



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Media Advisory

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdd.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

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Kayaking the Wild Mile with MWRD and Urban Rivers

Warm October evening allows the MWRD to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month and view how water quality improvements sustain the Wild Mile



Kayakers descend on the Wild Mile in the North Branch Canal near Eastman Street where Urban Rivers' Phil Nicodemus explains how eco-friendly floating islands are becoming an attraction for heron and other birds and wildlife, thanks to low boat traffic, improving water quality and sprouting habitats. Urban Rivers helped plant more than 50 native plant species along the waterway.

Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and Urban Rivers enjoyed an evening to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month and experience the benefits of their hard work and collaboration by gaining a closer glimpse at the Wild Mile Chicago by kayak.

MWRD Commissioner Marcelino Garcia, MWRD staff and friends joined the team from Urban Rivers to kayak the North Branch Canal of the Chicago River and learn how waterway protection has led to

miles of potential. To commemorate National Hispanic Heritage Month, the event sparked opportunities for the LatinX community to explore a STEM education and interact with their water environment. The MWRD also celebrated the month by honoring individual LatinX employees and acknowledging their contributions on social media.

“What better way to get out and connect with nature and highlight the importance of National Hispanic Heritage Month than to kayak along the *(contin-*

Kayaking the Wild Mile with Urban Rivers and the MWRD, *cont.*



From L to R: Joanne So Young Dill of the MWRD, Nick Wesley and Phil Nicodemus of Urban Rivers, MWRD Executive Director Brian A. Perkovich and MWRD Commissioner Marcelino Garcia hosted the Kayak and Learn night on the North Branch Canal in support of National Hispanic Heritage Month.

ued)Wild Mile at sunset,” said Commissioner Marcelino Garcia. “These events help make connections with our community and spotlight their great work through our partnerships. I thank our partners at Urban Rivers and MWRD staff for making it their mission to protect our water environment.”

Members of the MWRD’s Monitoring and Research Department, who joined the tour, have studied fish species in support of the Wild Mile Chicago project, coordinated by Urban Rivers. On the Wild Mile, along the North Branch Canal and Turning Basin, between Chicago and North avenues, Urban Rivers and the Shedd Aquarium are creating the world’s first mile-long floating eco-park, planting more than 50 native plant species and tracking an attraction of wildlife ranging from mussels to herons. The project, which launched in 2017, reclaims the waterway while providing an accessible public open space for the community. The Wild Mile was outlined over the course of many community meetings with the Chicago Department of Planning and Development to build a renewed urban ecology. Partners and plan-

ners said it will help generate cleaner, healthier water and more vibrant wildlife ecosystems.

The MWRD has also worked with Urban Rivers and other partners to enhance access to the water, collaborating to improve riverfront trails, restore riverbanks and remove dams, leading to upstream fish migration and better navigation and surroundings for boaters. Due to community-wide support for clean water from organizations like Urban Rivers and advancements in the MWRD’s water treatment operations, the MWRD’s Tunnel and Reservoir Plan and other initiatives, water quality has improved to a point not once envisioned. These efforts have helped initiate a resurgence in recreation and aquatic life through a growing number of fish species and habitats.

“It is encouraging to see the fruits of our labor in improved water quality and waterway recreation, but it is further uplifting to see talented water stewards from Urban Rivers coming forward to take ownership and protect our waterways, for our communities, aquatic life and wildlife on the *(continued)*

Kayaking the Wild Mile with Urban Rivers and the MWRD, *cont.*



Wild Mile,” said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet. “We all stand to benefit in this improved water environment.”

New research by the Shedd Aquarium and the MWRD shows a gradual increase in both the total

number of fish and fish species. Meanwhile native species have increased and the number of invasive species has dropped. Results of the study published in *Urban Ecosystems* show that Chicago waterways are more ecologically productive and conducive to aquatic life.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrld.org.