



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdd.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

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Clean water partners commemorate 50 years of landmark act



Clean water advocates gathered at Ping Tom Park on July 15 and included (from L to R): Chicago Department of Water Management First Deputy Commissioner Joel Vieyra, MWRD Commissioner Chakena D. Perry, MWRD President Kari K. Steele, MWRD Commissioner Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda, Friends of the Chicago River Executive Director Margaret Frisbie, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 5 Water Division Director Tera Fong, 25th Ward Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) Executive Director Erin Aleman, Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) President and CEO Darlene Hightower, Illinois Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Report Card Executive Committee Brian Parwala, State Rep. Theresa Mah (2nd Dist.), Chicago Chapter of the Environmental and Water Resources Institute (EWRI) Chair Saki Handa, Site Design Group Co-Founder and Principal Ernest Wong, and EWRI Vice Chair Joseph Wilk.

Clean water advocates, engineering leaders and commissioners with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) joined together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of groundbreaking federal legislation and to reaffirm their commitment to another generation of water environment protection.

Elected officials and representatives from across various local and federal government agencies, planning organizations and non-profit leaders commemorated the anniversary of the Clean Water Act (CWA) during a gathering along the South Branch of the Chicago

River at Ping Tom Park in Chicago's Chinatown community. The CWA established new legislation to regulate pollution and protect surface waters. These amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1948 provided the structure for regulating pollutant discharges into U.S. waters, gave the EPA authority to implement pollution control programs, set new water quality standards and paved the way for critical protection and planning support for Chicago area water resources. Equally as important, the CWA inspired a movement of water protection. Watch the ceremony at: https://youtu.be/G88lw-jmP_0. (continued)

Clean water partners commemorate 50 years of landmark act, *cont.*

“If not for the Clean Water Act and the partners that stand before you today, there might not be this significant push to protect our water resources,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “Today we mark the 50th anniversary of this monumental legislation that sparked not only new regulation but also a movement for our water resources, our environment and new critical thinking and urban planning that began to consider new ways we can improve our handling of wastewater, our surface waters, groundwater, navigation and public health. We hope this commemoration inspires a new appreciation for this landmark occasion and inspires a new generation of protection for the region’s future water environment.”

The event was coordinated by the MWRD and Chicago Chapter of the Environmental and Water Resources Institute (EWRI), a technical group that is part of the Illinois Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). Like water itself, the CWA has been pervasive in the work of many partners, including the MWRD, Chicago Department of Water Management (CDWM), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), city and state leaders, 25th Ward Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez and State Rep. Theresa Mah (2nd Dist.) and Friends of the Chicago River, who all gathered at Ping Tom Park to give remarks on the impact of the CWA.

“Truly, there is much to celebrate about the importance of the Clean Water Act to the renaissance of the Chicago-Calumet River system, and to waterways across the country,” said Margaret Frisbie, executive director of the Friends of the Chicago River. “However, we must also continue to work together with urgency to enforce and protect it. With the weight of federal law, the Clean Water Act galvanized an era of urgent citizen-action to clean up our waterways; people working together – prodding and holding our leaders to account for their policies and support.”

Despite concern for a history of pollution, the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) has never been healthier. When the MWRD began monitoring fish



From L to R: State Rep. Theresa Mah (2nd Dist.), MWRD Commissioner Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda, MWRD President Kari K. Steele, MWRD Commissioner Chakena D. Perry, and 25th Ward Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez mark the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act to prompt new awareness for the landmark legislation that inspired today’s protection for the region’s water environment.

populations in the CAWS in 1974, there were only 10 fish species counted. That figure has soared to 77 currently, including 60 that have been found in the CAWS since 2000. Thanks in part to the CWA, advancements at MWRD and CDWM water treatment operations and increased advocacy and planning, the CAWS is thriving and drinking water sources in Lake Michigan are world renowned.

“We thought what better way to commemorate such a historic and necessary piece of legislation protecting our waterways than at a location where you can see it at work.... feet away from the Chicago River,” said EWRI Vice Chair Joseph Wilk.

Also in 1972, the MWRD’s Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) was formally adopted as one of the largest public works projects in the world for water quality and flood control. Today the MWRD has constructed more than 110 miles of deep tunnels and three gigantic reservoirs that can store billions of gallons of water to curb water pollution and mitigate flooding for communities that rely on combined sewer systems. To learn more, visit mwrld.org/tunnel-and-reservoir-plan-tarp.

For more information about the EWRI, visit isasce.org/technical-groups/ewri.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrld.org.