

Volunteer Community Stewardship Program

in Chicago Park District's Natural Areas

2019 Annual Report

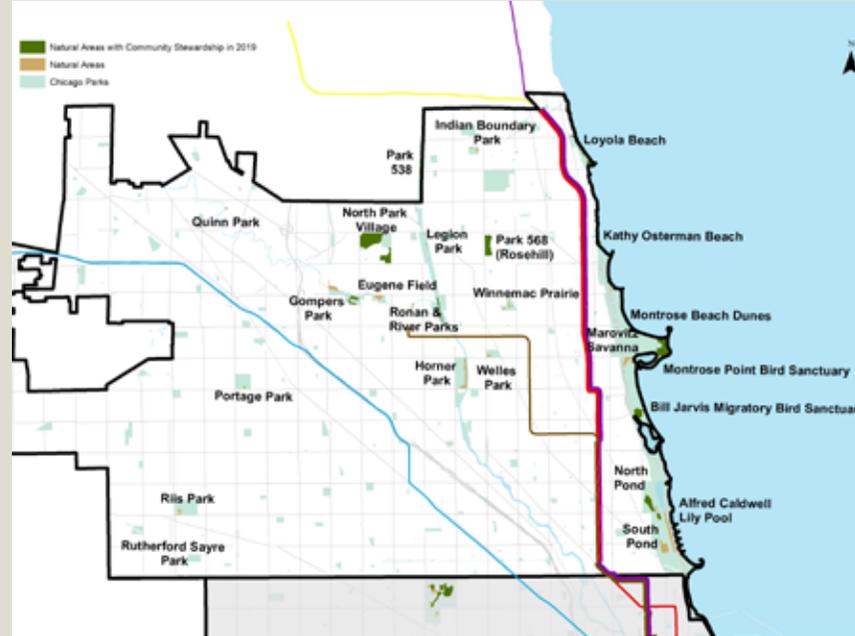


CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

NATURAL AREAS

The Nature
Conservancy 

Chicago Park District NORTH REGION



Ronan Park Hosts Tree Blitz

It is not unusual to see Ronan Park volunteer community stewards Joel Porterfield and Stephan Vandenbroucke riding their bikes to monthly workdays, wearing large backpacks filled with work tools. Joel and Stephan, along with the assistance of many volunteers, have created a tree blitz program to catalog tree data, including tree species, location and diameter, using GPS mapping. The data will help the Park District identify invasive trees to remove, which opens up the canopy, allowing light to reach younger trees. Ronan Park is located along the north branch of the Chicago River between Lawrence and Argyle. Joel and Stephan have served as co-stewards since 2017 and take great pride in keeping the riverbank healthy. We would like to congratulate Stephan, who was named "Volunteer of the Year" for 2019 by Friends of the Chicago River.



"We're so fortunate to have so many natural areas in the middle of such a large city. Being a volunteer steward has kept me connected to nature! I'm inspired by all the dedicated volunteers who share my passion."

Julie Newfeld,
Gompers Park Community Steward

Endangered Plovers Return to Montrose Beach Dunes

Bringing people together at Montrose Beach Dunes is a tradition that goes back nearly 20 years, when community member Leslie Borns rallied supporters to protect a small group of native plants that sprung up on the beach. Today, because of the quality of both the partnerships and the habitat, the dunes attract more than 350 birds each year, and stewards Leslie Borns, Ted Jindrich, Alycia Klauenberg and Mike Roche generously share their knowledge at monthly work days.

The summer of 2019 was historic, as the community and local partners flocked to protect two federally endangered piping plovers named Monty and Rose (in honor of Montrose Beach). The stewards and the Park District staff worked closely with volunteers and partners, including state and federal agencies, to protect, monitor and raise awareness about the nesting birds. Thanks to the passion and dedication of all involved, Monty and Rose raised two healthy chicks.



North Region Stewards



Julie Newfeld, Gompers Park | Don Morrison, Jarvis Bird Sanctuary | Lisa Klobuchar, Jarvis Bird Sanctuary | Renee Patten, Kathy Osterman Beach | Sharon Gerbe-Naylor, Loyola Beach Dunes



Mike Roche, Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary | Ted Jindrich, Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary | Aaron Hammond, Lincoln Park Conservatory | Renata Listopad, Portage Park Nature Garden | Joel Porterfield, Ronan Park



Stephan Vandenbroucke, Ronan Park | Gary Morrissey, West Ridge (Park#568) | Tom Murphy, West Ridge (Park#568)

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Greg Pranski, Gompers Park
Sharon Parmet, Gompers Park
Charlotte Newfeld, Jarvis Bird Sanctuary
Karen Gibson, Jarvis Bird Sanctuary
Linda Montenaro, Jarvis Bird Sanctuary
Terry Schilling, Jarvis Bird Sanctuary
Vera Rast, Jarvis Bird Sanctuary
Ann Whelan, Loyola Beach Dunes
Leslie Borns, Montrose Beach Dunes
Alycia Klauenberg, Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary
Annette Anderson, Friends of the Chicago River

Chicago Park District CENTRAL REGION



At McKinley Park, Resident Discovers Migratory Birds

Surrounding the McKinley Park Lagoon is a lush native landscape. For Antonio Flores, McKinley Park neighborhood resident, coming to the natural areas has been life-changing.

“It was at McKinley Park during a bird walk led by the site stewards that I pointed my binoculars at a bird for the first time,” he says. “I was awestruck by their beauty. I saw birds from Mexico and South America flying on an epic journey, and they chose McKinley Park as a resting place. Not only did I connect to the wildlife in the park, but I also connected with my neighbors, as together we ‘ooohed’ and ‘aahed’ about the birds.”

Katie Flores, McKinley Park steward and Park Advisory Council member, has been leveraging partners that offer family-friendly educational workshops after most monthly stewardship days. She works closely with Judy Pollock, president of the Chicago Audubon Society, who started bird walks in early 2019 and is thrilled with their progress.

“Guided bird walkers at McKinley have identified 23 birds that have never been recorded in the park before. Residents are also helping contribute to a McKinley Park bird list on eBird,” Judy says.



© Shedd Aquarium

Volunteers Protect Native Plants in Ping Tom Memorial Park

Ping Tom Memorial Park is where Chinese culture and the Chicago River meet. The many hands at community stewardship work days, which are led by the Shedd Aquarium, help manage invasive plants and remove trash. The program focuses on restoring prairie habitat along the river and expanding the diversity of plant species.

“Having the Shedd Aquarium partner with our Park Advisory Council through the Great Lakes Action Days has been really positive for our park and our community,” says Park Supervisor Brandon Cotton.

Central Region Stewards



George Davis
Burnham Nature
Sanctuary

Kathleen Taylor
Burnham Nature
Sanctuary

Laura Brentner
Columbus Park

Carol Johnson
Garfield Park

Jaclyn Wegner
Humboldt Park



Sarah Henderson
Humboldt Park

Katie Flores
McKinley Park

Suzanne Erin
McCormick Place Bird
Sanctuary

Carla Lents
Palmisano Park

Sydney Coyle
The Honeycomb Project-
Palmisano Park



Maggie Cooper
Shedd Aquarium
Ping Tom Memorial Park

Hilary Wind
Shedd Aquarium
12th Street Beach

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Eleanor Shunas, Burnham Nature Sanctuary
Jackie Majdov, Shedd Aquarium

“As a volunteer community steward, engaging community and families to see and hear nature has been a great joy.”

Carol Johnson,
Garfield Park Community Steward

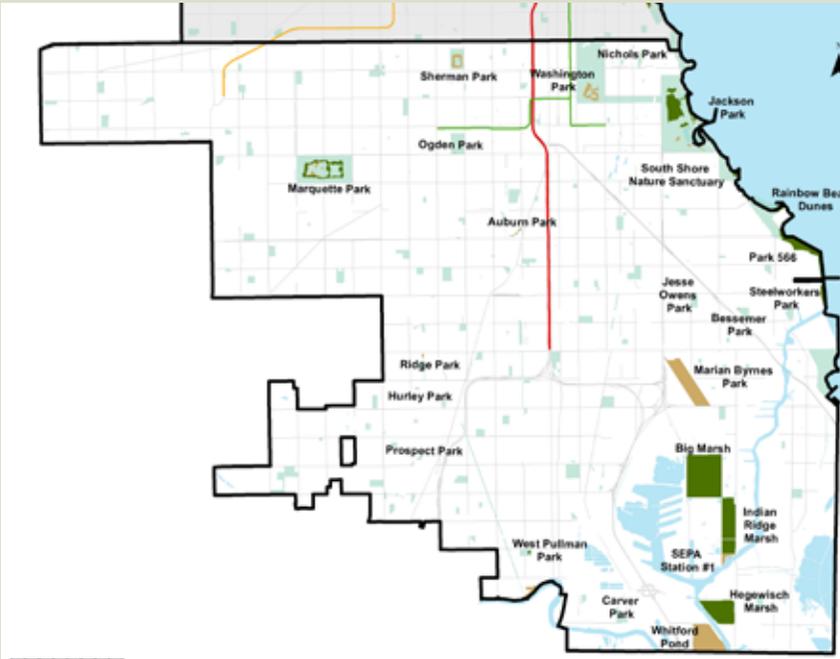


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Chicago Park District SOUTH REGION



© Lucy Gomez-Feliciano

Jackson Park Steward Leads Volunteers in Tree ID

In his garage, next to his cross-country skis, Jerry Levy has a pair of work gloves, a shovel and a rake--all the things he needs for his role as the community steward at Jackson Park, Wooded Island and South Shore Nature Sanctuary.

"I started volunteering as a steward in my 70s," he proudly shares. Then he reluctantly adds with a smile that we will celebrate his 90th birthday in 2020.

Jerry's favorite tree is a bur oak with long and heavy horizontal branches that is estimated to be 300 years old. To engage others in tree identification, Jerry has tagged 50 trees on Wooded Island that correspond to a handout available in a box near the south bridge. Jason Steger, Park District natural areas manager, has worked closely with Jerry, and he described him as a person with "unlimited energy and passion, a true inspiration."

The Park District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers led a 5-year restoration project at Jackson Park that wrapped up in October 2019. The project improved native habitat in more than 100 acres. The plantings along the pathways and overlooks were guided by the park's original landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead.

"I feel fantastic about this restoration," Jerry says. "It is beyond anyone's belief!"

Deep Roots Grow at Rainbow Beach Dunes

Marram grass is a native plant often called "the dune builder." With its deep roots, it transforms bare sand into lakefront habitat. This species was one of the first plants to be established on the south edge of Rainbow Beach in 2004. Soon after, the Park District planted more marram grass and native plants typical of sand prairies.

In 2009, Alison Anastasio was finishing her PhD in ecology and evolution at the University of Chicago when she fell in love with the dunes. She applied to serve as the volunteer community steward. In 2015, she was joined by co-steward Jen Raber. Together, they host community work days that include families from The Honeycomb Project, a group that leads family-friendly projects designed to help children work alongside their parents.

"We plant the seeds so that families return as the next generation of park stewards," says Kristina Lowenstein, Honeycomb's director.



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South Region Stewards



Edward Warden
Shedd Aquarium
63rd Street Beach

Teri Valenzuela
Audobon Great Lakes
Indian Ridge Marsh

Nancy Joseph
Jackson Park -
Columbia Basin

Jerry Levy
Jackson Park - Wooded
Island & South Shore
Nature Sanctuary

Dan Brown
Nichols Wildflower
Meadow



Jen Raber
Rainbow Beach Dunes

Susannah Ribstein
South Shore Nature
Sanctuary

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Gail Perry, Bobolink Meadow

Norm Bell, Bobolink Meadow

Joe Neumann, Marquette Park / Ashburn Prairie

Alison Anastasio, Rainbow Beach Dunes

"Serving as a steward has taught me patience, humility and, most of all, respect and appreciation for the communities we are working alongside to beautify and restore Indian Ridge Marsh back to a healthy place for people, water and wildlife."

Teri Valenzuela,
Indian Ridge Marsh Community
Steward and Audubon Great Lakes staff member



© Lucy Gomez-Feliciano



Since 2015, the Chicago Park District and The Nature Conservancy have worked together to connect people to nature by managing the Chicago Park District's Natural Areas Community Stewardship Program.

Within the Park District's 614 parks, there are more than 100 natural areas filled with diverse native plants and trees. Volunteers work alongside staff and contractors to help dunes, prairies, woodlands, savannas and wetlands thrive. They plant, remove invasive species and mulch paths. Natural areas not only attract pollinators, migratory birds, other wildlife and people, but they help cool the city in the summertime, hold rainwater that can flood basements and filter pollutants from the air we breathe.

24,481 Individual native plants planted
\$436,679 Dollar value of volunteer hours

17,859 Hours contributed
453 Community stewardship events
6,849 Volunteers engaged

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If you are interested in learning more and becoming a volunteer, visit:
www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/communitystewardship or email stewardship@chicagoparkdistrict.com.
As we look forward, our strategic goals include working to diversify our base of community stewards and building stronger connections with local organizations.
For more information contact Lucy Gomez-Feliciano at lucy.gomez@tnc.org.
If you wish to make a gift, please contact Ken Modzelewski at 312-580-2128.