

## **Consortium of North Shore Environmental Groups – CONSEG**

**March 14, 2017 MINUTES**

### **Stormwater Solutions**

#### **Speakers:**

Debra Shore, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District

John Quail, Friends of the Chicago River

Shannon Donnelly – Green Practices Water Mapping Project

#### **Debra Shore:**

4% growth in population and a 40% increase in land cover/use

42% of Cook County is impervious

30 Trillion gallons of water has been diverted from Lake Michigan since 1967

Flooding is increasing due to heavier rains and inadequate infrastructure. Our water runoff is very contaminated. The first flush of water in a rainstorm is the most contaminated.

Chicago's deep tunnel system can hold up to 2.5 billion gallons of combined overflow. It serves as a holding tank during storm events. Water is held and released to water treatment as the treatment plant has capacity to handle it. Goal is to eliminate all combined sewer water overflows.

Local sewers are owned and maintained by local municipalities. They empty into MWRD intercepting Sewer. When those are inadequate, there is back up into homes and/or into waterways. Now those MWRD sewers connect with the TARP system.

We are seeing more intense storm events that are overwhelming capacity to manage stormwater. At the same time, larger homes and more impervious surfaces are exacerbating the problem.

Intense rain events are a symptom of climate change. We cannot build pipes big enough to handle all storm events.

At Debra's Shore's home, 124% more rain falls on her roof and driveway than her household uses each year.

MWRD is working with schools to improve stormwater management while also improving recreational space for students. Hoping to work with 30 schools.

They are now working to test home systems that would help capture rainwater. This is a smaller investment than upsizing pipes which would cost \$3 billion. Considering also large vessels capturing rain water from large rooftops.

### **John Quail of Friends of the Chicago River:**

Friends of the Chicago River is a non profit organization that was founded in 1979 and now has 3,000 members.

Stormwater Overflow Action Alerts on their website help make residents aware of approaching storms and modify behavior to reduce water use.

Chicago had the first municipal water system in the country. River water is cleaner than it has ever been. Bubbly Creek has been cleaned up and is now being transformed to a recreational amenity. Fish species have increased from 10 to 70 species since 1974.

They realize that habitat is the limiting factor. Partner with IDNR and Ozinga. (Ozinga owns a lot of riverside property.) They are providing manmade fish habitat, and are re introducing Channel. Released 277,000 fish to the Chicago River.

Dams are a problem. Reduces fishes ability to access habitat above the dams, even if the habitat above the dam is of higher quality. Winnetka Road dam has been removed.

They do habitat restoration to provide habitat but also significant water management. Native habitat increases storm absorption. Also install large bat houses 3 – 5,000 bats. One is on the trail north of Tower Road on the west side of the Skokie Lagoons. They have begun to install osprey nests.

May 13<sup>th</sup>: 25<sup>th</sup> annual Chicago River Day and Blue River Awards

### **Q & A:**

## **If we have taken so much water out of Lake Michigan, why are Lake levels at an all-time high?**

Diversion of water from the lake comes from both what we withdraw to use and also all the rainfall that now goes into the sewer system and to the Gulf of Mexico due to increased land cover.

High lake levels are due to a couple of cold winters that reduced evaporation and also lots of rainfall.

She suggests *Great Lakes Water Wars* by Peter Annen

## **What is the Friends of the Chicago River stance of the St. Patrick's Day dyeing of the Chicago River green?**

Technically, this is bad for the river. IEPA says they do not object to it. In the past, Friends have not prevented it. But they are now working on it. Time-honored civic tradition – causes a dilemma.

## **Can MWRD work more *with* nature for stormwater management?**

MWRD is working more and more with green infrastructure. But they already had grey infrastructure projects underway. One of the reasons for the big holding tanks is to reduce pollution, not just hold back water.

## **How does MWRD predict a storm water action alert?**

Uses weather data. All community groups can try to get people to sign up for the alerts.

## **Shannon Donnelly – Green Practices Water Mapping Project**

Member of Go Green Park Ridge. Works for the Great Lakes Protection Fund which is an endowment set up by seven Great Lakes Governors to fund regional projects that protect the Great Lakes.

They funded a program (Networked Neighborhood for Eco-Conservation Online) to map green practices in neighborhoods. Go Green Park Ridge suggests that CONSEG communities consider using this program as an educational tool, an incentive, and perhaps even a friendly competition between our communities.

We could map practices that are already in place but also set some goals in each community. We could link this to our website.

There is a similar tree-mapping program available, as per Doug Gerleman.

Donnie Dann suggested that there are other organizations doing similar work. The advantage of this program is that we do not have to go through an organization.

Liz Kunkle suggests that we all go to our communities to put our practices to this map and revisit the map in one year to measure our progress.

[www.networkedneighbors.org](http://www.networkedneighbors.org)

Another book recommendation: *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes* by Dan Egan

**Witness Slip for Legislation:** All learned how to file a Witness slip for legislation – this time to promote Laura Fine’s amended coal tar ban. This Witness Slip process can be used by organizations or individuals to show support of any legislation going into committee.

**CONSEG Name Change:** CONSEG is changing our name to Go Green Illinois. Website will launch within the month.

**Glenview:** Judy Beck Glenview set up a storm water task force and found 18 challenges and came up with 18 solutions. Glenview just got an award for their efforts. People are often more willing to serve on a task force with a very specific goal than to serve on an environmental commission. April 23rd 2pm Friends of the Chicago River program in the Glenview Public Library. River clean up project planned for May.

**Nicholas Jansen:** Food & Water Watch urging all to sign coalition letter that will go to Brad Schneider. Rally at 111 Barclay in March 21<sup>st</sup> at noon.

**Park Ridge:** Doing a waiver to have rain barrels installed free of charge.

**Wilmette:** Follow our lead re coal tar sealant ban. Nine industry spokespeople came to try to prevent us from banning the product. We may be near a tipping point. Wilmette encourages ALL CONSEG communities to try to pass this ban.

**Evanston:** Karen McCormick (assistant to Robyn Gabel) encourages ALL groups to submit witness slips. Jim La Rochelle mentioned storm

water efforts in Evanston. Evanston Environmental Association just hosted Wild & Scenic Film Festival. Evanston got a big grant for habitat restoration.

**Northbrook:** Doug Gerleman. May 15<sup>th</sup> community tree appreciation program. Village not willing to ban coal tar sealants but did put a notice in the Village news that coal tar sealants are carcinogenic.

**Question: Why no talk about grey water projects?** It is against state law. Labor dispute now – plumbers versus pipe fitters.

**Libertyville:** Cathy O'Brien Green Living Fair this Saturday Lake County Green Congregations. 8 speakers forums. 10 – 2pm Libertyville

**Buffalo Grove:** Rosemary Heilemann Buffalo Creek Clean Water Partnerships

**Northfield:** Sandy Ritterson Addresses storm water issues in their Willow Road project and play fields.

**QUESTION: Are there grants available for stormwater programs?**

Look into watershed planning councils. MWRD looks for shovel ready projects.