



## North Pond Restoration Project



### Overview

North Pond is one of the most treasured natural areas in Chicago. Home to over a dozen threatened and endangered Illinois species and a haven for over 200 resident and migratory bird species, the North Pond Nature Sanctuary is a gem of nature within Chicago's largest and most visited park. Because North Pond is so beautiful, few visitors realize it is a man-made ecosystem in need of intervention and care. North Pond's restoration is called for in the Lincoln Park Framework Plan that was published in 1995. As long-time stewards of North Pond, the Lincoln Park Conservancy and the Chicago Park District began this restoration in the late 1990's including planting many of the current natural areas, building the overlook across from North Pond restaurant, and implementing natural erosion control techniques. At the time, dredging the pond and implementing comprehensive shoreline grading and stabilization techniques were not undertaken. Nearly 25 years later, North Pond's condition has continued to decline and requires additional restoration efforts to ensure its ecological health and vitality. The Pond's health is negatively impacted by a variety of stressors:

- **Shallow depth:** Many people are surprised to know the Pond's maximum existing water depth is only 3 feet, limiting aquatic habitat and inhibiting temperature regulation.
- **High temperatures:** The Pond's water is too warm in the summer, creating algae blooms that prevent healthy aquatic habitat.
- **Erosion:** The unstable shoreline is slowly falling into the Pond, leading to sediment and pollution accumulation and shallow depths.
- **Nutrient run-off and sediment:** The Pond is filling up with organic and mineral material like grass, leaves, bird poop, tree limbs, and more.
- **Limited make-up water:** Beyond rainfall, there is no natural water source for North Pond. Rather, during times of low precipitation, municipal water must be used as a source of make-up water, totaling over 5 million gallons annually.

Without intervention, these factors will continue to degrade the Pond as we know it, taking away a beloved human greenspace and destroying critical habitat for many native plant and animal species. North Pond's restoration is vital to ensure that this natural treasure remains healthy and vibrant for the

hundreds of native species that rely on it and the millions of park visitors who visit its shores for a respite from urban life. The restoration of North Pond includes:

- **Dredging** the pond to deepen it to increase oxygen turnover and **improve water quality and aquatic habitat.**
- **Grading and stabilizing the shoreline to reduce erosion and runoff and increase** submergent, emergent, and terrestrial **habitat for native plants, animals, and birds.**
- **Planting new** or enhancing existing submergent, emergent, and **native plants and trees** in the pond and along its shore **to provide improved or additional habitat** for native plants and animals.
- **'Lining' the pond** with a natural polymer **to reduce water loss** to groundwater.
- **Installing underdrains** in the park to **direct and filter stormwater** to the pond as an additional source of make-up water and **installing an automated sensor** on the municipal water supply inlet **to further reduce potable water usage** and, when needed, filter out additives that are can be harmful to aquatic plants and animals.
- **Replacing and increasing the number of aerators** in the pond to aid in oxygen turnover and **improve water quality.**
- **Restoring** and enhancing the **historic casting pier** including reinforcing its girders, replacing the crumbling staircase, adding an ADA **accessible boardwalk** to the pier, and installing bumper edging around the pier.
- Adding a **new public engagement feature** at the northwest corner of the pond to immerse visitors in the wonders of the Pond while **keeping other areas protected from human traffic.**

The North Pond Restoration Project is a collaborative and inclusive effort. Guided by the original goals of the Lincoln Park Framework Plan, the design process is comprised of many feedback and input methods including:

- **Stakeholder engagement** – during the spring, summer, and fall of 2020, individual and group meetings were held with key project stakeholders that regularly utilize North Pond including the Chicago Ornithological Society, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, North Pond Restaurant, and the several volunteer groups who utilize the historic casting pier. Input from each of these groups influenced the final restoration design.
- **Chicago Park District** - Two design meetings were held with the Chicago Park District's natural areas staff to ensure the restoration project's alignment with broader natural area goals throughout Lincoln Park. Milestone review and approval meetings were held with key CPD department heads and staff at the 30%, 50%, 75%, and 90% plan development thresholds. Input from these meetings was directly integrated into the restoration plan. The project was also presented to and received support from the Lincoln Park Advisory Council in early 2021.
- **Public meetings** – three public meetings were widely promoted and attended by over 150 persons during the fall of 2020. Feedback from these meetings was directly integrated into the restoration plan. Recordings and materials from these meetings are available on the project web site so that individuals not able to attend can learn more and offer input.
- **Public presentations, survey, and awareness** – banners and signage around North Pond that explain the need for the restoration and encourage persons to learn more through QR codes have been displayed over the past 24 months. Volunteer North Pond Champions regularly engage with park visitors about the project and offer feedback or ways for persons to learn more and offer input. A dynamic, regularly updated project web site contains detailed information about the restoration project, video from the public meetings, and a community input survey to share feedback. The project web site also encourages members of the

community to contact the Lincoln Park Conservancy to learn more or schedule a meeting. Over two dozen public presentations have been given to date to area community groups, neighboring buildings, the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce, neighboring Aldermen, and the Lincoln Park Advisory Committee. The Lincoln Park Conservancy's social media channels post about the restoration weekly and encourage feedback on the project, which many community members have offered over the last 24 months.

### **Project Timeline**

- October 2019 – Campaign for North Pond launched, individual and community information meetings begin (ongoing), fundraising campaign launched
- Winter 2019 – Spring 2020 – Baseline studies conducted (tree health and inventory, pond hydrology and water quality, pond sediment sampling, soil sampling, topography and boundary survey), launch of North Pond project site and input survey, launch of weekly social media posts about project (ongoing), installation of park signage about the project and seeking input, individual and community information meetings begin (ongoing)
- Spring/Summer 2020 – Individual and group stakeholder engagement and feedback, Chicago Park District design meetings/input, launch of North Pond Champions in park outreach and engagement (ongoing)
- Fall 2020 – Initial restoration plan for public comment, public meetings, 30% design plans finalized and incorporating public comments and stakeholder engagement
- Winter 2021 – 30% design approved by Lincoln Park Advisory Council and Chicago Park District
- Spring/Summer 2021 – 50%, 75%, and 90% construction drawing input sessions with Chicago Park District with all input incorporated into plans
- Summer 2021 – initial permit meetings with City of Chicago Departments with all input incorporated, presentation to and approval of plan by Chicago Plan Commission
- Fall 2021 – All permits approved/received, contractor RFP released and contractor selected
- Fall/Winter 2021/2022 – work begins, dredging and initial pond grading
- Spring 2022 – dredging completed, grading and edge work completed, planting of submergent/emergent plants begins
- Spring/Summer 2022 – planting of shoreline trees and plants begins, planting of submergent/emergent plants completed, begin construction of related park features/amenities
- Fall 2022 – all planting completed, park amenity construction continues
- Fall/Winter 2022 – project completion, public celebration, ongoing stewardship begins (ongoing)

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **This is a habitat restoration project, why are trees being removed?**

Most of the trees slated to be removed are dead, in poor health or are non-native, invasive, or weedy species that provide little biodiversity support. Over time they have grown too close to the Pond's edge and are exacerbating shoreline erosion, runoff, and nutrient overload of the Pond. For the Pond's restoration to be successful and for the long-term health of the entire ecosystem, a small subset of trees must be removed. In areas where trees are removed, native trees including oaks, birches, and alders will be planted along with new submergent and emergent vegetation along the Pond's edge that will provide new habitat for an even wider variety of birds and other fauna. Woody structures in water provide critical habitat and many of the trees removed will be placed in the pond as snags for use by aquatic species like turtles and herons. Tree removal is planned for late fall and winter to minimize soil compaction and impacts on resident and migratory animals.

### **Why are trees tagged and fenced?**

As a part of the restoration project, a comprehensive tree inventory was conducted to ascertain the number, types, and health of trees at North Pond. Each tree was tagged with a unique number to identify its size, species, and condition as a part of their long-term care plan. Fencing around trees throughout North Pond and other natural areas near water protects them from beavers.

### **Will key nesting/habitat areas be protected/preserved?**

North Pond is a vital habitat for native and migratory birds. A key goal of the restoration project is to ensure the site remains so in the future. The shoreline grading and stabilization is planned for late fall and winter to minimize ecological impact. Many areas around the pond that provide unique bird nesting or habitat will remain untouched thanks to input from stakeholder groups. Our dialog with stakeholders continues and we welcome additional input, meetings, or a chance to walk the site together and identify key trees or areas so that their disturbance is mitigated further or eliminated. We will also work with key birding groups and individuals to install nesting boxes or implement other techniques to provide additional nesting and habitat areas around the Pond where appropriate.

### **How can I learn more about the North Pond Restoration Project?**

To learn more about plans for North Pond's restoration you can visit the Project's [web site](#) or contact the Lincoln Park Conservancy to schedule a one-on-one or small group video meeting or on-site meeting to learn more and offer feedback. Reach out by calling 773.883.7275, emailing [info@lincolnparkconservancy.org](mailto:info@lincolnparkconservancy.org), or visiting [www.lincolnparkconservancy.org](http://www.lincolnparkconservancy.org).

### **How do I offer feedback on the project?**

We welcome ongoing input and engagement. Please contact the Lincoln Park Conservancy to set up a time to meet: 773.883.7275, [info@lincolnparkconservancy.org](mailto:info@lincolnparkconservancy.org), [www.lincolnparkconservancy.org](http://www.lincolnparkconservancy.org).

