



2017

COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

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Welcome



© CRISTINA RUTTER

Michelle Carr



© PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

Mike Kelly

COVER PHOTO: Veasna Johnson (left) rests her head on her boyfriend Anthony Okocha during the last light of the day at Montrose Beach Dunes in Chicago, Illinois in June of 2017. Anthony and Veasna traveled from their home in Evanston, Illinois, to enjoy an evening picnic together to celebrate the first day of summer.

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The City of Chicago has a long history of connecting people to nature. As early as the mid 1800s, citizens rallied for what would become the nation's first comprehensive park and boulevard system. Later, Chicago Architect Daniel Burnham co-wrote the 1909 "Plan for Chicago," which made provisions for improving the lakefront and growing the park system. The result is what we have today: 8,800 acres of green space, which makes the Chicago Park District the largest municipal park manager in the nation.

Our natural areas are a vital part of this legacy. In addition to the playgrounds, ball fields and public beaches, the Park District oversees more than 1,700 acres of native habitat. You'll find everything from coastal dunes to forests to prairies, and the native plant and wildlife communities that call them home. The habitats within the city may vary greatly, but they all have one thing in common—volunteers.

As you will see in the following pages of this report, volunteers are the heart and soul of our restoration and stewardship work. They work alongside Chicago Park District staff and contractors in every part of the city, in every habitat and in every season to ensure these precious places receive the care they need to thrive. Diverse in age, background and experience, our volunteers do everything from removing invasive plants to monitoring migratory birds to building trails. Last year alone, they donated 20,000 hours of their personal time to these efforts.

The work of our volunteers not only benefits pollinators, migratory birds and other wildlife—it benefits people and nearby communities. Our volunteers restore habitats that cool the city, hold rainwater that can flood our basements and businesses, and absorb carbon and other pollutants from the air we breathe. In addition, Chicago's natural areas give communities from north to south and east to west a place to gather, unplug and connect with nature.

That's why in 2015, the Park District and The Nature Conservancy, a global conservation organization with a long history of volunteer stewardship in Illinois, partnered to expand volunteer opportunities across the city. Our first step was to hire Forrest Cortes as our community stewardship program manager. Since then, the Park District has gained 23 new volunteer stewards, activated 11 new sites in volunteer stewardship, and increased the number of community stewardship days to more than 400 per year. The partnership has also helped engage more youth and families in the city's incredible natural areas.

The continued partnership between the Conservancy and the Park District will be essential as we work to meet our goals for the future, such as expanding the Chicago Park District's natural areas footprint as part of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's Building on Burnham initiative. Since 2016, we have already grown from 1,525 acres to 1,790, and our goal is to reach 2,020 acres by 2020. But the key to our success will be our volunteers. More than 200 years ago, Chicagoans showed their deep love, appreciation and connection to nature when they demanded green space be set aside for the public. Our volunteers keep that spirit alive, and by helping our prairies, woods and coastlines thrive, ensure a connection to nature for the next generation.

Michelle Carr
State Director
The Nature Conservancy in Illinois

Mike Kelly
General Superintendent and CEO
Chicago Park District



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20,500+
HOURS CONTRIBUTED

8,500+
VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED

400+
COMMUNITY
STEWARDSHIP DAYS

7.5 YEARS
AVERAGE LENGTH OF
STEWARDSHIP SERVICE

\$43,235
IN GRANTS TO THE
STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

31,796
INDIVIDUAL NATIVE PLANTS
PLANTED

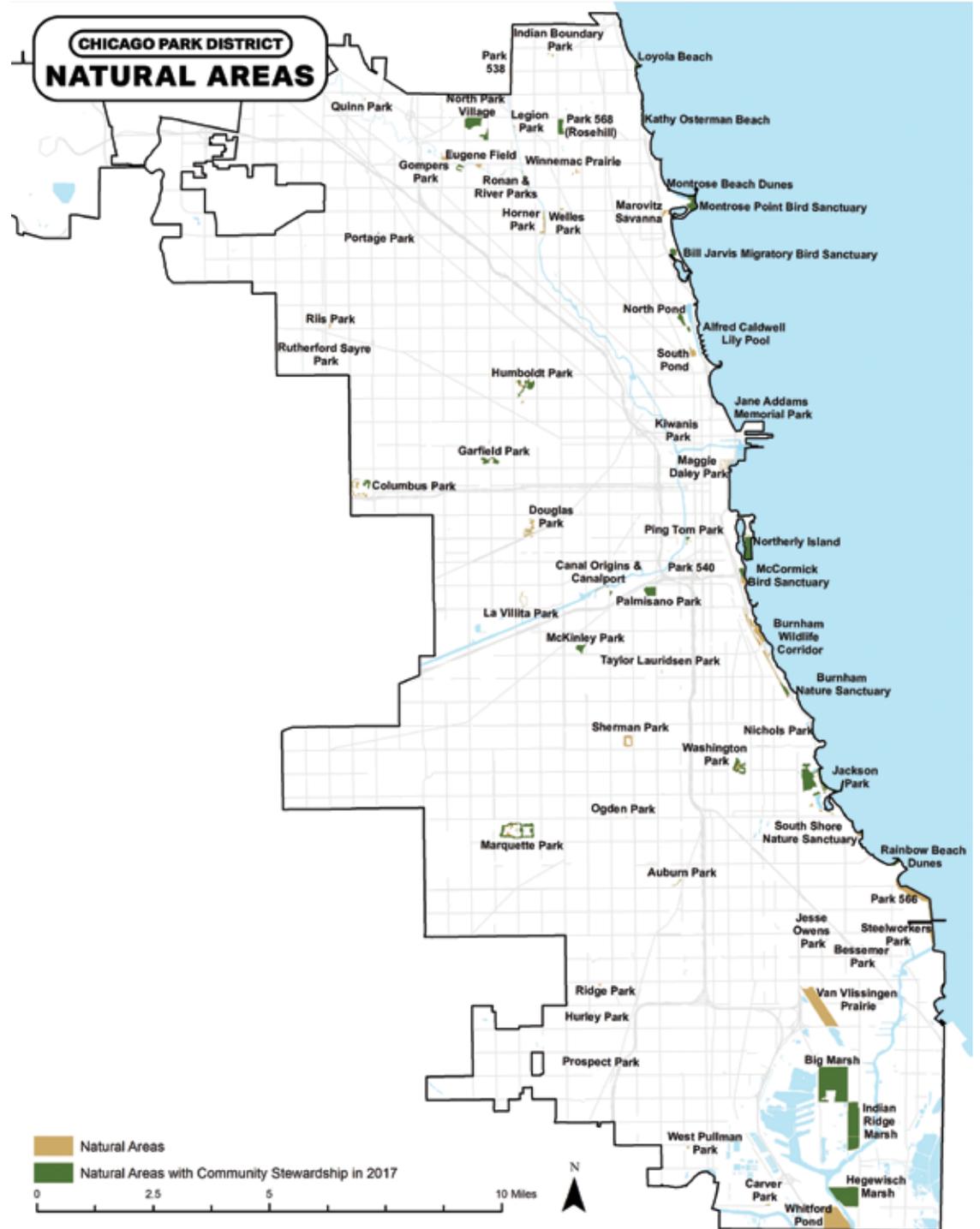
70+
NATURAL AREAS

1,700+
ACRES

34
NATURAL AREAS
ACTIVATED



© KAREN THARP





PRAIRIE



DUNE



WOODLAND



WETLAND



© EMANUEL LOVE; MONARCH © FORREST CORTES

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD



© KAREN THARP; © AASIA MOHAMMAD CASTAÑEDA, THE FIELD MUSEUM

© JULIE DIDOMENICO

Burnham Wildlife Corridor

The 100-acre Burnham Wildlife Corridor along the lakefront is emblematic of the way the stewardship program is involving the community in natural areas. It was once just turfgrass, but the Chicago Park District, in collaboration with other partners, has been establishing pockets of native habitat, along with art installations that serve as gathering spaces for visitors. Working with community partners in Bronzeville, Pilsen, Little Village and Chinatown, the Conservancy, Chicago Park District and The Field Museum are activating these spaces with cultural program-

ming coupled with trail building, native plantings and invasive species removal. For example, this past year we built trails at three locations along the Corridor with several families from the various communities. In the spring, we collaborated with Chicago Commons and their Paulo Freire Head Start program to allow their young students to visit the Corridor to learn about native plants. These young visitors got their hands dirty making and throwing native seed balls into McCormick Bird Sanctuary, followed by water coloring inspired by the lake and the prairie at the nearby Caracol gathering space.

Palmisano Park

At Palmisano Park, we're getting families invested in prairie restoration. By leveraging the expertise of community steward and parent Carla Lents, and our partners at The Honeycomb Project, we're merging hands-on restoration with learning experiences about invasive species, native pollinators and migratory birds. This year, we received a ComEd Green Region Grant to engage volunteers in a series of "PollinatorPalooza" events to increase native plant diversity for wildlife and people alike. "When our families come to Palmisano Park, they know they are working to benefit Chicago as both an ecosystem and community," says Honeycomb Project Co-Founder and Executive Director Kristina Lowenstein.



Montrose Beach Dunes

In a huge urban area like Chicago, people and place are inextricably linked. The story of Montrose Beach Dunes and longtime steward Leslie Borns amply demonstrates this. From nesting sandpipers to snowy owls, orchids to gentians, muskrat, red fox, and coyote, this lakefront gem hosts surprises in every season. But that wasn't always the case. In the early 1990s, this corner of the beach was a debris-filled area mostly ignored and frequented by bulldozers and sand-grooming machines. Lake Michigan's water level was at a historic low point, and Leslie and others began noticing small plants emerging. In 1998, Leslie identified the first clump of Lakeshore Rush (*Juncus balticus* var. *littoralis*), a plant species that hadn't been seen in the Chicago region for over 50 years.

"It seemed like the beach was trying to tell us something and I wanted to protect and preserve that process," she said.

From that point on, Leslie became one of the Park District's first stewards and an advocate for the protection of the developing dune ecosystem. She worked with what would become the Chicago Park District Natural Areas Program and the Chicago Botanic Garden's Plants of Concern rare plant monitoring program to build a volunteer base to help care for this rare lakefront habitat. Now, 20 years later, the Montrose Beach Dunes holds an Illinois Natural Areas Inventory designation and is home to 23 state-listed plant species, 11 nesting bird species and a globally rare wetland type called a panne. Leslie continues to inspire community members to become Montrose advocates. When asked why she's stayed involved so long, Leslie doesn't hesitate to respond: "The continual beauty, mystery and discovery. It's a calling."

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD



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Purple Martin Monitoring

Across the city, citizen scientists are taking the pulse of our natural areas. These volunteer ecological monitors track populations of butterflies, calling frogs, migratory birds, odonates, threatened and endangered plants, and singing insects. In addition to hosting citizen science efforts started by partner organizations, the Chicago Park District organizes programs that estimate prickly pear cactus reproduction at lakefront dunes and monitor and care for purple martin colonies at three parks. Across the district, we had a very successful purple martin breeding season, with over 550 martins fledged.



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A special thank you to our community stewards...

- Aaron Hammond, Alison Anastasio, Alycia Klunenberg, Ann Whelan, Annette Anderson, Becky Collings, Carla Lents, Cathy Kasper, Charlotte Newfeld, Dan Brown, Don Morrison, Eleanor Shunas, Fran Vandervoort, Gail Perry, Garrett Johnson, Gary Morrissey, George Davis, Greg Pranski, Heather Breems, Jackie Majdov, Jaclyn Peterson, Jen Raber, Jerry Levy, Joe Neumann, Joel Porterfield, John Rafetto, Julie DiDomenico, Julie Newfeld, Karen Gibson, Katherine Victorson, Kathleen Taylor, Katie Flores, Laura Brentner, Leslie Borns, Linda Montanero, Lisa Klobuchar, Madiem Kawa, Mike Roche, Nancy Joseph, Norm Bell, Pat Fox, Renata Listopad, Renee Levine, Rochelle Lodder, Sarah Henderson, Sharon Gerbe-Naylor, Sharon Parmet, Stephan Vandembroucke, Suzanne Erin, Sydney Coyle, Ted Jindrich, Terry Schilling, Tom Murphy, Vera Rast.

For more information on the community stewardship program, contact stewardship@chicagoparkdistrict.com.

