



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Officials make one big jump into river, one giant leap for water quality



Big Jump participants, including Commissioner Josina Morita (fourth from left) and Commissioner Debra Shore (fourth from right) and MWRD Executive Director David St. Pierre (far left), plunge into the Chicago River at Ping Tom Park to represent their support and pursuit of cleaner waterways.

Elected officials, agency representatives and clean water advocates joined the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) to back up their commitment to protect the waterways by jumping into the Chicago River, an activity long considered unimaginable.

Hosted by MWRD Commissioner Josina Morita and Friends of the Chicago River, the event highlighted the jumpers' commitment to improve the river's water quality and the collective work done to drastically alter the perception of the waterways over the last few decades. The Big Jump was held along the banks of the south branch of the Chicago River at Ping Tom Park.

"We salute Commissioner Morita, Friends of the Chicago River, and the many jumpers who submerged themselves into the Chicago River to tell our story of water quality improvement," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "The investments the MWRD has made in protecting our waterways has yielded positive results, cleaner water and a surge in recreational activity and economic development that has drawn us closer to the Chicago River in myriad ways."



(L to R): MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore, Executive Director David St. Pierre, Commissioner Josina Morita, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Friends of the Chicago River Executive Director Margaret Frisbie were among those who made the "Big Jump" to highlight water quality improvements in the Chicago River.

Water quality improvements have proven to be essential factors for nurturing aquatic life, while the MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) has also helped reduce the amount of combined sewer overflows, leading to less polluted water and healthier homes for freshwater fish living in the Chicago Area Waterways Systems (CAWS). In addition to TARP and other measures to improve water quality, the MWRD has introduced sidestream elevated pool aeration (SEPA) stations and other instream aeration stations to help inject needed oxygen into the waterways and implemented chlorination/dechlorination technologies to disinfect water at its Calumet Water Reclamation Plant (WRP), and UV disinfection at its O'Brien WRP.

"Our work on TARP has significantly reduced pollution loads throughout our waterways. With disinfection now in place at our O'Brien and Calumet plants, the water we are releasing into the river is cleaner than the river water itself," said Commissioner Morita. "The water is safe for people with normal immune systems."

The event also served as a fundraiser for the Friends of the Chicago River's community education program, *(continued)*

Officials make one big jump into river *(continued)*



(L to R): 25th Ward Ald. Danny Solis, US EPA Region 5 Acting Regional Administrator Robert Kaplan, U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (9th), MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore, MWRD Commissioner Josina Morita, U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley (5th), Friends of the Chicago River Executive Director Margaret Frisbie, Chicago City Clerk Anna Valencia, State Rep. Theresa Mah (2nd) and MWRD Executive Director David St. Pierre moments before they plunged into the Chicago River.

the Chicago River Schools Network, which provides river education to schools and communities throughout the year.

“The Big Jump was tremendous fun,” said Margaret Frisbie, executive director of the Friends of the Chicago River. “Everybody had big smiles on their faces after we all jumped in and there was a wonderful sense of partnership and pride in what we have accomplished together over the years. It was a wonderful demonstration of what is ahead for the Chicago River system and the people who live, work, and visit the region.”

Joining Commissioner Morita and Friends of the Chicago River in the inaugural jump were MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore, MWRD Executive Director David St. Pierre, U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky (9th) and Mike Quigley (5th), Illinois State Treasurer Mike Frerichs, State Rep. Sonya Harper (6th), State Rep. Theresa Mah (2nd), Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, 25th Ward Ald. Danny Solis, Chicago City Clerk Anna Valencia, US EPA Region 5 Acting Regional Administrator Robert Kaplan and US Army Corps of Engineers Fisheries Biologist Matthew Shanks.

“The Chicago Sanitary District completed construction of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal in 1900, reversing the river’s flow and sending all manner of human and industrial



Local leaders meet at Ping Tom Park to take a dip into the Chicago River to showcase improvements in water quality.

waste downstream. Nobody would have imagined at the time that someday the river and canals would be clean enough for any direct contact whatsoever – especially not swimming,” said Commissioner Shore.

Once completed in 2006, the tunnel portion of TARP cut the number of combined sewer overflow (CSO) events in half and prevented an estimated 85 percent of the CSO pollution. In the Majewski and Thornton Reservoir service areas, the completion of those reservoirs has nearly eliminated CSOs. Since the Thornton Composite Reservoir came into service in late 2015, there have been only three reported CSOs in the Calumet River System. Once McCook Reservoir comes into service, water quality will improve. The first stage of McCook Reservoir is scheduled to be completed in late 2017, and when the second stage is completed, the reservoir will have a total capacity of 10 billion gallons.

As a result of these water quality improvements, aquatic life in the waterways has thrived. The MWRD conducts fish monitoring periodically throughout its service area, which includes the Chicago, Calumet, and Des Plaines River Systems. The number of fish species found in the CAWS has drastically increased since the 1970s when monitoring of the fish population first began. From 10 known species in 1974, that number has ballooned to 76 in 2017, including 59 that have been found in the CAWS since 2000. Thanks in part to advancements at MWRD water treatment operations, the waterways have experienced decreases in levels of ammonia and biochemical oxygen demand (BOD).

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrld.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for used water treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.