

Service Project Ideas

Project Ideas

This is not an exhaustive list. Use it to spark ideas of your own and of your students.

Hazardous waste disposal

- Research when and where school and homes can dispose of hazardous waste. Develop a campaign to encourage parents to dispose of hazardous waste properly.
- Develop a survey to look into the use of hazardous products in students' homes or school: what hazardous materials do they use, how is it disposed, are there non-toxic alternatives? Make recommendations and try to change what products are used and how they are disposed of.

Road and sidewalk salt

- In winter, test for chloride in river. If chloride levels are found to be high, develop a campaign to target salt users (homes, businesses, schools, street and sanitation departments) in order to reduce or eliminate their use of salt in winter to de-ice roads and sidewalks.

Increasing infiltration

- Increase infiltration by starting or expanding a native plant garden at school or working on a community garden.
- In certain parks and forest preserve districts, volunteers and staff are working to increase the native diversity. It may be possible to set you up with one of these groups.

Car oil

- In your neighborhood or around school, find out if people are changing their own car oil and where they are disposing their used car oil. If people are not disposing of their car oil properly, come up with a campaign to change behaviors.

Storm drain stenciling

- Stencil on storm drains to inform people that their storm drains empty into the Chicago River. Note: due to spray paint restrictions and Chicago's focus on its anti-graffiti campaign, stenciling is not allowed in the city of Chicago.

Lawn care

- Find out how your family or your school takes care of its lawn. Or find out if there is a large manicured open area (fields, golf course, cemetery) near the river. Are pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers used? Could application techniques be improved so only what is required is applied? Are lawns watered? How is the amount of watering determined? Could improved techniques be used to reduce the amount of water applied? Work to improve application techniques.

Stormwater run-off from roofs

Downspout disconnect program: Connected downspouts send the rain water falling on roofs into underground combined sewer or stormwater pipes (which eventually empty into the Chicago River). When disconnected this water would flow into the yard and infiltrate into the soil.

- Conduct a survey to find out if people are disconnecting their downspouts (students could look at their school, their own home, or around their neighborhood).
- If appropriate, develop a campaign to increase downspout disconnections.
- For information on how to disconnect your downspout go to <http://egov.cityofchicago.org> to the Department of Water Management and look for the link to disconnecting your downspout.

Friends of the Chicago River



Rain barrels: Rain barrels can capture rainwater and the water flowing out of downspouts. This water can be later used to water plants or to clean cars, sidewalks etc.

- Investigate rain barrels. Decide if you think they would work at the school or in your home. Develop a campaign to get them adopted. Find out if your city or town is giving them away.

Improving habitat

- Begin a native plant garden at the school or in the neighborhood. Native plants not only improve habitat for native wildlife, like butterflies, but their deep root systems help more water infiltrate the ground.
- Create brochures or write articles for your neighborhood paper about the advantages of native plant gardens and how to go about starting one.
- If your class would like to improve native habitats along the banks of the Chicago River, ask Friends of the Chicago River and they may be able to find a site along the river that needs some volunteers. If students are interested in volunteering on the weekends, check out the North Branch Restoration Project for a list of their work days <http://www.northbranchrestoration.org>.
- Build and put up bird and bat houses.

Clean up trash on the river

- Participate in Friends of the Chicago River's annual river clean-up. Traditionally, Chicago River Day is on a Saturday in May.
- We can work with you to set up a relationship with a particular landowner, if you would like to take on a site and clean it up on a more regular basis or on dates other than Chicago River Day.

Trash survey

- When collecting trash, tabulate what kind of trash you are collecting. Can you determine where it might be coming from? Or why it is ending up along the river. Come up with and implement a strategy for reducing the amount of trash ending up near the river.

Erosion

- Monitor erosion at specific sites along the Chicago River. We can help you find appropriate sites. Develop possible remediation ideas. Share your ideas with Friends of the Chicago River and approach the landowner with your ideas and suggestions.

Advocacy and political action

- While you are monitoring if you see a problem that needs addressing, let public officials know about the problem and what you think should be done about it. You could write a letter, go to a town meeting or present in front of the landowner.
- Currently the Chicago River is undergoing a Use Attainability Analysis to study whether or not the water quality regulations for the Chicago River could be changed so that the water quality is improved. Share your opinions and data with the EPA by attending one of their public meetings. For more information on the process, visit www.chicagoareawaterways.org.

Knowing the river and its watershed

- Teach the community (parents, other classrooms) about the river and its watershed. School plays, neighborhood or school newspaper articles, posters in the school, neighborhood walks, a presentation at the annual Chicago River Student Congress are all possibilities. Topics could include: Did something historically significant happen in your neighborhood that is related to the river? What plants and animals used to live in your neighborhood? Where is the river, how can you get there, what might you see when you are there, what is the connection between the neighborhood and the river? Why is the Chicago River important to your city or town?

Friends of the Chicago River



Getting to the Chicago River

- If the river flows through your neighborhood, find out where it goes and where some good sites are to view the river. Make a guide to your local portion of the river, including access points, interesting things to see along the river, places to visit near the river. Identify places (such as your school or local libraries) that might distribute your brochure. You could also offer mini-walking tours to parents or older students could act as guides for younger students on their field trips.
- If there is not good access to the river, develop ideas and propose them to the landowners, the community and the city.