District of Cook County’s North Branch Bicycle Trail continues along the main stem of the North Branch from points northward and terminates at the Bunker Hill/Edgebrook Flatwoods natural areas near the intersection of Devon and Caldwell Aves. in Chicago. Road signs provide bicyclists with street connections between the North Branch Trail and the Chicago Lakefront Path. Paved pathways wind along the river through the Chicago Park District’s larger river parks on the North Branch; at River Park the trail connects with a discontinuous trail system along the North Shore Channel. The forest preserve district has proposed extending the North Branch Trail south from its current terminus through LaBagh Woods to Gompers Park. Friends of the Chicago River, together with other groups and agencies, have developed a conceptual plan for developing a North Branch Riverwalk that would link the LaBagh Woods Forest Preserve, Chicago Park District river parks (Gompers, Eugene Field, River, Ronan) and other properties with a continuous trail. The Friends of the Chicago River has also produced a set of walking tour maps that cover a major portion of the Chicago River corridor within the city; for the North Branch, the route begins on the north at LaBagh and Clayton Smith Woods Forest Preserves, and follows dirt paths along the river, streets, sidewalks, park paths, and alleys to Wolf Point in downtown Chicago. The lowermost part of the North Branch has been incorporated within a plan for a downtown riverwalk (see description under Reach 6).

Natural and Cultural Resource-Based Recreation and Education: The forest preserves of the main stem of the North Branch have the greatest concentration of ecological restoration sites in the Chicago region. North Branch Restoration Project volunteers assist in managing seven sites

along this reach, most of which touch the banks of the river. The forest preserves on this reach also offer great opportunities for birding and other wildlife observation, on both an organized and informal basis. The North Branch as it flows through the city of Chicago also offers opportunities for children to explore urban nature. Children are often seen along the banks of the river in the forest preserves and where the river is accessible from adjacent neighborhoods. A frequently flooded portion of Gompers Park has been identified as a ChicagoRivers demonstration project for wetland restoration, and ChicagoRivers partners are working with the Chicago Park District, the Department of Environment, and other groups to implement the project. The project has received funding under the Urban Resources Partnership (URP) grant program.

Other Recreation: The parks and forest preserves of this reach offer a full range of active and passive recreation opportunities, from golfing and swimming to toboggan slides and indoor sports. Several companies along the North Branch have developed private open space facilities for their employees to use in their free time; a few of these are accessible to the public.

REACH 6 CHICAGO RIVER (MAIN BRANCH)

RESOURCE CHARACTER

Location: The Chicago River (Main Branch) begins at Lake Michigan and flows west to Wolf Point, a distance of 1.4 miles (Figure 4.4). Here it joins the North and South Branches, which both flow south.

Land Use/Vegetative Cover: Flowing through the heart of downtown Chicago and the city’s newly developing New East Side, the Chicago River has become a focal point for high-rise commercial office, hotel, and residential development. The concrete canyon formed by new and older development, however, is being planned around an open space river edge that is publicly accessible. This open space is mainly hardscape plazas and riverwalks, except for two areas: South Bank Park between Lake Shore Drive and Michigan Avenue, which has mowed grass and scattered trees, and Wolf Point, which has a wooded river edge backed by a mowed lawn. A large undeveloped parcel just south of the river and west of Lake Shore Drive has been converted to a golf course as an interim use.

Channel Character: The Chicago River has been widened and deepened to serve the commercial functions of the large metropolitan city and can receive large ships and barges as well as tour boats and smaller recreational craft. The channel is straight except for a slight s-curve at Michigan Avenue, where the canyon of high-rises opens up to afford a dramatic view of the river embraced by the historic Wrigley and Tribune Tower buildings—an urban space that has been called one of the most spectacular of any American city. The eight bascule bridges between Michigan Avenue and Wolf Point have become symbols of the river downtown. The river

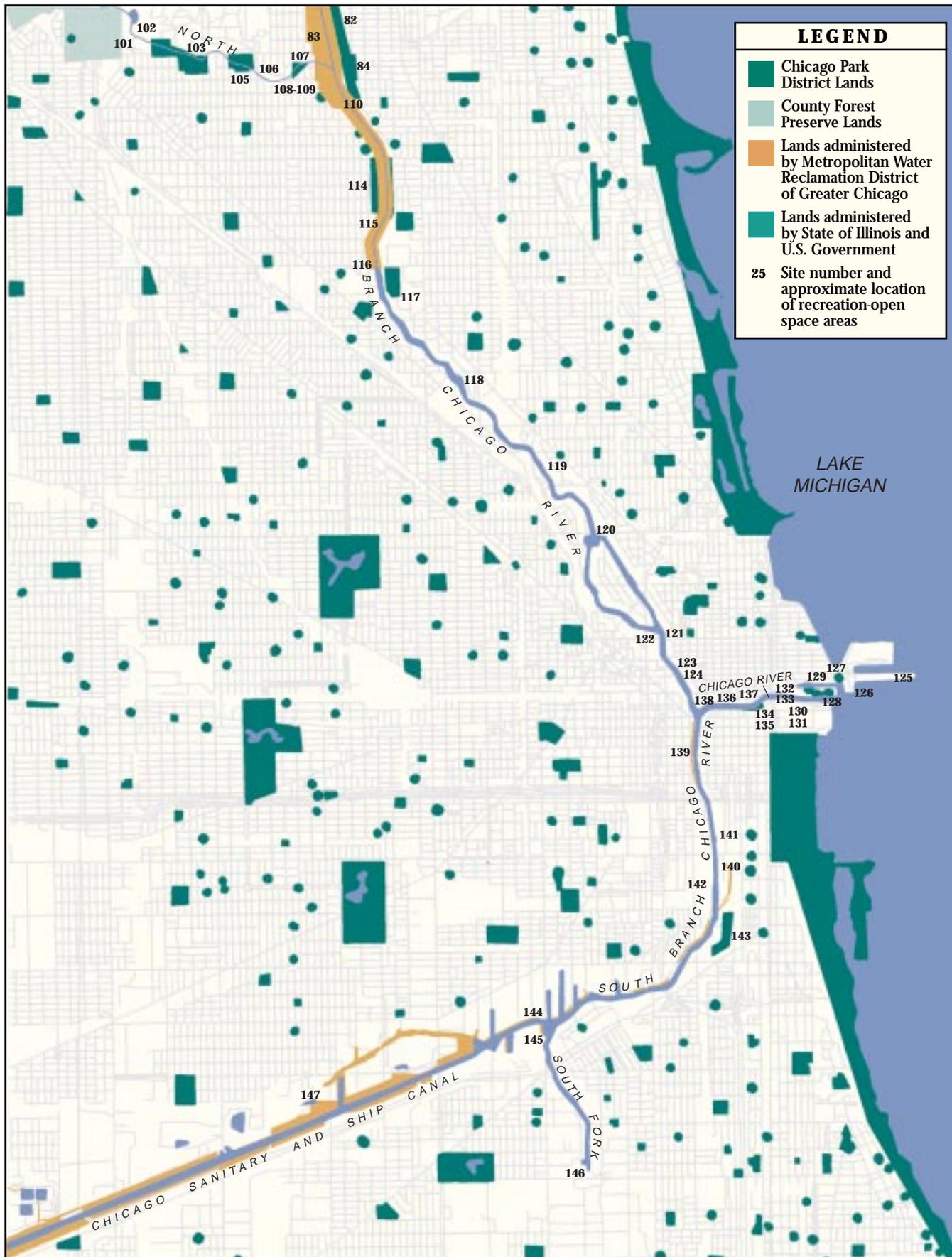


FIGURE 4.4
Current and potential recreation-open space opportunities, Reaches 5B, 6 and 7

edge is for the most part a vertical wall of concrete or steel sheet piling, except for Wolf Point, which has a gradually sloped, vegetated edge. At the mouth of the river, a lock provides access to Lake Michigan and the river widens on its south bank to form a turning basin known as the Inner Harbor. On the north bank is Ogden Slip, which once served commercial ships but is now used primarily by recreational boats.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

Current and potential recreation and open space opportunities in Reach 6 are described in Table 4.9 from east to west, and are keyed to Figure 4.4 with numbers in the first column of the table. Major activity types are discussed in the sections below.

Boating: The Chicago River is a center of activity for a variety of recreational boating opportunities. Several excursion boat companies are based along the river, primarily near Michigan Avenue and at Ogden Slip, and offer tours of the river and lake on a regular basis during the summer. The Chicago River Aquatic Center is housed in the old Coast Guard Station, and its members use their rowing shells on the river on a daily basis in the early morning hours. Motorboats ply the waters of the Main Branch in large numbers on summer weekends, touring the river, moving through the locks out to the lake, or docking in the Inner Harbor and at Ogden Slip. Canoes and kayaks are rarely seen on this reach, but North Pier and Wolf Point have been used as access points for small paddle boats. All these recreational uses over-

lay commercial shipping, which has declined in its use of the Main Branch but remains an important function of the river.

Fishing: Fishing is becoming increasingly popular on the Chicago River, both by boat and from shore. Twenty different species have been caught here, including small and large-mouth bass, white and yellow perch, white crappie, channel and blue catfish, rock and white bass, trout, salmon, and smelt. In the winter of 1992-1993, North Pier Chicago installed water aerators in Ogden Slip to keep the water from freezing to protect their floating restaurant docks; this open water attracted both fish and anglers in large numbers. Very good fishing has also been reported along the south bank between the Michigan Avenue bridge and Columbus Dr. In this popular fishing spot, anglers have devised special bank fishing techniques to avoid having their lines snapped by the busy barge and pleasure boat traffic. In addition to these activities, fishing derbies are also being held on the Chicago River. In 1988 and 1993, a part of the river was netted off and stocked with tagged fish (rainbow trout in the first derby, catfish and largemouth bass in the second), and for a fee contestants could fish off floating barges for prizes. The 1993 derby was sponsored by the Mayor’s Office in cooperation with the Chicago Riverwalk Corporation and member hotels and businesses along the river. A more recent tournament, “The Chicago Carp Classic,” had its first year in 1994 with 21 contestants. This tournament aims to showcase the Chicago River downtown and the premiere carp fishery there, and hopes to draw attention from those in countries like England where the carp is a revered gamefish species.

TABLE 4.9
Current and potential recreation-open space opportunities, Reach 6
(See Figure 4.4 for site locations)

SITE NUMBER AND NAME	MUNICIPALITY/OWNERSHIP	ACCESS, FACILITIES/NOTES
125 Navy Pier	Chicago/Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority	Waterfront park, festival, event, and market place
126 Old Coast Guard Station	Chicago/City of Chicago	Access for police marine unit and Chicago River Aquatic Center
127 Du Sable Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	3.24 acre park under development
128 Turning Basin Marina and Gateway Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	Proposed marina and park around turning basin
129 North Pier Terminal	Chicago/North Pier Chicago	Retail/entertainment; river promenade & restaurants
130 South Bank Park (Chicago Riverwalk Shore Dr. to Michigan Avenue)	Chicago/MWRD-Illinois Center	Dock-level walkway and landscaping; street-level walkway; good bank fishing
131 Illinois Center Golf Course	Chicago/Illinois Center	9-hole par golf course (interim use)
132 River Esplanade Park (North bank Lake Shore Drive to Columbus Drive)	Chicago/Chicago Park District	1.13 acre landscaped riverwalk
133 Centennial Fountain	Chicago/MWRD	Park and water fountain/arc
134 Du Sable cabin site	Chicago/City of Chicago	Recorded archaeological site
135 Ft. Dearborn historical marker	Chicago/City of Chicago	Brass sidewalk markers show original location
136 Chicago Riverwalk (Michigan Avenue to Wolf Point)	Chicago/private	Discontiguous dock- and street-level walkways/plaza
137 Marina City	Chicago/Marina City	Marina
138 Wolf Point	Chicago/Apparel Mart	Natural edge, passive use

Abbreviations: FPD—Forest Preserve District; URP—Urban Resources Partnership of Chicago; MWRD—Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

Trails: The Chicago Riverwalk Corporation is spearheading the effort to develop a continuous river edge walkway from the river mouth to Wolf Point, and on the North and South Branches in the downtown area. The Chicago Riverwalk would connect with the Chicago Lakefront Path, which runs north and south along the lakefront parks for 20 miles. The riverwalk would be at dock level where feasible, and dock- and street-level walkways, landscaping, and amenities are all components of the plan. Much of the riverwalk is in place along the Chicago River, but a lack of continuity inhibits the riverwalk from being used to its full potential. The Friends of the Chicago River's walking tour map of the downtown area highlights and interprets the historical and contemporary aspects of the river.

Natural and Cultural Resource-Based Recreation and Education: Natural river features are at a premium along the Chicago River, and future development could help or hurt what is already there. The river mouth and turning basin attract birds migrating along the lake shore, and are popular birding areas. Wolf Point has the only natural river edge in the downtown area, providing a welcome contrast in this highly urban setting. Planning documents suggest that when this privately owned parcel is developed, the natural condition should be retained to the extent practical. The real asset of the river downtown is its rich cultural history, including two sites—the cabin of Jean Baptiste Point du Sable and Fort Dearborn—that mark the founding of present-day Chicago. Although these structures are long gone, the buildings and bridges that now define the river are some of the most interesting in the city and represent a range of architectural styles. Boat tours by the Chicago Architectural Foundation interpret the history of these structures, as do guided and self-guided downtown walking tours.

Other Recreation: Just outside the locks on Lake Michigan lies historic Navy Pier, built in 1916 for ship and recreational purposes and it has been redeveloped as a premiere entertainment facility for the city. Opened in summer 1995, the completely renovated pier includes a 19-acre park to serve as the gateway to the I&M National Heritage Corridor, a 1-acre indoor winter garden/park, a 1,500-seat theatre, an exhibition hall and conference facility, an amusement park with ferris wheel and carousel, a bike path, a children's museum, stores, restaurants, and more. Inside the locks on the river proper, riverside restaurants, bars, and cafes along the Main Branch are few in number but very popular during the summer. The largest concentration of establishments is at North Pier, where three restaurants have floating docks that can be accessed by shore or boat. The riverwalk and adjacent plazas attract many downtown workers during lunch, and are popular locations to sit and watch people and boats go by. Rowing competitions sponsored by the Chicago River Aquatic Center draw thousands to the riverbanks, as have occasional visits by historic tall ships and events such as the City's annual Venetian Nights. A 9-hole par course at Illinois Center provides a unique golfing experience in the heart of downtown, but will be built upon when the full development plan for the site is implemented.

REACH 7 SOUTH BRANCH OF THE CHICAGO RIVER AND SOUTH FORK (BUBBLY CREEK)

RESOURCE CHARACTER

Location: The South Branch of the Chicago River begins where the North and Main Branch meet at Wolf Point. It flows south for 4 miles to Damen Avenue and its confluence with the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and the now filled-in West Fork (Figure 4.4). The South Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River, known as Bubbly Creek, flows into the South Branch at the South Turning Basin at Ashland Avenue. Once including both West and East Arms, the South Fork was gradually filled in as this important industrial area of Chicago grew, so that today only 1 mile of the South Fork remains.

Land Use/Vegetative Cover: The land use of the South Branch in downtown Chicago is much like that of the Main Branch, a canyon of high-rise office buildings with a discontinuous walkway along the river edge. South of Van Buren Street, the river is a mix of industrial and vacant land. The open space along this corridor includes hardscape plazas, grass, and formal tree plantings around the riverwalk, and pioneer brush and tree vegetation on the vacant land parcels. Areas of dense pioneer tree cover on vacant land along Bubbly Creek are fittingly called “the Amazons” by area residents. At the southern end of Bubbly Creek lies the Water Reclamation District's Racine Avenue Pumping Station and the site of the former Chicago Stockyards.

Channel Character: The river is straight and crossed by bridges nearly every block in the downtown area. Its average width is about 150 feet, and its depth is sufficient for large commercial vessels. South of downtown, the river from Polk Street to 18th Street was straightened in the 1920s in a plan to consolidate rail facilities. Below 18th Street, the river turns to the southwest, and short canals or slips along the north bank provide water access to industrial areas off the main river. The shore of the South Branch is a vertical wall of concrete or steel sheet piling for the most part, with sections of concrete riprap south of downtown. A part of the bank along the South Turning Basin has a natural slope and vegetated edge, and is the original site of the start of the historic Illinois & Michigan Canal, now known as the “Chicago Origins” site. The I&M Canal, however, is filled in at this point.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

Current and potential recreation and open space opportunities in Reach 7 are described in Table 4.10 from north to south, and are keyed to Figure 4.4 with numbers in the first column of the table. Major activity types are discussed in the following sections.

Boating: Recreational boating activities centered on the Chicago River tend to spill down the South Branch in the downtown area. Motorboats launched on the lake often cruise the river down to River City and back; River City is also a common end point in the regular run for rowing shells

TABLE 4.10
Current and potential recreation-open space opportunities, Reach 7
(See Figure 4.4 for site locations)

SITE NUMBER AND NAME	MUNICIPALITY/OWNERSHIP	ACCESS, FACILITIES/NOTES
139 Chicago Riverwalk Wolf Pt.-Van Buren Street	Chicago/private	Discontiguous walkway, mostly at street level; cafes
140 River City	Chicago/private	Marina
141 CSX properties	Chicago/private	Undeveloped parcels with proposed riverwalk development
142 Chicago Riverwalk Van Buren-Cermak Road	Chicago/private	Proposed riverwalk on undeveloped/industrial land
143 Chinatown Park	Chicago/Chicago Park District	12 acre planned park development
144 Wholesale Food Market	Chicago/private	Proposed public river edge
145 Chicago Origins Park	Chicago/Illinois Department of Natural Resources	1.5 acre future park and interpretive site
146 Bubbly Creek Wetland and Union Stockyard Gate	Chicago/state and city property to be managed by the Chicago Park District	Proposed environmental and historic park
147 Job Corps site (31st & Kedzie)	Chicago/U.S. Dept. Labor	Proposed public river edge

Abbreviations: FPD—Forest Preserve District; URP—Urban Resources Partnership of Chicago; MWRD—Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

launched from the Chicago River Aquatic Center and for excursion boats that tour the river. An increasing number of boaters from the southern reaches of the corridor are motoring up the South Branch to see the sights downtown. Canoes and kayaks are uncommon on the South Branch, but the lower volume of commercial and recreational traffic makes Bubbly Creek an appealing alternative for some local paddlers. Several boat yards located along the South Branch provide off-season dry docking for area boaters and sailors. River City contains a small marina but offers few services to non-members. Future development of properties along the South Branch may provide new marina space and facilities, but until the real estate market improves, there are no definite plans for these properties.

Fishing: Fishing is marginal on the South Branch. Shore anglers are infrequently spotted near the South Turning Basin and along Bubbly Creek, and have reported catching bass and large carp.

Trails: The Chicago Riverwalk continues along the South Branch from the Chicago River, and is proposed by the Chicago Riverwalk Corporation to go as far south as Chinatown (Cermak Road). The northern end (Wolf Point to Van Buren Streets) is currently the most developed; here the riverwalk is a series of street-level hardscape walkways and plazas with some formal tree and flower plantings. The walkway necessarily breaks every block for a street crossing, and runs principally along the west bank of the river. On the west bank between Randolph and Washington Streets (the Morton International Building), stairs lead down to an attractive dock-level walkway and green area. Future development plans for the riverwalk in this section call for extending the current street-level walkway north and south and for constructing a cantilevered walkway at the dock level. Below Van Buren Street, the plan proposes dock-level walkways on both sides of the river, terminating near the new Chinatown Park. CSX Real Property, Inc., owns large land parcels in this section, and proposals for their development include the

riverwalk as an integral part in the plan. Development plans for the new Wholesale Food Market and the Job Corps Center also call for a public walkway and landscaping along the river edge. Other large property owners like the Chicago Union Station Company (Amtrak rail yard) and Commonwealth Edison (generating station) are less enthusiastic about the prospects of a public walkway on their property because of safety and liability concerns. This end of the riverwalk could be linked with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's Centennial Trail to the south and the proposed Street Charles Airline rail-trail, which crosses the river north of 18th Street. A trail or walking route could also be developed along Bubbly Creek in conjunction with a proposed wetland park development (see next paragraph).

Natural and Cultural Resource-Based Recreation and Education: Proposed development of the Chicago Origins site by the Chicago Park District and other entities would offer a unique opportunity to enhance the natural environment of the South Turning Basin and interpret the natural and cultural history of the Chicago Region. The park would also provide a focal point within the City of Chicago for interpretation of the 120-mile-long I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor. This National Park Service-designated corridor encompasses much of the ChicagoRivers study area south of the South Branch. There is also a proposal to transform the former Chicago Stockyards on Bubbly Creek into a wetland park and historical site, using the highly degraded area as a laboratory and demonstration project for environmental restoration, providing a link to an important part of Chicago's past, and adding needed recreation space to an underserved area of Chicago.

Other Recreation: A few cafes along the northern section of the riverwalk offer outdoor seating, and the riverwalk as a whole is a popular area for downtown employees to eat lunch or just relax and watch the urban scene. The proposed Chinatown Park would offer a full range of active and passive activities, including facilities and amenities that reflect the culture of the Chinese American community located adjacent to the park.