



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

December 14, 2011

MWRD agreement aims to reduce combined sewer overflows *Development of green infrastructure to improve region water quality*

The volume of water discharged to the waterways from combined sewer overflows (CSOs) in Cook County, along with the potential for flooding, will dramatically decrease thanks to efforts that began in the early 1970s and will continue through 2029.

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) have executed an enforceable schedule for implementing MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan ("TARP"). That agreement is reflected in a Consent Decree that was lodged with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

MWRD conceived TARP in the early 1970s as the appropriate means to control CSOs and to protect water quality in the Chicagoland area, even before current laws requiring CSO controls went into effect. IEPA approved TARP under those laws in 1995, even as MWRD was already 20 years into the project's construction. The Consent Decree validates MWRD's reliance on TARP as well as MWRD's schedule for completion of this unprecedented project.

"MWRD has long been a national leader in the water reclamation community," said MWRD Executive Director David St. Pierre. "We are proud to continue that tradition and look forward to continuing our work on TARP."

Because of its scope and complexity, TARP included two phases. The first phase involved the construction of 109 miles of deep, large diameter rock tunnels. This project was completed in 2006, and the entire tunnel system is currently in operation. In addition to providing pollution control benefits, the second phase consists of constructing reservoirs for flood control for the Chicagoland combined sewer area, and specific timeframes have been established.

The Thornton Composite Reservoir will be completed by Dec. 31, 2015, and will have 7.9 billion gallons of storage

capacity. Two years later, the McCook Stage 1 Reservoir will be completed adding 3.5 billion gallons of storage capacity. The McCook Stage 2 Reservoir will be completed by Dec. 31, 2029, and will add 6.5 billion gallons of storage capacity. Combined, this represents nearly 18 billion gallons of storage capacity.

"Partnerships with private quarry operators and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have made it possible for us to execute a project of such monumental scale in a fiscally responsible manner," said St. Pierre. "The region will be proud of the work that is done to provide protection from flooding and improve water quality throughout the Chicago Area Waterway System."

Other components of the Consent Decree are designed to foster the use of green infrastructure that will help reduce the very stormwater runoff that causes CSOs. The new program is unprecedented in its design, which focuses strongly on outreach to a multitude of public and private stakeholders. Together with MWRD, these stakeholders will create a new "green culture" that will pay dividends far into the future. These efforts are scheduled to produce at least 10 million gallons of new runoff retention during the life of the Consent Decree.

"We are excited for the opportunity to be out front in the development of green infrastructure alternatives," said St. Pierre. "In drafting the Green Infrastructure program in this Consent Decree, it was important to MWRD to create a model that was aimed at transforming a culture – not checking off a box of requirements. We look forward to working with our partners in a way that will produce lasting benefits for the entire region and will blaze a new trail in how we manage stormwater."

Within the first year of the Consent Decree, at least one demonstration project will be constructed and evaluated for potential wide-spread implementation. In addition, a new comprehensive Land Use policy will bring green infrastructure to MWRD-owned lands that are leased to others. Expansion of a rain barrel distribution program is also part of the program.