

Protecting Our Water Environment

Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

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Small Streams, Big Accomplishments

Volume 2 Winter 2009

Clearing the Way for 2010

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (District) Small Streams Maintenance Program (SSMP) forged much progress in 2009. In July, the SSMP bid a warm farewell to Tom Starr and welcomed Brian Levy. Brian led us through a productive summer and fall by coordinating stream debris removal across the county. Many challenges were overcome due to hard work and collaborative efforts throughout our communities. *Downstream Milestones* on the back page emphasize Tom and Brian's efforts. The statistics are an impressive

count of improvements throughout the area streams and waterways. Also highlighted inside are two fine examples of community partnerships: The first-ever Watershed Action Volunteer Efforts (WAVEs), and an intergovernmental project producing an overhaul of the North Branch of the Chicago River. Likewise, the popular rain barrel program continued with on-line sales and distribution events at the District's Stickney, Calumet and North Side facilities. More evidence that the District's goal is clear is shown in the photos below.



District crews worked between September 9th and September 30th to remove 3,000 cubic yards of debris from Thorn Creek in the Sweet Woods Forest Preserve. While that statistic alone is impressive, the before and after photos provide clear illustration of the benefits of the Small Streams Maintenance Program.

GOING FORWARD

The SSMP was developed three years ago at the behest of Executive Director Richard Lanyon. Assistant Director of Maintenance and Operations Manju Sharma and her staff researched similar programs while developing the District's SSMP. They met with staff from DuPage County to incorporate what they had learned from their years of SSMP operation. The District's SSMP team, in cooperation with local municipalities, has been very successful in its mission of removing existing blockages in the streams to prevent flooding. Going forward, the program will become more proactive and will transition from *reacting* to blockages to *preventing* them from developing. The District expects to expand the program to include erosion control projects to stabilize banks and prevent blockages that can lead to flooding.

**Report
small stream
blockages to
www.mwrd.org**

WAVEs Event
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**Winterize your
Rain Barrel**
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Winterize your Rain Barrel

Wondering what to do with your rain barrel during the winter months?

Empty and store it indoors. If you must leave your barrel outside throughout the winter, cover the opening or flip it over to prevent accumulation of water (and ice) inside.

Break It Up... Be a WAVE

Residents are encouraged to report blockages seen in any small stream in the county. Simply submit a blockage clearing request through the front page of the District's website: www.mwrd.org. Citizens, civic groups, students and others are welcome to participate in District's Watershed Action Volunteer Effort (WAVEs) program across Cook County using the same link. WAVEs assists people in taking an active role in cleaning and learning about the area waterways.

Starr Retires; Levy Aspires

The SSMP changed its public face this summer. After twenty-one years of service to the District, SSMP Coordinator Tom Starr retired in July. He will be missed by his fellow employees as well as the local communities he worked with throughout the past three years. Tom was instrumental in starting and developing the SSMP in 2006. Since then, he consistently increased the level of service to local communities. In addition to inspecting waterways, scheduling crews, and administering contracts, Tom promoted and developed partnerships with municipalities. He learned the history of the waterways to better understand local issues. When asked to reflect on the program, Tom said, "I truly enjoyed working with the towns and villages in the area and really appreciated all of their help. Leading the Small Streams Maintenance Program was an honor and privilege."



To relieve flooding potential, District crews hauled debris and vegetation from the North Branch.

North Branch Face Lift

As part of the District's Stormwater Management responsibilities, the specialized SSMP staff is skilled at riparian zone care. During the summer, trees and shrubs were removed to allow for unrestricted flow in storm situations. Removal will also protect against flooding and will stabilize the banks of the North Branch of the Chicago River. District SSMP crews trimmed and removed vegetation along the banks in accordance

with engineering and stabilization plans. Woody material and debris was taken from the river edges in areas bordered by Carmen Avenue on the south, Christiana Avenue to the east, Foster Avenue to the north and Pulaski Road to the west. District crews worked for more than three weeks in July and August in consultation with both the Chicago Park District and Alderman Margaret Laurino.

Tom is remembered for his dedication to the people and communities throughout the Cook County watersheds and his drive to improve our small streams.

Senior Civil Engineer Brian Levy has taken over since Tom's retirement. Brian earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Marquette University and a Masters in Environmental Engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology. He came to the District in 2003. Brian learned municipal and constituent relationship organization as the District coordinator for Illinois EPA-sponsored Household Hazardous Waste Disposal events since 2005. Enjoying his new position, Brian said, "I'm looking forward to working with the communities and continuing a District Starr tradition in caring for our local waterways."



Senior Civil Engineer Brian Levy, The District's new SSMP Coordinator

WAVEs of Inspiration!



RBHS Students for Environmental Excellence Team members removed debris under the Brookfield Avenue bridge. Large debris was later removed by District crews. The resulting debris-free waterway is seen behind student leader Stephen McCroary. (photos: Kathie McCroary)

The first Watershed Action Volunteer Efforts (WAVEs) event serves as inspiration for community-based small streams maintenance work. The project was initiated by Riverside Brookfield High School student Stephen McCroary. He noticed debris accumulation at the Brookfield Avenue Bridge

and realized it would be perfect for a clean-up project. This past October, RBHS Students for Environmental Excellence Team diligently removed approximately 35 cubic yards of debris from the portion of Salt Creek under the Brookfield Avenue Bridge. The work was a joint effort performed by

Stephen, the S.E.E. Team, the District, Groot Recycling & Waste, and Brookfield Public Works. Please go to www.mwrd.org to learn more about the WAVEs program, to initiate a project or to report a blocked waterway.

Richard Lanyon Makes Waves



*MWRDGC Executive Director,
Richard Lanyon*

After years of work in the Illinois General Assembly, the District revved up its Stormwater Management Program in 2005. Cook County has big flooding problems and mobilizing a program to construct infrastructure to control floods and reduce damages takes years of planning, setting priorities and decision making on funding. The flood-weary residents of the county needed immediate relief and time was not on the District's side. Enter SSMP, the immediate fix for addressing some of the problems. Kick-started in 2006 with the District workforce, the program went into high gear in 2007 with funding for contractual services. Thus, the District met the immediate need for removal of debris to keep stream channels and bridges clear and free-flowing.

Less visible, but equally important is the long standing collection of floating trash

and fallen trees on the 76-mile network of deep water canals. The canals flow more slowly than the small, shallow streams, so the work is different; rounding up pockets of floating trash behind bridge piers, in storm drain outfalls and along dock walls. This work can only be accomplished by crews on boats.

We encourage citizen participation in local clean stream volunteer efforts. Check out our web site, www.mwrd.org, for information on how to participate in a Watershed Action Volunteer Efforts (WAVEs) event. Look for a group in your area. Join the Friends of the Chicago River's River Rescue Day event in May. Thanks for your help in keeping Cook County streams and waterways clean.

Dick Lanyon, Executive Director



MISSION
SMALL STREAMS
MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

*To reduce flooding in
urbanized areas through
immediate and relatively
simple remedies.*

Small Streams, Big Accomplishments is published biannually by the MWRDGC Office of Public Affairs as a service to the communities within its Stormwater Management service area.

Contact us:

Office of Public Affairs: 312.751.6633

Waterway Blockage: 708.588.3171

Waterway Emergency: 312.751.5133

FAQ

Q: What is a 100-year flood event?

A: A 100-year flood is a flood event with a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. In Northeastern Illinois, 7.58 inches of rainfall within a 24 hour time period is usually considered to be a 100-year rainfall event.

Q: What are the differences between creeks, streams, rivers and canals?

A: Creeks, streams and rivers are all natural waterways. The differences between them are relative to size and depth. A creek is a small, shallow and natural waterway (usually a tributary to a larger stream). A stream is also a natural waterway, but larger than a creek and smaller than a river. A river is a large natural waterway with numerous, smaller tributary streams and creeks. All of these differ from canals.

Rivers, streams and creeks are natural waterways; canals are man-made waterways constructed for navigation, commercial barge traffic, effluent distribution, irrigation and water power.

Q: Why do beavers build dams?

A: Beaver dams are created as a protection against predators (coyotes, wolves and bears) and to provide easy access to food during winter. Beaver dams can be a headache or natural blessing depending on the impact on surrounding areas and landowners. Wetlands create suitable living conditions for many species. Dams prevent sediment from flowing from small waterways into larger bodies of water. The downside to beaver dams is the potential for flooding and obstruction of natural flow in and out of waterways.

2009 Downstream Milestones

Approximately **34,550 cubic yards** of debris have been removed from area small streams in 2009.

Approximately **1.25 miles** of the North Branch of the Chicago River were cleaned over the summer.

3,000 cubic yards were removed to clear blockages on Thorn Creek in Glenwood.

Thanks to the many cooperating municipalities who provided assistance with the removal of river and stream debris. Here is the breakdown by watershed:

Little Calumet
9,339 cubic yards

Cal-Sag
7,232 cubic yards

Lower Des Plaines
8,708 cubic yards

North Branch
6,695 cubic yards

Upper Salt Creek
426 cubic yards

Poplar Creek
2,150 cubic yards

Rain Barrels sold to residents and communities:
3,560

Sales resume in March, 2010.

Q: When District crews clean up and remove debris from a waterway, what happens to all the wood?

A: A contractor separates wood from plastic and other debris, which goes to landfill. Whenever possible the woody debris is chipped to reduce debris volume and decrease transportation expenses. The District often coordinates these efforts with local communities, who make wood chips available to residents for mulch.

Q: How do I report a blockage or debris problem?

A: Go to the District's web site (mwrld.org) and click on "Report Waterway Blockage" or call 708-588-3171 or 312-505-7604.