



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Welcome to the March Edition
of the 2026 M&R Seminar Series

NOTES FOR SEMINAR ATTENDEES

- Remote attendees' microphones are muted at entry to minimize background noise.

For attendees in the auditorium, please silence your phones.

- A question and answer (Q/A) session will follow the presentation.
- For remote attendees, please use “**Chat**” only to type questions for the presenter. For other issues, please send emails to MnRseminars@mwr.org.

For attendees in the auditorium, please raise your hand and wait for the microphone to ask a verbal question during the Q/A session.

- The presentation slides will be posted on the MWRD website after the seminar.
- This seminar has been approved by the Engineering Society of Illinois (ESI) for one PDH and approved by the IEPA for one TCH. Certificates will be issued only to participants who attend the entire presentation. For PDH certificate seekers, **completing a brief course evaluation and submitting it are required.**

KATE PERRYMAN STEWARDSHIP SPECIALIST THE MORTON ARBORETUM, LISLE, ILLINOIS



Kate Perryman's community engagement experience includes participation in the Tree Ambassador Program and leading efforts to engage the Southwest Side of Chicago in the benefits of maintaining parkway trees. She co-managed the food forest/permaculture at El Paseo Community Garden. Kate specializes in project management and internal and external funding coordination. She is responsible for the Chicago Regional Trees Initiative Contract Growing Program, including forecasting for species and quantities for successful planting programs in partnership with internal and external sources.

RYAN SWEENEY, J.D., L.L.M.
COMMUNITY SPECIALIST
THE MORTON ARBORETUM, Lisle, ILLINOIS



Ryan Sweeney is a grant manager with the Chicago Region Trees Initiative at the Morton Arboretum. Ryan manages the Urban and Community Forestry Grant for Large Communities, supporting municipalities such as the City of Chicago and the Town of Cicero. A former attorney with a strong background in environmental and administrative law, Ryan brings extensive experience translating complex legal and technical concepts into practical strategies for public landowners and community partners. Before joining the Arboretum, he represented urbanist and environmental justice organizations to advance public transit and urban forestry goals and volunteered with the Berwyn Tree Initiative to help expand the city's tree canopy.



CHICAGO REGION
TREES INITIATIVE

Planting Partnerships and Green Infrastructure:

How trees support public health, equity,
and environmental resilience

Kate Perryman, CRTI Stewardship Specialist
Ryan Sweeney, CRTI Community Specialist

Question:

How many gallons of stormwater can all the trees in Cook County intercept and absorb annually?

Question:

How many gallons of stormwater can all the trees in Cook County intercept and absorb annually?

Answer:

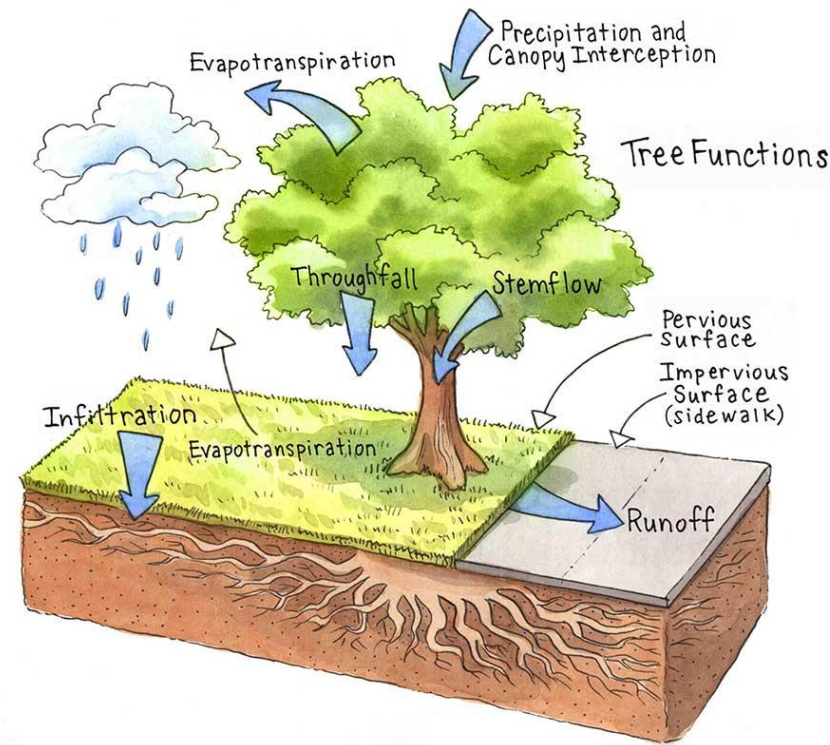
166.5 billion gallons

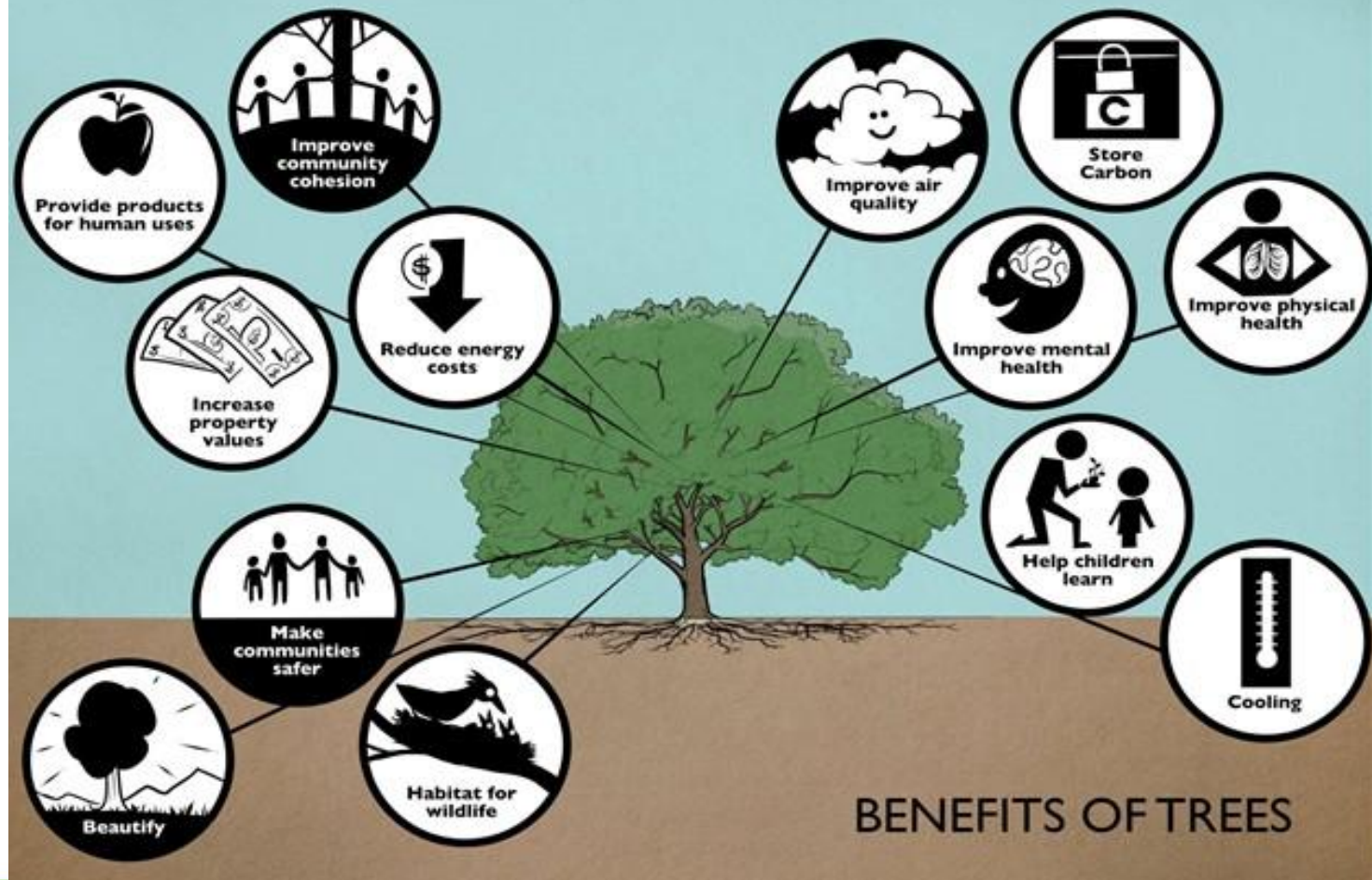
Urban and Community Forestry



Trees help our sewer systems

- Trees can help reduce and intercept stormwater and improve the quality of runoff water (Turner-Skoff & Cavender, 2019)
- Pollutants, sediment, and runoff contaminants are diverted by trees from streams and rivers
- Trees help take the load off of sewer system infrastructure





CRTI Priority Maps

Flood Risk

Tree Canopy

Surface Temperature

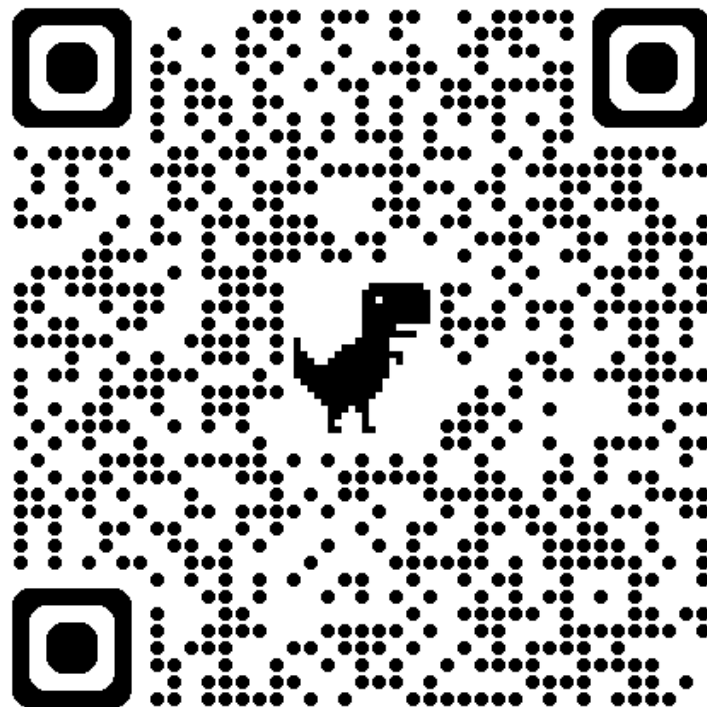
Air Quality

Asthma Rates

Vulnerable Populations

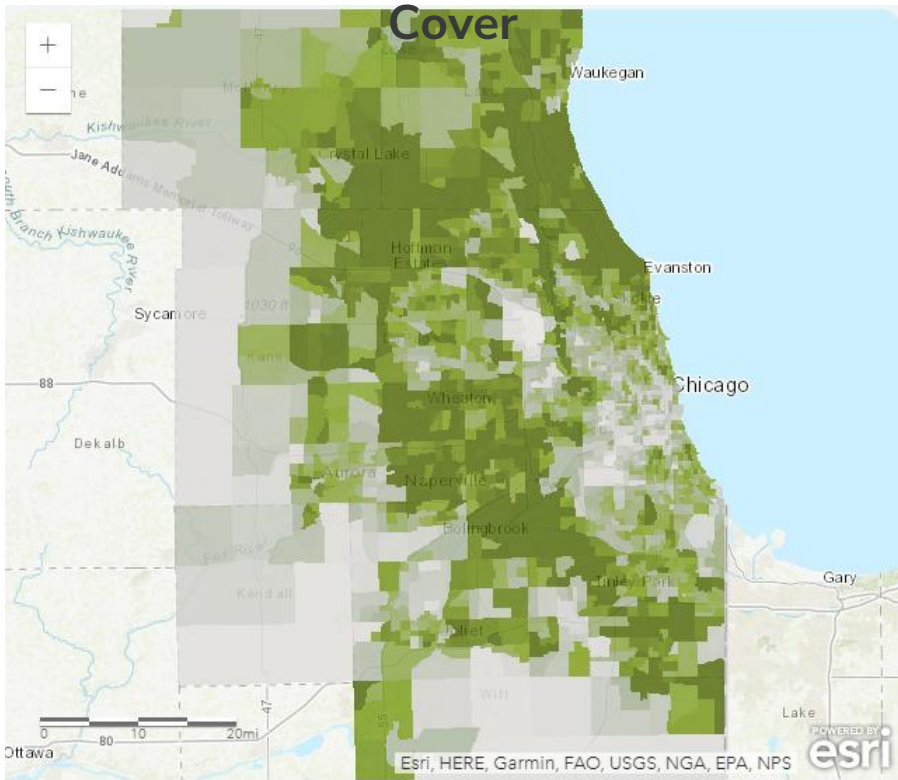
Priority Areas

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Chicago Region Trees Initiative

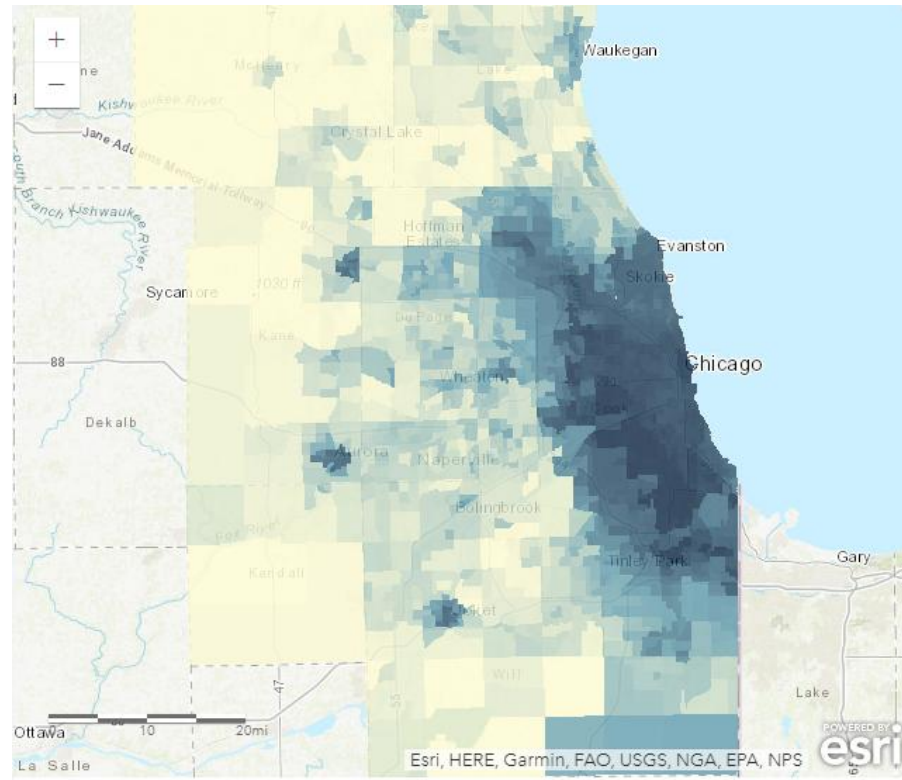
Canopy Cover



Canopy cover

Very High High Medium Low Very Low

Flood Risk



Flood risk

Very High High Medium Low Very Low

CRTI Priority Maps

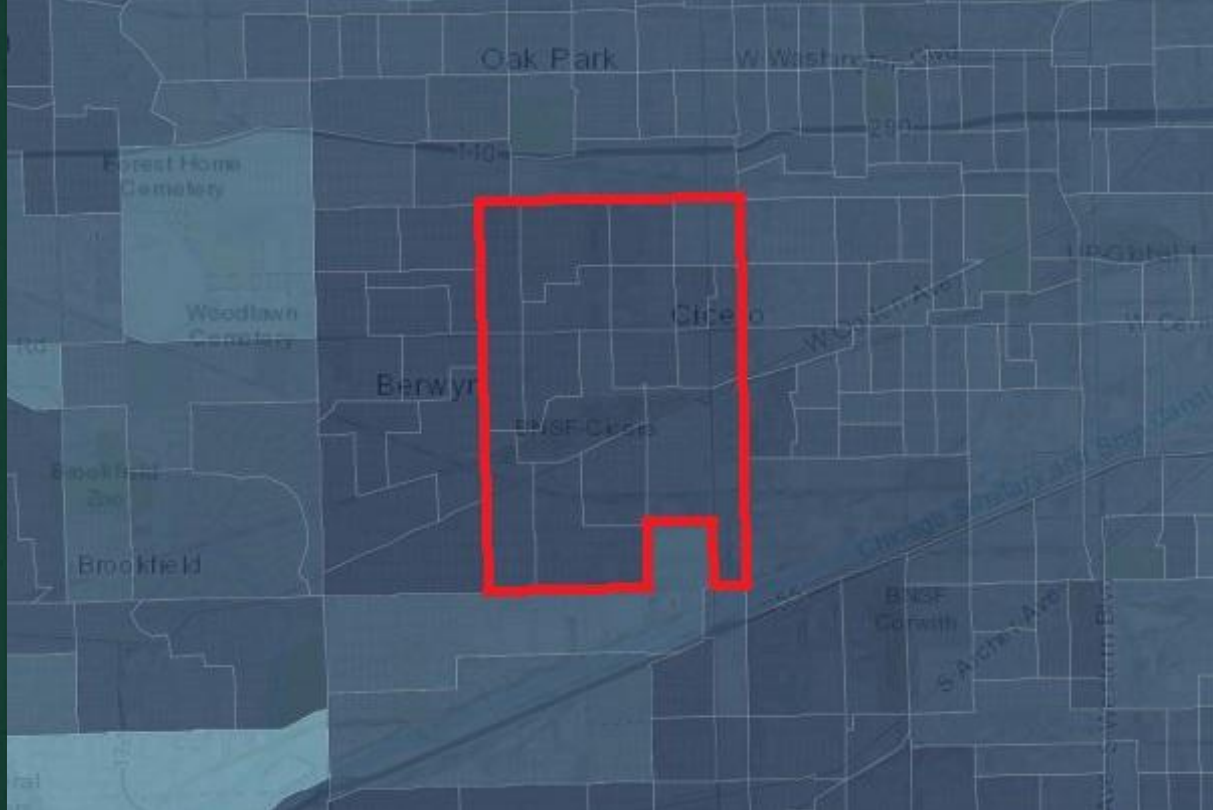
Flood Risk

0 to 10

Higher number
Higher flood risk

Cicero: 9.53 – 9.98

The Morton Arboretum



Very High High Medium Low Very Low

Chicago Region Trees Initiative

Trees as Critical Infrastructure





Time to grow matters: Benefits calculated over 20 years

	20" existing maple	2" replacement maple
Carbon sequestered	1,488 lbs	233 lbs
Runoff avoided	16,740 gallons	2,346 gallons
Rainfall intercepted	46,442 gallons	6,511 gallons
Air pollution removal (PM 2.5)	38 oz	1.33 oz
Electricity savings	1,264 kWh	113 kWh
Heat fuel savings	11.68 MMBtu	8.47 MMBtu



The background of the slide features a dark teal color with faint, detailed images of tree cross-sections (dendrograms) visible in the corners. One is in the top right and another is in the bottom left.

**Given the benefits of trees, how
do we accomplish our goals?**

Chicago Region Trees Initiative

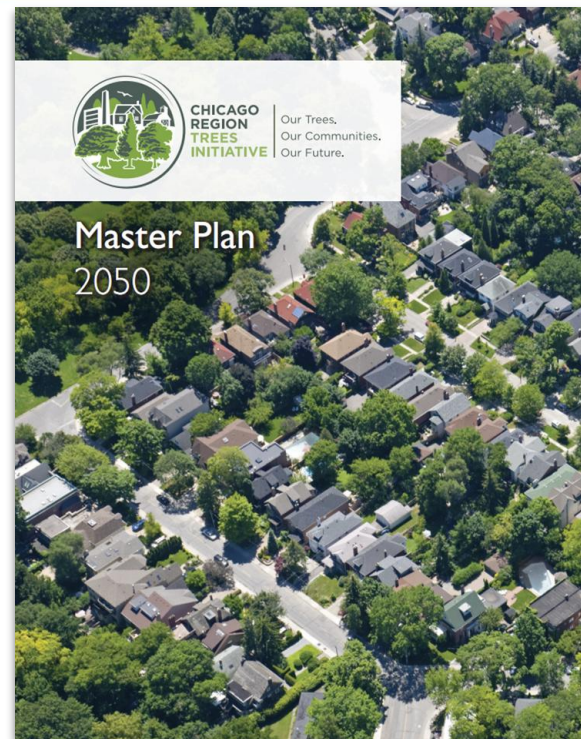
**INSPIRE PEOPLE
TO VALUE TREES**

**INCREASE THE CHICAGO
REGION'S TREE CANOPY**

- Improved tree health
- Improved urban forest policy
- Increased funding for urban forestry
- Integration of science

**ENHANCE OAK
ECOSYSTEMS**

**REDUCE THREATS
TO TREES**



CRTI: Three Teams

The Morton Arboretum





THE
CHAMPION
of TREES

Stewardship Team

Stewardship

- Plantings & Distributions in Spring and Fall in the seven county region
- Contract Growing Program
- Tree Walks and Maintenance Workshops
- Tree Ambassador Program



Proksa Park Planting, Berwyn, Fall 2025

Contract Growing Program



Contract Growing is an opportunity:

- Nurseries bid on RFP to grow and supply quality tree stock for CRTI plantings and distributions
- Ensures a consistent supply of diverse native and hybrid species
- To influence industry standards towards sustainable practices
- CRTI nursery visits

Tree Ambassador Program

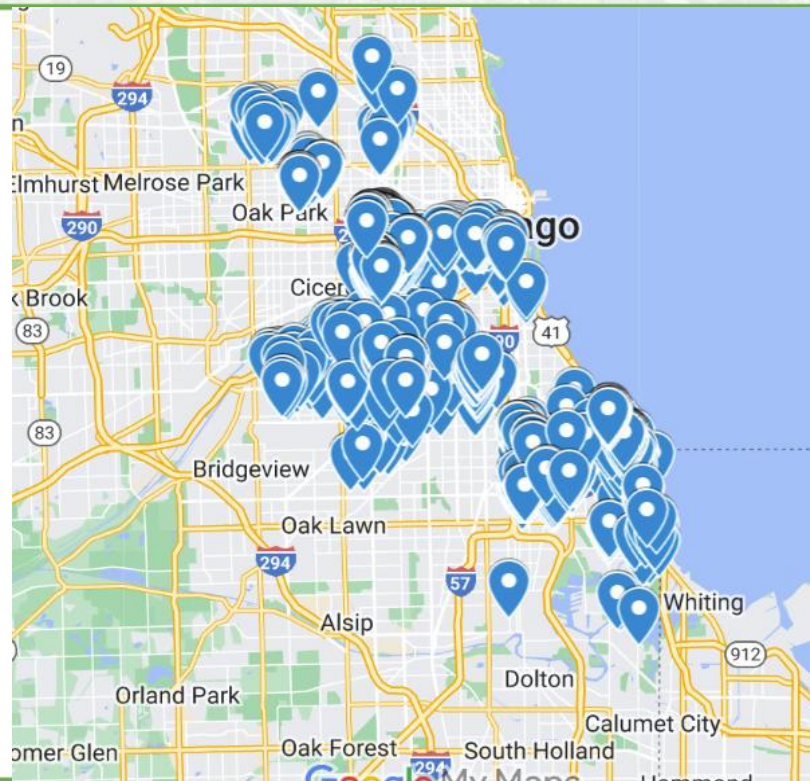
20 active community groups

10 new applicants in review

Spaces for new community groups!

applications will to open in late 2026

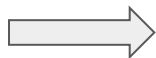
3151 Trees Planted



TAP: How Does It Work?



Grow Greater Englewood (GGE)
Tree Ambassador Program training in
August 2023



GGE engaging with residents and
putting in **tree requests**.



Imani Village standing
next to one of their newly
planted trees.

At a Glance: Steps for Planting / Distributions

- **On Site Evaluation**
 - “Right Tree Right Place”
 - Diverse species
 - Post planting care / training
- **Tree Maintenance Agreement**
 - Required capacity for watering and care
 - CRTI sets plant and/or distribution date
 - Trees are tracked through Canopy Counts





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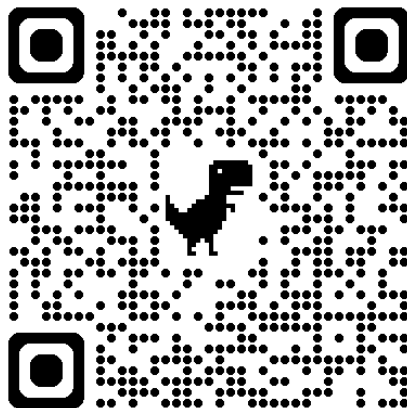
Operations Team

Operations: Events & Training



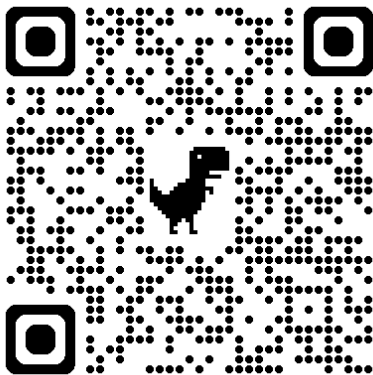
Operations: CRTI Newsletter

- Grant opportunities
- Trainings for municipal staff (including Urban Forestry Basic Training)
- Resources
- Volunteer opportunities for events!



Operations: CRTI Work Groups

- Forest Composition
- Tree Stewardship & Planting
- Tree Risk Assessment & Management
- Trees & Green Infrastructure





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Community Capacity Team

Law & Policy: *Green Infrastructure*

- **Street Features**
 - Permeable pavement
 - Bioswales
 - Tree pits
 - Depaving
- **Building Features**
 - Green roofs
 - Rain barrels
- **Landscape Features**
 - Rain gardens
 - Stormwater parks
 - Urban tree canopy



Law & Policy: *Green Infrastructure*

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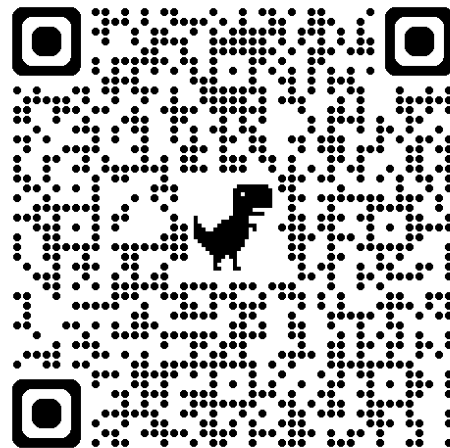
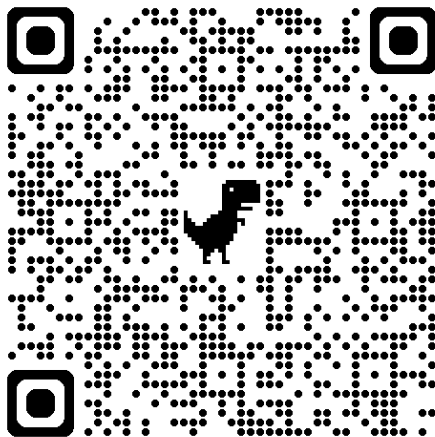


Law & Policy

Tree Ordinances

The Morton Arboretum

Ordinance Templates



Ordinance Builders

Chicago Region Trees Initiative

Town of Cicero

Tree Inventory

- Started January 2025
- Completed March 2025

Management Plan

- Vendor and Town of Cicero
- are currently drafting with community input





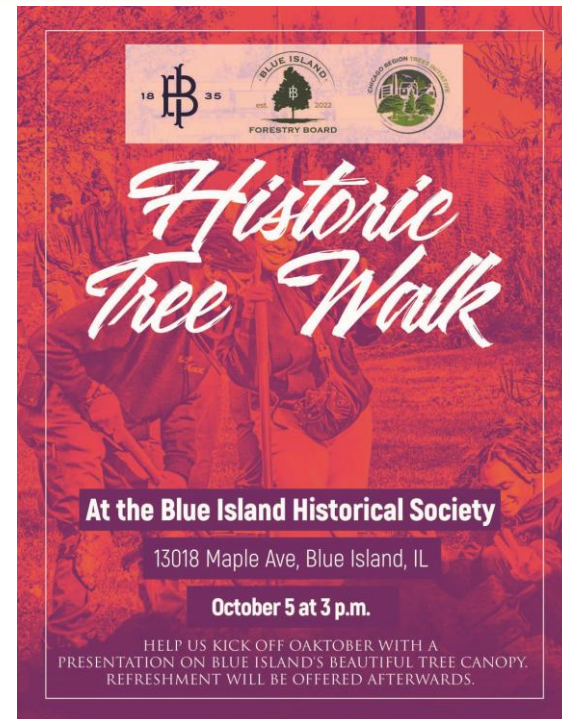
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Partnership and Collaboration

Longstanding Partnerships

City of Blue Island

- Planting partner since 2016
- Over 200 trees planted in partnership with CRTI
- Oaktober 2025:
Historical Tree Walk and
Oaktober Tree planting



Longstanding Partnerships



Stone Temple Baptist Church



Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community

Alsip Boat Launch

Made possible through
Great Lakes Restoration
Initiative (GLRI) grant

Alsip Boat Launch, adjacent to
the Little Calumet River

Timeline: 2019-2023



Mary Schmidt Community Sanctuary



2019



2023

Mary Schmidt Community Sanctuary

MWRD provided site guidance, compost, and biosolids

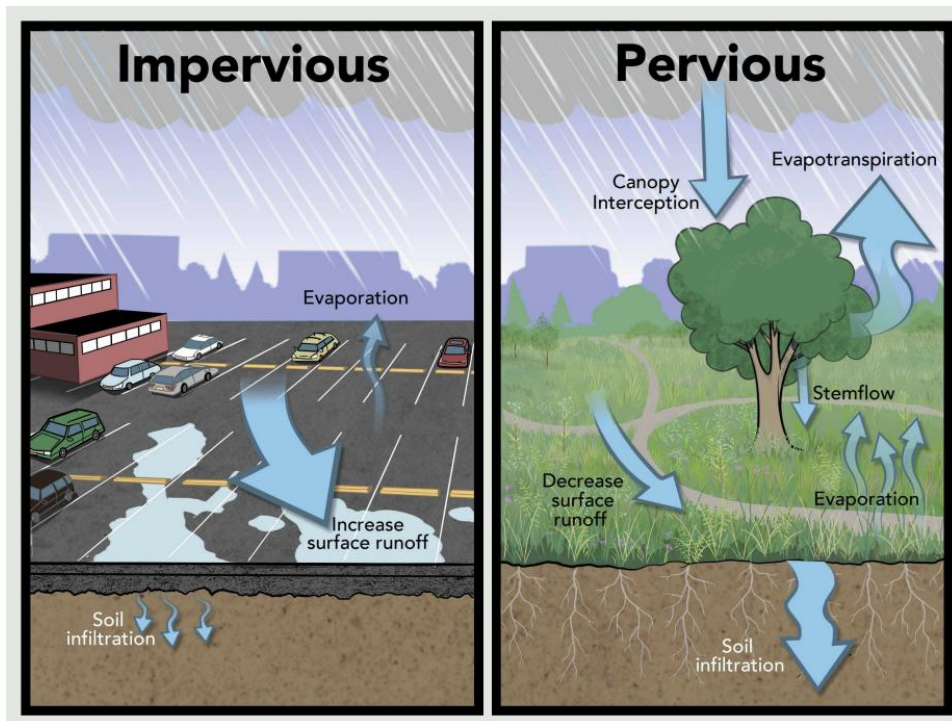
Stores 2 inches, or 200,000 gallons, over the entire site

This equates to a runoff reduction of 530,000 gallons per year

Installed 200 trees and shrubs, and native seed to improve biodiversity and habitat

Removed 2.77 acres of impervious surface

Trained 150 green infrastructure professionals



Mary Schmidt Community Sanctuary

Partnerships:

- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District
- Village of Alsip
- USDA Forest Service
- WRD Environmental / Green Corps Chicago
- OAI Inc.
- Parkland College
- The Calumet Stormwater Collaborative
- Planit Landscape Perspectives
- Iroquois Paving Corp.
- Sterling Solutions

Post project: Field Museum, Friends of the Chicago River, local volunteers from neighboring communities



Greencorps worker watering newly planted oak tree



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How do you see trees playing a role
in public health, equity, and
environmental resilience?

Thank you!



CHICAGO REGION
TREES INITIATIVE

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