

Friends of the Chicago River

411 South Wells Street, Suite 800 • Chicago, Illinois 60607
tel 312.939.0490 • fax 312.939.0931 • www.chicagoriver.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Contacts:

Ivan Moreno, NRDC, (312) 651-7909

Cindy Skrukrud, Illinois Sierra Club, (815) 353-5123

Judith Nemes, ELPC, (312) 795-3706

Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River, (773) 316-6473

Collaborative Resolution with MWRD Addresses Phosphorous Pollution in Chicago Area Waterways

METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT OF GREATER CHICAGO •
ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER • FRIENDS OF THE CHICAGO RIVER •
GULF RESTORATION NETWORK • NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL •
PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK • SIERRA CLUB

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and citizen organizations Environmental Law & Policy Center, Friends of the Chicago River, Gulf Restoration Network, Natural Resources Defense Council, Prairie Rivers Network, and Sierra Club are pleased to announce a collaborative resolution to lawsuits concerning the MWRD's Total Phosphorus discharge from its three largest water reclamation plants to the Chicago Area Waterway System. The parties' settlement agreement maps out a long-term plan to gather essential data and, in cooperation with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), address any phosphorus related adverse conditions in the region's waterways.

The agreement empowers a joint oversight committee to hire experts to determine where too much phosphorus may be fueling the growth of excess algae and plants or causing dissolved oxygen problems, and what steps need to be taken to resolve these issues. When the committee's work is complete, the MWRD will ask the IEPA to write an action plan into the Clean Water Act permits for three of the MWRD's water reclamation plants. As a backstop to ensure steady progress, the MWRD has committed to meet a Total Phosphorus discharge limit of 0.5 mg/L annual geometric mean by 2030, if feasible. The MWRD also has the ability to avail itself of a trading program to reduce overall phosphorus in the waterways of Illinois and satisfy any obligations imposed by its permits. Both the MWRD and the IEPA agreed to conduct extensive monitoring of the Chicago River and downstream waters. Gathering the data is an essential foundation to eliminating any problems caused by excess phosphorus. The MWRD will also conduct a thorough study of the feasibility of a tenfold reduction in its phosphorus discharge limit.

The MWRD and the citizens organizations look forward to a fruitful partnership over the coming years as we strive together to improve the quality of our region's waters. We share a common goal of continuing the efforts that the MWRD has made over the past several decades to improve the overall water quality in the Chicago Area Waterway System, in order to create a healthy metropolitan waterbody supporting communities and aquatic life, and to offer recreational and economic opportunities for our region. We hope this novel approach will provide a positive example of how working together, citizens and dischargers can channel their resources positively to improve our nation's waterways.

[Read the full press release here](#)

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Founded in 1979, 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 6,000 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 communities across the watershed. Friends of the Chicago River is working to make the Chicago River one of the world's greatest metropolitan rivers. For more information on Friends of the Chicago River, please visit our website: www.chicagoriver.org.