



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdr.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

For immediate release

March 23, 2018

## Now is the time to plant a (free) tree and restore the canopy with the MWRD

Cool March temperatures may not make it feel like planting season, but spring has arrived, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) will be ready with free oak tree saplings. Back for a third year, the MWRD's Restore the Canopy (RTC) program will allow Cook County residents to help the MWRD manage stormwater by planting a tree.

The MWRD has distributed more than 40,000 free oak tree saplings in its first two years of the RTC initiative, working with hundreds of municipalities, schools and community organizations to spread the word about myriad tree benefits, one of which includes stormwater management.

"We are asking the public to help us manage the influx of stormwater and work toward solutions to flooding by planting a tree through our Restore the Canopy program," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "Trees have proven to provide a multitude of environmental benefits and this free program is a terrific way for schools to educate our students on how trees can improve our surroundings and keep our communities dry when spring rains arrive."

The pin, bur and swamp white oak saplings can be picked up every Wednesday at six MWRD water reclamation plants from 9 a.m. to noon and at community outreach events all year long, including approaching Earth Day and Arbor Day events in which the MWRD is participating. Trees can be picked up every Wednesday through the fall from 9 a.m. to noon at the following water reclamation plants:

- Calumet (400 E. 130th St., Chicago)
- Egan (550 S. Meacham Rd., Schaumburg)



*Swamp white oak trees at the O'Brien Water Reclamation Plant in Skokie grew in abundance last year in only a few short months. Tree enthusiasts can stop by O'Brien and five other MWRD facilities each Wednesday beginning March 21 to pick up free oak tree saplings.*

- Hanover Park (1220 Sycamore Ave., Hanover Park)
- Kirie (701 West Oakton St., Des Plaines)
- O'Brien (3500 Howard St., Skokie)
- Stickney (6001 W. Pershing Rd., Cicero)

The saplings can also be delivered at no cost in either bulk bags of 100 bare root saplings or individually potted, minimum 50. Planting and care instructions, along with additional information regarding the benefits of trees, will be provided with each delivery. They are an average of 18-inches tall and can be delivered to community organizations, municipalities and schools.

"Trees are an important part of Chicago's ecosystem. Trees absorb carbon gasses, reduce our reliance on energy, produce oxygen and provide a canopy that reduces city heat island effects," said MWRD Commissioner Kari K. Steele. "Trees also absorb rainfall that will help us manage excess water that can overwhelm our communities."

*(continued)*

## Now is the time to plant a (free) tree and restore the canopy *(continued)*

Given the 21st century challenges in flooding, the MWRD uses trees as one tool to manage stormwater. A secondary benefit is the restoration of the oak tree population, which has been depleted over the last century. According to a study funded by the USDA Forest Service and US Fish & Wildlife Service, prior to Euro-American settlement, oak ecosystems were widespread across Cook County. However, by 1939, only 28 percent of these original oak ecosystems remained due to agriculture, settlement and the growth of Chicago. By 2010, only 17.8 percent remained leaving a patchwork of small, fragmented and unhealthy lands.

Additionally, the region has lost approximately 13 million trees in recent years due to emerald ash borer devastation and extreme weather events. All of these reasons prompted the MWRD to act on an ambitious plan to help restore the Cook County canopy. To find out more about how your school, organization or municipality can participate in this program, please contact the MWRD Office of Public Affairs at [public.affairs@mwrld.org](mailto:public.affairs@mwrld.org) or by calling (312) 751-6633.

###



*MWRD employees have potted thousands of oak tree saplings in anticipation of restoring the region's canopy. The program also allows the MWRD to combine its goals of resource recovery with stormwater management by planting the tree saplings in the MWRD's exceptional quality compost, a sustainable soil amendment derived from woodchips and the water treatment process.*

---

### 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 used water treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*