



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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For immediate release

November 2, 2018

Water quality improvements help Chicago Fishes event reel in a catch

It was not long ago that the idea of catching fish along the Chicago River downtown was frowned upon. But thanks to water quality improvements resulting from improvements in water treatment by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and the advocacy work of the Friends of the Chicago River, Metropolitan Planning Council, the Chicago Park District, the Environmental Law & Policy Center, the Shedd Aquarium, the Illinois Environmental Council and other partners, today the river's health is flourishing and sparking new attraction. That interest was on display on Oct. 19 as these partners invited local fishing enthusiasts to take a break from their Loop and River North offices and homes to join them along the Chicago Riverwalk for the second Chicago Fishes event.

Fishing poles taking part in the second Chicago Fishes event could be seen lining the Riverwalk between Lake Street and Orleans Street, giving passersby, city dwellers and office workers nearby the opportunity to catch a fish after work or while strolling along the Chicago Riverwalk.

"Chicago Fishes is a terrific event that gets people right down to the water where they have a ball catching and releasing fish," said Margaret Frisbie, Friends' executive director. "And not only do the people fishing with us learn about the incredible diversity of fish that live in the river, hundreds of passersby do too."

The event, coordinated by Friends of the Chicago River and partners, supplied those fishing with poles, bait and lessons. There was no charge to attend, and all fishers were covered by a group permit.

"I was happy to attend the Chicago Fishes event to support our partners and highlight the many initiatives that we have taken in protecting our waterways resulting in cleaner waterways, healthy aquatic life and a surge in recreational activity and economic development," said MWRD Commissioner Kari K. Steele. "We hope all Cook County area residents have the opportunity to take advantage of these many waterway improvements."



Commissioner Kari K. Steele tried her hand at fishing along the Chicago River at the Friends of Chicago River's second annual Chicago Fishes event.

The MWRD constructed local waterways more than 100 years ago for the purpose of reversing the flow of the river with the main intent of providing drainage for the Chicago region and conveying wastewater. It has taken years of investment, testing and innovation to improve the quality of the water to the level it is at today.

The MWRD conducts fish monitoring periodically throughout its service area, which includes the Chicago, Calumet, and Des Plaines River Systems. The number of fish species found in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) has drastically increased since the 1970s when monitoring of the fish population first began. From 10 known species in 1974, that number has ballooned to 76 in 2017, including 59 that have been found in the CAWS since 2000.

"The Chicago Fishes event is a terrific opportunity for visitors to become acquainted with the Chicago River and the many water quality improvements and recreational amenities that now line our river," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "Whether it's dropping a line in the water, taking a stroll along the beautiful Riverwalk or kayaking across the water, we hope the public has a chance to benefit from our work in protecting our water environment." *(continued)*

Water quality improvements help Chicago Fishes event reel in a catch, *cont.*



Fishermen and women braved cold, rainy conditions to line the Chicago Riverwalk for Chicago Fishes. MWRD Commissioner Kari K. Steele joined members of Friends of the Chicago River and the Shedd Aquarium to reel in various fish species.



Water quality improvements have proven to be essential factors for nurturing aquatic life, while our Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) has also helped reduce the amount of combined sewer overflows (CSO), leading to less polluted water and healthier homes for freshwater fish living in the CAWS. In addition to TARP and other measures to improve water quality, the MWRD introduced sidestream elevated pool aeration stations and other instream aeration stations to help inject needed oxygen into the waterways and implemented chlorination/dechlorination technologies to disinfect water at our Calumet Water Reclamation Plant (WRP), and ultra-violet UV disinfection at our O'Brien WRP.

Thanks in part to advancements at MWRD water treatment operations, the waterways have experienced decreases in levels of ammonia and biochemical oxygen demand (BOD). The BOD captures the degree of pollution by measuring the



amount of dissolved oxygen (DO) that must be present in water for microorganisms to break down organic matter in the water at a certain temperature over a time period.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

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