



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District *of* Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## MWRD Board of Commissioners recognize Juneteenth as holiday option for employees

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) Board of Commissioners unanimously made a trailblazing decision to approve plans that will allow employees to recognize Juneteenth as a holiday for the first time.

In recognition of the importance of Juneteenth as the oldest known celebration of emancipation of slaves in the United States, MWRD officials sought a way to more fully recognize the day. Although Juneteenth is observed each year on June 19, the occasion is officially celebrated in Illinois on the third Saturday in June annually. With this change, the MWRD gives employees the choice to use June 19 as their one additional holiday selection each year. In addition to Juneteenth, the additional holiday choices for MWRD employees include the days preceding or following Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day or New Year's Day.

"The day symbolizes freedom, achievement, and racial equality not only for the descendants of former slaves, but for all Americans, and we feel that it should be recognized in that light," said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan.

On July 16, the commissioners passed a resolution honoring Juneteenth, and on June 19 of this year, the MWRD joined the state of Illinois in lowering its flags to celebrate

Juneteenth. The date marked the 155th anniversary of the ending of slavery in the United States. It was on this day in 1865 when Major General Gordon Granger and his Union soldiers marched into Galveston, Texas with the news that the war had ended and proclaimed "absolute equality of rights" to liberate the country's last remaining slaves.

Juneteenth is recognized as a state holiday in 47 states. There is legislation in Illinois sponsored by state Rep. Thaddeus Jones (29th District) that will observe Juneteenth National Freedom Day on June 19. Although it was still 2.5 years after President Abraham Lincoln's famous Emancipation Proclamation, Juneteenth gives Americans opportunity to reflect on the nation's history, the struggle for civil rights and continued work for equality.

"The MWRD is the first government agency to recognize this holiday and at no additional cost to taxpayers," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "We are proud to afford this holiday to our staff to allow them to reflect, celebrate and remember our past."

"Juneteenth is deserving of recognition, just as a day off around Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day holidays," said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet.



## METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT of GREATER CHICAGO RESOLUTION

SPONSORED *by the* BOARD of COMMISSIONERS RECOGNIZING

# JUNE 19<sup>th</sup> *as* JUNETEENTH

**WHEREAS**, Juneteenth, celebrated on June 19th, is an annual holiday which commemorates the anniversary of the date that slaves in Galveston, Texas were informed that they were free; and

**WHEREAS**, Juneteenth, also known as Emancipation Day, is the oldest known celebration of the emancipation of slaves in the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, during the Civil War, as many Confederate states fell to the Union Army, many slave owners from Louisiana, Mississippi, and other southern states moved with their slaves to Texas due to its relative isolation and lack of monitoring by the Union Army. Thus, by the end of the Civil War, the number of slaves in Texas had greatly increased; and

**WHEREAS**, while General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate Army surrendered on April 9, 1865, marking the official end of the Civil War, news regarding the War traveled slowly to isolated areas of the South. Texas was the last state in the Confederacy to receive notice of the end of the War; and

**WHEREAS**, on June 19, 1865, Union soldier Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced an end to the war. In reading "General Orders No. 3", he effectively announced that slavery no longer existed in the state of Texas; and

**WHEREAS**, the announcement officially gave effect to the Emancipation Proclamation, which had been issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863. While the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery in states that

had seceded from the Union, slavery as an institution in the United States did not end until the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment on December 6, 1865; and

**WHEREAS**, the first celebrations of Juneteenth can be traced back to Galveston, Texas as early as 1866. As former slaves moved north from Texas in search of a better life, they took with them the history of June 19th. As such, Juneteenth celebrations became widespread throughout African American communities in the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, on January 1, 1980, due to the efforts of State Representative Al Edwards of Houston, Texas became the first state to proclaim Juneteenth a holiday. To date, 46 states and the District of Columbia have recognized Juneteenth either as a state holiday or a day of observance. Additionally, in recent years, many companies have begun to acknowledge Juneteenth as a formal company holiday; and

**WHEREAS**, Juneteenth symbolizes freedom, achievement, and racial equality not only for the descendants of former slaves, but for all Americans; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago recognizes June 19th as Juneteenth; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that this Resolution be spread upon the permanent Record of Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and that a copy of same, suitably engrossed, be presented.



DRAFTED for ADOPTION on the 16<sup>th</sup> DAY of JULY 2020.

### BOARD of COMMISSIONERS

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*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 wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*