



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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MWRD receives Chicago Region Trees Initiative award



The Chicago Region Trees Initiative honored the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) by presenting the organization with the “Most Sustainable commercial tree program.” The award ceremony was held at Promontory Point in Chicago on Oct. 5.

In six months, the MWRD distributed more than 20,000 oak tree saplings as part of the agency’s Restore the Canopy, Plant a Tree program. During this time, the MWRD reached out to the 129 municipalities it serves about the importance of the tree population, while coordinating partnerships with 25 of those municipalities, 30 schools and 46 community groups to distribute free tree saplings and work together to restore the canopy and encourage a renewed commitment to the environment.

The MWRD’s tree program provides the opportunity to educate the region about the importance of trees and the lasting benefits trees provide in assisting property owners and the MWRD in managing the influx of stormwater flowing through local communities due to changing weather patterns. Given the 21st century challenges in flooding, the MWRD sought trees as one tool to manage excess water, while also attempting to restore the oak tree

population, which has been depleted over the last century despite its contributions to vital biodiversity in the region to support a wide range of plants and animals. The program has also allowed the MWRD to combine its goals of resource recovery with stormwater management by planting the tree saplings in the MWRD’s biosolids compost blend, a sustainable alternative to chemical fertilizers derived from the MWRD wastewater treatment process.

By introducing the Restore the Canopy program, the MWRD has also opened up the region’s eyes to many more tree benefits that extend beyond stormwater.

“Not only does a tree serve as an effective form of green infrastructure to reduce flooding, but trees also reduce city heat island effects, absorb carbon gases, produce oxygen, improve the habitat for wildlife and remain an important part of the ecosystem,” explained MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos.

The Chicago region’s canopy has fallen to 21 percent compared to the national average of 27 percent. To make matters worse, invasive species like buckthorn comprise 28 percent of total tree stems and most communities do not have trained professionals caring for trees or any urban forest management plan.

“The time is now to reverse these trends, and the MWRD’s Restore the Canopy, Plant a Tree program is a fitting example of how the region can start changing attitudes, changing perspectives and changing the earth for the better,” said Commissioner Cynthia Santos.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrdd.org) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.