



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Student Congress inspires future protection of Chicago River

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) participated in the 19th Annual Friends of the Chicago River Student Congress, where more than 500 area students and their teachers learned the value of clean waterways and an important lesson in science and ecology.

The theme of this year's event held Feb. 20 at Taft High School in the Norwood Park neighborhood was "The Good,

the Bad, and the Invasive" and included 24 schools, many of which were high schools that allowed students to interact with other students from all over the Chicago area.

"Friends of the Chicago River hosts the Chicago River Student Congress as a way for students from all over the watershed to share research and celebrate the river in a meaningful way," said Mark Hauser, education manager



*A group of students from Taft High School participating in the Friends of the Chicago River's 19th Annual Student Congress played the role of invasive species to drive home the challenges of protecting the local ecosystem surrounding the local waterways. The Student Congress provided the students with a wide range of presentations and seminars concentrating on the value of the Chicago River and the extensive work that goes into protecting it.*

with Friends of the Chicago River. “It is certainly a unique event. No other event I can think of would have sixth graders from Chicago City Day School teaching twelfth graders from Northside College Prep, or students from Curie High School rubbing shoulders with students from Glenbrook North High School.”

MWRD’s Public Affairs Specialist Justin Brown led an interactive workshop on the MWRD’s Tunnel and Reservoir Plan, focusing on why the system was built, how it works and how it has helped local rivers since the tunnels became operational in 1985. Community Education Specialist Mary Carroll followed the theme with a presentation about how water reclamation has improved local water quality and increased biodiversity in the Chicago River. Improvements in water reclamation have increased fish species in the Chicago River from 10 in 1974 to more than 76 species today.

Every year, the Friends of the Chicago River feature a local animal exhibit at the end of the event. The influx of

animals shows how much the Chicago River has improved by returning to its natural state that draws a diversity of species. This year the animals were local birds, including a live owl presented by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. The healthier the fish population, the more birds of prey can be seen roaming the area. The Forest Preserve District cares for injured birds, many of which will never be allowed back into nature because the birds have permanent disabilities.

“We thank the Friends of the Chicago River for their tireless work in improving our precious waterways and inviting us to participate in this year’s Student Congress,” said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “We like to promote these events because they teach our future leaders about the importance of protecting our local waterways and how we each play a role because this preservation starts at our drains and is impacted greatly by the work of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.”



*Forest Preserve District of Cook County volunteer Deborah Cohen gave students a glimpse of the result of hard work to improve the Chicago River by presenting a Great Horned Owl, the largest owl in Illinois found on a year-round basis in Illinois. These birds live in a variety of habitats, including forests, woodlands, stream sides and open country, and the Chicago River is one of the owl’s frequent haunts. Because of efforts made by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, Forest Preserve District, Friends of the Chicago River and other organizations, the restored and improved waterways have become an attraction for owls and other birds.*

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## **Recovering Resources, Transforming Water**

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