



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## MWRD and environmental organizations release joint statement on agreement

**METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT OF GREATER CHICAGO • ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER • FRIENDS OF THE CHICAGO RIVER • GULF RESTORATION NETWORK • NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL • PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK • SIERRA CLUB**

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and citizen organizations Environmental Law & Policy Center, Friends of the Chicago River, Gulf Restoration Network, Natural Resources Defense Council, Prairie Rivers Network, and Sierra Club are pleased to announce a collaborative resolution to lawsuits concerning the MWRD's Total Phosphorus discharge from its three largest water reclamation plants to the Chicago Area Waterway System. The parties' settlement agreement maps out a long-term plan to gather essential data and, in cooperation with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), address any phosphorus related adverse conditions in the region's waterways.

The agreement empowers a joint oversight committee to hire experts to determine where too much phosphorus may be fueling the growth of excess algae and plants or causing dissolved oxygen problems, and what steps need to be taken to resolve these issues. When the committee's work is complete, the MWRD will ask the IEPA to write an action plan into the Clean Water Act permits for three of the MWRD's water reclamation plants. As a backstop to ensure steady progress, the MWRD has committed to meet a Total Phosphorus discharge limit

of 0.5 mg/L annual geometric mean by 2030, if feasible. The MWRD also has the ability to avail itself of a trading program to reduce overall phosphorus in the waterways of Illinois and satisfy any obligations imposed by its permits. Both the MWRD and the IEPA agreed to conduct extensive monitoring of the Chicago River and downstream waters. Gathering the data is an essential foundation to eliminating any problems caused by excess phosphorus. The MWRD will also conduct a thorough study of the feasibility of a tenfold reduction in its phosphorus discharge limit.

The MWRD and the citizens organizations look forward to a fruitful partnership over the coming years as we strive together to improve the quality of our region's waters. We share a common goal of continuing the efforts that the MWRD has made over the past several decades to improve the overall water quality in the Chicago Area Waterway System, in order to create a healthy metropolitan waterbody supporting communities and aquatic life, and to offer recreational and economic opportunities for our region. We hope this novel approach will provide a positive example of how working together, citizens and dischargers can channel their resources positively to improve our nation's waterways.

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**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.*