Chi–Cal Rivers Fund Announces $1.4 Million in Grants

Public–private partnership funds six projects to improve stormwater management, habitat, and green space in Chicago/Calumet region

NOVEMBER 16, 2015, CHICAGO, Illinois – Today, Chi–Cal Rivers Fund partners announced six projects selected to receive $1.4 million in grant funding that will help improve and enhance waterways in the Chicago and Calumet region. With a focus on reducing stormwater runoff, enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, and improving public-use opportunities, this investment will support community-driven projects that benefit the people and wildlife of the region. Grant recipients will match the new grant funding with an additional $4.4 million, for a total on-the-ground impact of $5.8 million.

Administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), the Fund is a partnership among ArcelorMittal, The Chicago Community Trust, Crown Family Philanthropies, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Joyce Foundation, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the Wrigley Company Foundation. The
partnership began in 2013, and the $1.4 million announced today marks the Fund’s third annual set of grants.

“As the world’s leading steel company, strengthened by our Chicago roots, ArcelorMittal is committed to conserving our shared natural environment so that we may serve the multitude of needs required by all of its stakeholders,” said Bill Steers, General Manager of Corporate Responsibility and Communications at ArcelorMittal. “In serving this need, the **Chi-Cal Rivers Fund** is a great example of a public–private partnership that brings a comprehensive consortium of partners together to address the many opportunities found in the Chicago Area Waterway System for greater collective impact.”

"The **Chi-Cal Rivers Fund** will fund both green infrastructure and habitat improvement in the District’s service area and make lasting contributions to the water environment," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "The District is proud to partner on this very worthwhile effort."

The six grants announced today will help improve stormwater management in Chicago, enhance public park space and improve access to the area’s waterways in Northwest Indiana, enhance prairie and wetland habitat along the Calumet River, and improve fish habitat in the Chicago River. Collectively, the funded projects will:

- add more than 508,000 gallons of stormwater storage capacity
- improve 5 acres of public park space
- restore and enhance 566 acres of wetland and upland habitat
- improve approximately 2,640 feet of in-stream habitat

“The grants announced today demonstrate how actions to restore local rivers work in concert with efforts to enhance local communities,” said Jeff Trandahl,
executive director and CEO of NFWF. "These innovative projects represent the extraordinary commitments of the Chicago and Calumet regions to restoring their local waterways and surrounding habitats."

**Friends of the Chicago River** (Friends), in partnership with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) will use a $105,003 grant to install native emergent vegetation in the North Shore Channel and the North Branch of the Chicago River as habitat for fish and other aquatic species. The project involves the planting of 2,500 water willow and 2,000 lizard’s tail at river locations between Wilmette Harbor and Goose Island. This work will create stands of high-quality habitat for aquatic organisms, protect the shoreline from bank erosion, create shelter for aquatic life during floods, and improve the aesthetics of the channel for recreational users. The selected plant species are particularly appropriate for the unique conditions of the Chicago River and will complement other recent efforts by IDNR and Friends to install 400 channel catfish nesting cavities in the Chicago River system.

**National Audubon Society** will receive a $273,347 grant to enhance habitat for wetland-dependent species and improve public-use for surrounding communities at Indian Ridge Marsh and Big Marsh in the Calumet region. Project outcomes include the establishment of native marsh vegetation on 110 acres and improved and increased public access to two large public areas on Chicago’s South Side. The removal of invasive plant species and the revegetation of a complex mosaic of wet meadow, marsh and submerged vegetation will improve conditions for dozens of imperiled and declining species in the region and provide flood protection, sediment control, and nutrient trapping. Additionally, informational and educational signage will promote access and provide information on the river and marsh systems in the Calumet region.

**Chicago Public Schools** will receive a $300,000 grant for continuing efforts
under the Space to Grow program to transform Chicago schoolyards into vibrant outdoor spaces that benefit students, community members, and the environment. Schoolyard renovations supported by the grant will incorporate green infrastructure features, such as vegetated swales, rain gardens, permeable surfacing, and underground water storage. Altogether, these features will capture significant rainfall, helping to keep the City’s water resources clean and resulting in less neighborhood flooding. The schoolyards will capture and store stormwater for a combined storage capacity of approximately 500,000 gallons and prevent approximately 320,000 gallons of stormwater from entering Chicago’s combined sewer system each year. The renovated schoolyards will also expand recreational opportunities by providing five acres of new park space for underserved communities.

**Friends of the Forest Preserves** will use a $270,000 grant to continue and expand the Centennial Volunteers Network, an organized system of volunteers that restore and monitor habitat along the North Branch of the Chicago River and the Little Calumet River. Grant funding will be used to organize volunteer days throughout the year to conduct habitat restoration activities on 267 acres at nine sites managed by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. The project will reduce invasive vegetation and increase native plant cover throughout riparian areas and adjacent habitat. Reduction of invasive species and improved diversity of native species will improve habitat connectivity and complexity, reduce erosion, and improve water quality, which will benefit native wildlife and plant species. Grant funding will also help ensure the long-term care and enhancement of these sites by building an invested and trained constituency that will continue restoration efforts into the future.

**Faith in Place** will receive a $250,689 grant to improve stormwater management systems at five houses of worship located on Chicago’s South Side. The project will perform a stormwater audit, develop a stormwater management plan, and implement at least one green infrastructure feature at
each site. The project will also develop outreach and education plans to encourage more effective water management on properties surrounding the faith communities. The implementation of these activities will improve stormwater management, create demonstrations of green stormwater infrastructure elements throughout the communities, and prevent 43,000 gallons of stormwater from entering area waterways each year. It will also lead to a better understanding of stormwater management among local communities.

**Save the Dunes Conservation Fund** will receive $205,959 in grant funding to increase and enhance public-use and riparian habitat on four properties along the Little Calumet River in Northwest Indiana. New canoe and kayak launch sites will be constructed at three properties and 1.7 miles of interpretive trails will be created at two sites. The project will also install new pervious surface parking lots at two sites, which will reduce the amount of stormwater runoff entering the river while providing access to the boat launch sites and hiking trails. Finally, the project will enhance 189 acres of riparian habitat on three of the properties though control of invasive plants, prescribed burning, and replanting areas with native species. Expected project outcomes include increased visitation and usage of local parks, natural areas and waterways, as well as improved habitat for many fish, birds, and other wildlife.

**Chi-Cal Rivers Fund** partners plan to announce the next Request for Proposals in June 2016. For more information, please visit [www.nfwf.org/chi-cal](http://www.nfwf.org/chi-cal).

The **Chi-Cal Rivers Fund** is a public-private partnership working to restore the health, vitality and accessibility of the waterways in the
Chicago/Calumet region by supporting green storm water infrastructure, habitat enhancement, and public-use improvements.

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