

ORIGINAL



FRIENDS
OF THE FOREST PRESERVES

August 4, 2008

RECEIVED
CLERK'S OFFICE

AUG 04 2008

John Therriault, Assistant Clerk
Illinois Pollution Control Board
100 West Randolph Street, Suite 11-500
Chicago, Illinois 60601

PC # 81

STATE OF ILLINOIS
Pollution Control Board

RE: Rule Making R08-009

Dear Illinois Pollution Control Board:

Friends of the Forest Preserves (FOTFP) supports the recommended water quality standard improvements proposed by the Illinois EPA for the Chicago Area Waterways System (CAWS) and Lower Des Plaines River (LDPR) in rulemaking R08-09. As the only non-profit environmental organization whose sole mission is to preserve, protect, and restore the Forest Preserves of Cook County for the benefit of people and nature, we have a strong interest in ensuring high water quality in the streams and rivers that cross forest preserve lands.

The new standards will foster better aquatic habitat in and along the CAWS and LDPR. It is essential that we protect the biodiversity of species that reside in our waterways. In Cook County, forest preserve land is located along significant portions of the CAWS and nearly all of the Des Plaines River. This publicly owned land provides the highest level of public access for recreation in the river systems.

Furthermore, the Forest Preserves of Cook County are critical lands for protecting both aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity and are home to more than 170 threatened and endangered species. Establishing better habitat conditions would help native Illinois species to flourish in these preserves.

Thousands of volunteers take an active role in enhancing and restoring aquatic and riverine habitat along the banks of these waterways in the forest preserves. They have a vested interest in ensuring strong water quality standards are adopted. More than 40 volunteer stewardship groups dedicate effort and time to improving habitat in and along the rivers, contributing thousands of volunteer work hours each year. For example, these groups conduct riverbank erosion control activities that require them to enter the water.

Volunteer groups throughout the county include those who improve habitat along the Calumet River system through the Calumet Stewardship Initiative and the Palos Restoration Project. Friends of the Morton Grove Forest Preserve and the North Branch Restoration Project work at sites along the North Branch of the Chicago River. The Des Plaines River Valley Restoration Volunteers and Friends of the Chicago Portage are dedicated to improving habitat and water quality along the Des Plaines River.

Additionally, this ruling is critical to forest preserve users who utilize these waterways for recreational purposes including boating, canoeing and fishing. The public deserves waterways that they can enjoy, secure in the knowledge that they are much safer from bacteria in effluent discharged by sewage treatment plants in the area.

Improvements to water quality standards for these waterways are long overdue. This rule is a rare opportunity to set the standard higher for clean and safe waterways for the Chicago Metropolitan region. And as stewards of these natural resources, we should not be seeking the minimum in improvement, but the maximum. Therefore, we urge the Board to approve these changes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benjamin Cox", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Benjamin Cox
Executive Director
Friends of the Forest Preserves