

Friends of the Chicago River

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chicago River Day 2019: Largest Annual River Cleanup Scheduled for May 11

What Kind of Trash Is In the River? Litter Analysis Project Set for Seven Sites

CHICAGO—Chicago River Day, an annual cleanup event hosted by Friends of the Chicago River since 1992, is scheduled for May 11, 2019 from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Over 2,000 volunteers are expected to work in and along the river at 70 locations in the city and suburbs.

New this year is a project to analyze trash removed from the river at seven locations to better understand the types of trash that plague the Chicago River and their origin, and develop ways to reduce it.

Over the years volunteers have carted off hundreds of tons of garbage from the Chicago River system and restored banks along its 156 miles of shoreline. A recent Friends' survey of refuse removed through its year-round effort, Litter Free Chicago River, revealed that today's trash is mainly wrappers, plastic bags, disposable packaging and bottles. In years past, Chicago River Day volunteers discovered shopping carts, appliances, tires and other automobile parts, and bowling balls.



“Litter in the Chicago River system poses a threat to wildlife, which can become entangled in it or swallow it,” said Margaret Frisbie, Friends’ executive director, “as well as adversely affect water quality and plant life, and mar the beauty of the river.” Frisbie notes that the Clean Water Act legally requires government to protect the river from such “floatable” pollutants.

“There has been significant improvement in water quality and the general health of the river,” Frisbie said. “But litter remains a stubborn problem. Chicago River Day volunteers haul thousands of pounds of trash from the river and highlight how much work still needs to be done to make the river system all it can be.”

The trash analysis sites are Dammrich Rowing Center, River Park, Horner Park, Clark Park, Kayak Chicago, East Bank Club and Ping Tom Memorial Park. The trash will be brought to the

Waste Management facility on Goose Island for auditing. The project is part of the Friends-initiated Litter Free Task Force Committee that includes representatives from Waste Management, Mars Wrigley Foundation, REI Co-Op, Friends and Loyola University biology professor and aquatic biologist, Timothy Hoellein, Ph.D., an expert on litter and its effects on aquatic life.

There are volunteer collection sites all along the river system, with new sites including the Wild Mile and Hegewish Marsh Park, Watersmeet Woods, and Trinity United Church of Christ in Deerfield. The Summit Boat Launch returns for its second year, reflecting a strong response from the southwest suburban community in 2018. There are also on-the-water sites in partnership with local kayak and canoe outfitters such as Kayak Chicago and REI.

Volunteers for 2019 will wear specially designed T-shirts bearing the image of the ruby meadowhawk (*sympetrum rubicundulum*), a type of dragonfly found along the Chicago River system. The ruby meadowhawk was chosen because their presence indicates improved water quality and habitat. Also, Friends of the Chicago River in 2019 is celebrating its 40th year—its ruby anniversary.

This year's Chicago River Day was underwritten by a number of generous corporate partners, including presenting sponsor Exelon and lead sponsor PepsiCo, and stream sponsors Mars Wrigley Confectionary and Royal Bank of Canada's Blue Water Project, all longtime Chicago River Day supporters.

For all of the hard work done by volunteers that day, Metropolitan Brewery and Blue Island Brewing will host post-River Day celebrations.

Twenty-seven years and more than 60,000 volunteers after the first Chicago River Day, the Chicago River system is no longer a forgotten wildlife corridor filled with sewage and trash. Today the river system is vibrant, accessible, and alive with people, 70 species of fish, countless species of birds, and many native animals including beavers, mink, and turtles.

About Friends of the Chicago River

Friends of the Chicago River is an award-winning nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve and protect the Chicago River for people, plants and animals. With over 10,000 members, volunteers, and online advocates, Friends works to make the river greener and more accessible, while building awareness of the benefits that a clean, healthy river can bring to the surrounding community. Friends of the Chicago River is working to make the Chicago River one of the world's great metropolitan rivers. For more information please visit our website www.chicagoriver.org.

