



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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For immediate release

October 27, 2020

Virtual Sustainability Summit shines light on MWRD and partners' missions to protect the environment

Nearly 400 green-minded advocates and environmentalists registered to join the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and partners online this year at the MWRD's Eighth Annual Sustainability Summit to learn about resource recovery, green infrastructure and other innovative measures to protect the planet.

Due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Sustainability Summit went virtual this year, featuring a lineup of talented speakers sharing their information, tips, best practices and success stories to an interactive audience. The event equipped and empowered partnering municipalities and residents with the latest trends in sustainability, while also educating the public on the work of the MWRD and celebrating impressive achievements in sustainability over the last year in Cook County.

"We thank everyone for joining us for these intelligent conversations to promote a better environment and we congratulate our award winners and thank them for protecting our communities through long-term stewardship," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele, who served as moderator for the virtual event. "Because of your hard work in protecting the waterways and the environment, the Chicago region grows more resilient and vibrant every day."



The educational forum allowed viewers to gain a better understanding of the benefits of using sustainable resources like the MWRD's EQ Compost and EQ Biosolids, a product of the wastewater treatment process that can help reduce turf maintenance costs by improving soil quality. EQ Compost, a blend of biosolids and woodchips, works as a soil amendment



Sutherland Elementary School, 10015 S. Leavitt St., Chicago, provided its students with an outdoor classroom by converting traditional turfgrass and landscaping into a dedicated garden and rain table that increases student and community engagement in sustainability. Deeper rooting plants also reduce runoff. For their efforts, Becca Blue and the Green Team at Sutherland earned a Sustainable Landscaping Certificate from the MWRD at its Eighth Annual Sustainability Summit.

to improve soil structure, supply organic matter and allow plants to more effectively utilize nutrients and soil to retain more water. Applying biosolids can also reduce the return of vegetation carbon as carbon dioxide to the atmosphere from land, MWRD scientists said in their presentation.

Viewers also learned about the power of green infrastructure to combat flooding and improve water quality. Between local and regional stormwater management projects, green infrastructure partnerships and flood prone property acquisitions, the MWRD has more than 170 projects in some phase of design or construction, and the totality of these projects are protecting or removing more than 13,000 structures. Green infrastructure projects demonstrate smaller, localized projects that homeowners can take in their own yards to capture more water. The MWRD provides tips through its new Green Neighbors Guide found at mwrdd.org.

The Sustainability Summit also covered sustainable landscaping methods and introduced ways to help Illinois restore the monarch butterfly population. The MWRD staff (*continued*)

Virtual Sustainability Summit shines light on missions, *cont.*



(From left to right): Award winners at the MWRD's Eighth Annual Sustainability Summit included Orland Park Mayor Keith Pekau, Stickney Mayor Jeff Walik, and John Anderson and Lisa Gillis from the Village of River Forest Sustainability Commission, for their community-driven work to implement new sustainable solutions.

and partners discussed how they have successfully enlisted goats and sheep to improve vegetation control at water reclamation plants, and how a revitalized Chicago Area Waterway System is now home to an increasing population of native fish, thanks to research compiled by presenters from the MWRD and Shedd Aquarium.

"Sustainability means pushing ourselves to always do better for the planet we all call home," said MWRD Commissioner Cam Davis. "While attending the Sustainability Summit like we've done in person in the past is fun, this year, more people attended and we cut down on transportation impacts. Thanks to our speakers, award winners, and participants for their work for the world."

In addition to providing an outlet for sharing strategies and resources in promoting the environment, the Summit honored individuals, organizations, municipalities and other agencies for modeling best practices in sustainability. This year's award winners included the following:

- Julie Roth from Natural Learners Co-Op, winner of the 2020 Biosolids Beneficial Reuse award for her educational efforts, partnership and sustainable work, creating a children's garden at Proksa Park in Berwyn.
- The Sweet Water Foundation, winner of the 2020 Sustainable Landscaping Award for their work transforming abandoned city blocks in the Washington Park and Englewood neighborhoods and turning them into productive green space for community engagement.
- The Village of Orland Park and Mayor Keith Pekau, winner of the 2020 Sustainable Landscaping Award, for their efforts and accomplishments in creating a green roof at Village Hall and prairie restoration, which creates a landscape-scale sponge for stormwater and connects prairie

fragments within the MWRD.

- John Anderson, Lisa Gillis and the Village of River Forest Sustainability Commission, winner of the 2020 Sustainable Landscaping Award, for their work advocating and supporting the Des Plaines River floodplain; adding green permeable alleys, streets, and parking lots; distributing rain barrels; native plantings; and implementing essential community education.
- Mayor Jeff Walik and the Village of Stickney, winner of the 2020 Sustainable Landscaping Certificate for achievements in promoting green landscaping and community education. The mayor's efforts have led to tree plantings and an Arbor Day celebration at local schools to increase student understanding of the importance of trees and nature.
- Becca Blue and the Green Team at Sutherland Elementary School, winner of the 2020 Sustainable Landscaping Certificate, for outstanding work creating an outdoor ecological classroom at the Beverly neighborhood school. This garden increases student and community engagement in sustainability and, through deeper rooting plants, can reduce runoff during rain events.
- Grant Ferguson at fcAmerica (Ferguson Cares) with a 2020 Sustainable Landscaping Certificate in recognition for their sustainable food forest and farm in South Holland. This project includes rain gardens, swales, and native plantings to manage stormwater on the property and rainwater harvesting to utilize for the crops.

To see a recording of the Sustainability Summit, visit the MWRD's YouTube [channel](#).

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.