



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Growing MWRD tree program shelters region from storms

It has been four months since the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) introduced a free tree distribution program, and leaves are already sprouting in hopes of restoring the region's tree canopy and managing local stormwater.

Driven by the devastation of the emerald ash borer and extreme weather events that have led to the loss of approximately 13 million trees, the MWRD staff set off on an ambitious plan to help restore the Cook County canopy. In distributing more than 14,000 oak tree saplings as part of the Restore the Canopy, Plant a Tree program, the program has garnered instant attention thanks to the support of MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan and the MWRD Board of Commissioners. The Board endorsed the program to offer trees to the public as an aid in coping with overwhelming storm events. Vice President McGowan is leading by example. Her sapling has already grown about a foot and sprouted leaves in a few short months.

"In restoring the canopy, we are working to prevent flooding, improve local water quality and promote resource recovery," said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan. "We thank the thousands of homeowners, schools and community groups that have participated in this program to protect our water environment and plant a promising future for many beautiful tree-lined streets and backyards."

Since launching the program in April, the MWRD has forged partnerships with 25 different municipalities, 30 schools and 46 community groups to distribute more than 14,000 free tree saplings to restore the canopy.

Trees reduce city heat island effects, absorb carbon gases, produce oxygen, improve the habitat for wildlife, and serve as an effective form of green infrastructure to reduce flooding. Promoting trees became a natural fit in the MWRD's pursuit of improving stormwater management. Since the Illinois General Assembly delegated the MWRD as the stormwater management authority of Cook County in 2004, the agency has studied and introduced creative solutions to meet this challenge. The MWRD has distributed over 72,000 rain barrels, constructed massive stormwater reservoirs, transformed Chicago Public School grounds to better contain stormwater, implemented various green infrastructure programs and flood control projects and is now distributing tree saplings. A large oak can reduce 5,400 gallons of stormwater runoff. If 14,000 trees are planted, more than 75 million gallons of stormwater storage will be provided. These numbers are expected to grow as the number of distributed trees grows.



MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan encourages homeowners and business owners to participate in the MWRD's Restore the Canopy, Plant a Tree program. Her sapling is already sprouting leaves and looks to be a valuable form of green infrastructure to contain future stormwater and help the agency in mitigating flooding.

The program has also allowed the MWRD to combine its goals of resource recovery with stormwater management by planting the tree saplings in the MWRD's biosolids compost blend, a sustainable alternative to chemical fertilizers derived from the MWRD wastewater treatment process. The MWRD trees saplings are available as red oaks, bur oaks, pin oaks and shingle oaks and come in individual pots or in bulk bags of 100 bare root saplings. Planting and care instructions, along with additional information regarding the benefits of trees, will be provided with each delivery. With advanced notice, the saplings can be picked up at MWRD facilities or delivered.

To participate in the program, visit [www.mwrdd.org](http://www.mwrdd.org) or contact MWRD Public Affairs at (312) 751-6633 or [public.affairs@mwrdd.org](mailto:public.affairs@mwrdd.org). The MWRD also distributes free trees every Wednesday from 9 a.m. to noon at the following water reclamation plants:

- Calumet (400 E. 130th St., Chicago)
- Egan (550 S. Meacham Rd., Schaumburg)
- Hanover Park (1220 Sycamore Ave., Hanover Park)
- Kirie (701 W. Oakton St., Des Plaines)
- O'Brien (3500 Howard St., Skokie)
- Stickney (6001 W. Pershing Rd., Cicero)

### Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

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