

Friends of the Chicago River



Chicago River Watershed Web Sites

Here are some websites full of information about the Chicago River Watershed.

Chicago Area Nature

<http://www.chicagowilderness.org>

Friends is part of the Chicago Wilderness Network which includes hundreds of organizations dedicated to preserving, restoring and conserving the regions natural areas. For information about our local ecology, nature programs, and volunteer opportunities check out

Water quality

Note: You can often search for river data by the Drainage Basin/ HUC code. The code for the Chicago River is 07120003

<http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/water-quality/index.html>

These are the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's water quality reports. You can check out the water quality for streams across Illinois. To view "impaired" streams you can look at Appendix A which lists the waterway and the possible water quality issues. For more detailed information on individual streams look in Appendix B. To understand this appendix you will need to refer to the code explanations on the first pages. For example, scrolling down to the "North Shore Channel" in the table, it can be seen that one cause of impairment is number 400, which is "fecal coliform levels", and a potential source for this is number 23, which is "Combined Sewer Overflows".

<http://www.mwrld.org>

These are the MWRD water quality reports. To get them, click on "Technical and data reports" then "water quality data and reports." These reports outline a variety of research reports on everything from biosolids to heavy metals.

<http://www.chicagoareawaterways.org/>

Here is the Use Attainability Report. This report that was compiled recently as a comprehensive study of the Chicago River system to determine if the water quality standards for the North Shore Channel and south should be upgraded. To read the draft report click on Draft-UAA report in the little box on the right.

http://www.epa.gov/STORET/dw_home.html

The STORET Database on this site contains the Environmental Protection Agency's detailed chemical, biological and habitat quality data. It can be tricky to use, but the site has a great and easy tutorial on how to download data. You can even download the data into an excel spreadsheet. To learn how to use the database, scroll down to the "Training Session" box at the bottom of the home page and follow the directions.

<http://www.epa.gov/enviro/index.html>

This site has a whole bunch of environmental data. Go to "water" and put in a zip code and it will show you all of the facilities that have a NPDES (national pollution discharge elimination system) permit. These permits regulate what individual facilities can discharge into a waterway. Facilities with NPDES permits can include factories that spill wastewater into a waterway and all of the water reclamation plants that discharge effluent. When you click on the facility, you can see a variety of facts including what waterway they actually discharge to. You can even find out if they had any non-compliance issues. You can look at the data in charts or also use the mapping tool to look at overlay maps. It's a great site.

Flow and Discharge Rates

<http://www.usgs.gov/state/state.asp?State=IL>

The United States Geologic Survey monitors a stream flow and discharge of many rivers across the United States. On this site you can look at conditions on the river today or since monitoring began on the river (often several decades, if not a century ago). Very cool and useful.

Native Plants

<http://plants.usda.gov/>

Every plant you want to know about can be found in the United States Department of Agriculture plant database. The website shows photos, ranges, explains characteristics and even has sections regarding plants found in each state.

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/nps/rg/plants/PlantListing.htm>

Amazing site for information on native plants that can be used for rain gardens. Rain gardens alleviate flooding, help water soak into the ground, and are beautiful additions to home, school and business landscapes. If you are interested in building a rain garden, go to <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/nps/rg/index.htm> and scroll to the bottom of the page for links to wonderful resources.

Aerial maps

<http://terraserver-usa.com/> or <http://www.mapquest.com>

Amazingly detailed aerial photos – you can pick out your school, your house, or the river can be found on these websites by clicking on “aerial view” once you pull up the map you want.

Topographic maps

<http://www.topozone.com/>

This site is sponsored by the United States Geologic Survey.

Historic photos and documents

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

This is the site of the Library of Congress’s American Memory. You can find ALL KINDS of stuff here. Even old interviews. Especially neat is the Chicago Daily News photos. When you go to the page, just click on "List all collections" and then go to "Chicago Daily News."

<http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/archives.html>

This site has old Illinois archives, including old land sales.

<http://imcanal.lewisu.edu/JohnMLamb.html>

Extensive local historian’s collection on the Illinois & Michigan Canal.

Original surveyor maps and notes

<http://landplats.ilsos.net/Flash/Welcome.html>

This site is very cool! Search for the original survey notes from surveyors exploring the Chicago River area. Find out what the area looked like hundreds of years ago.

Wildlife photos

<http://images.fws.gov/>

Free stock photos from the United States Fish and Wildlife.