Millennium Reserve: Opportunities for Action
Millennium Reserve

The Millennium Reserve is a place where action will benefit the economy, community, and the environment.

It is located in Cook County, Illinois, and includes a portion of the City of Chicago and thirty-seven other municipalities.
The Promise and Potential of the Millennium Reserve

A million residents live within the boundaries of the Millennium Reserve. Millions more travel to the Millennium Reserve or through it on one of five major interstates. Here, a young resident participates in science education at one of the nature preserves. Photo: Karen Bean, The Field Museum
The Millennium Reserve has large expanses of vacant land available for industrial use, and it hosts a bounty of open spaces and wetlands important for birds and wildlife. The Millennium Reserve’s strategic location in a major metropolis coupled with these substantial land resources make it an ideal place to take action to improve the economy, protect nature, and strengthen communities.

In December of 2011, Governor Pat Quinn launched the Millennium Reserve. The mission of this initiative was to transform the Illinois side of the bi-state Calumet region into a one-of-a-kind public destination that stimulates vigorous and diverse economic growth, protects and enhances natural ecosystems, and supports healthy and prosperous communities. The concept was originally introduced as part of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors Initiative to reconnect Americans to the nation’s magnificent outdoor treasures and to use science-based management practices to restore and protect our lands and waters for future generations.

On August 16, 2012, U.S. Interior Secretary Kenneth Salazar and U.S. Senator Richard Durbin joined state and local officials and organizational leaders in Chicago to announce commitments of $2 million from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Coastal Zone Management Program to restore natural areas on Chicago’s southeast side and in adjacent south suburban Illinois and Indiana. This announcement also highlighted 12 model conservation projects by over a dozen partner organizations that have strategic goals and outcomes aligning with the Millennium Reserve.

Key investments will help us grow the Calumet region into an economic powerhouse. We need the jobs and vitality that industry brings; we need strong, healthy communities; and we need to forge connections through trails and green spaces. With new and improved parks and preserves, we give more children the opportunity to experience the great outdoors, and we help Illinois become one of the nation’s greenest states.

Pat Quinn
Governor
State of Illinois

Americans spent more than $145 billion dollars in 2011 on outdoor recreation, including bird watching, hiking and fishing. Investments in open space and outdoor recreation makes economic sense. In the Calumet area of Chicago, we are following Mother Nature’s course, and creating a destination for all Illinoisans and the 53 million tourists who visit the Chicago area every year.

Marc Miller
Director
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

The Promise and Potential of the Millennium Reserve

The Millennium Reserve Includes:
- 38 Illinois municipalities
- Diverse Chicago neighborhoods
- Pullman National Historic Landmark District
- 2 proposed National Heritage Areas
- Lake Michigan shoreline
- I&M National Heritage Corridor
- 2 inland lakes: Calumet and Wolf
- 3 rivers: the Calumet, Grand Calumet and Little Calumet
- 6,000 acres of high ecological value, as identified by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory
- 13 sites with natural communities so rare they’re considered globally significant
- One barge channel that connects the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River.
- 5 interstate highways
- 5 major railroads and two short-line freight railroads
- America’s largest intermodal center, with five major terminals
- 15,000 acres of open space
- 1 State Park
- 15 County Forest Preserves
- 1 million residents
Background
On March 1, 2013, Governor Pat Quinn signed the executive order that set up the Millennium Reserve Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was charged with identifying specific projects of regional significance, recommending policy initiatives to be pursued by the State of Illinois and partner organizations, and identifying potential funding sources for projects. The Millennium Reserve Steering Committee was composed of public partners, including representatives of municipalities, county government, state government and regional agencies, and it was composed of private sector partners, including representatives from corporations, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropy. These members had expertise in various issues of concern and represented different interests, including environmental, economic, and community development.

Commitment and Guiding Principles
Seeking to make the most of the region’s assets, the Steering Committee determined it would provide the catalyst for innovative actions and partnerships that:

- Stimulate vigorous and sustainable economic growth.
- Restore and enhance natural ecosystems.
- Support healthy and prosperous communities and residents.
- Honor the region’s cultural and industrial past.

Milestones and Working Sessions
As the Steering Committee set to work, important questions were raised about how to incorporate previous plans and goals. In the past 20 years, the State of Illinois, State of Indiana, federal agencies, local governments, regional planning agencies, civic organizations, research institutions, industrial interests, commercial businesses, community organizations and councils of government, conservation groups, historic preservationists, and social service groups have worked hard to develop and sustain a new future for the City’s South Side, Chicago’s south suburbs and Northwest Indiana. These groups and many individuals share a passion for and a commitment to fostering the intersection and interdependence of industry, environment, and community.

The Steering Committee’s first step was to examine the existing plans and initiatives. Altogether, the Steering Committee identified 90 separate plans that addressed the needs of some geographical portion of the Millennium Reserve or one specific issue within it. Some members of the Steering Committee were among the stakeholders who had worked hard to create those plans. Not all were relevant to the tasks of the Steering Committee, but the sheer number demonstrates the amount of effort already directed at the region. The Steering Committee focused most closely on the documents that were either region-wide or were close in topic to its own work.

Plans used included: GO TO 2040 from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; Chicago Southland’s Green TIME Zone from the Center for Neighborhood Technology and South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association; Green Infrastructure Vision from Chicago Wilderness; Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan and Northwest Indiana Regional Greenways and Blueways Plan; Calumet Land Use Plan and Calumet Open Space Plan from City of Chicago; The Marquette Plan: A Vision for Lakeshore Reinvestment and 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan from the Northern Indiana Regional Planning Council; and various pieces and guidelines on green infrastructure and stormwater. Besides these, many of the other plans proved relevant, and were analyzed either in part or in full.

How the Committee Functioned
This report is a summary of the recommended actions resulting from the Steering Committee’s work. Over the course of six months, participants worked together to:

- Learn from previous efforts, both successful and unsuccessful ones.
- Align efforts and leverage resources in the region.
- Advance regional priorities and critical projects.
- Devise tangible benchmarks and goals.
Open space for nature and infrastructure for industry are intertwined within the Millennium Reserve, creating a landscape with dramatic contrasts and dynamic possibilities. Photo: Jin Lee
Millennium Reserve Steering Committee’s Recommendations for Goals and Priority Projects

As the Millennium Reserve Steering Committee evaluated how best to achieve the Governor’s vision for the Millennium Reserve, some actions rose to the top immediately and remained a high priority throughout the process. Others were gleaned later, through research and debate. Some were ideas that already existed in rough form, but that required substantial revision and polishing. Some will require more specific goal-setting to be done in the future by experts in the field.

Potential funding sources have been identified for some goals while for others, finding the necessary financial resources may be the project’s most challenging hurdle. Each project is recommended with the full support of the Steering Committee and each is considered critically important to implement soon.

Open Public Access to Lake Calumet
Lake Calumet is the largest lake within Chicago city limits, and it occupies a central location within the Millennium Reserve. Currently, there is no way for the public to approach Lake Calumet, and no options for using the water or surrounding lands for recreation. Yet its potential for becoming a scenic asset and a place for recreation is outstanding.

Transforming Lake Calumet and a portion of its shoreline into publicly accessible amenities is a key recommendation for the Millennium Reserve Steering Committee. This move would advance all three of the primary purposes of Millennium Reserve—economy, environment and community development.

The land is owned by the Illinois International Port District, an agency undergoing a renaissance in program policy and operations. As new members to the Port District’s Board are added, political will and operational commitment will be essential to fully realize and harness the abundant assets of Lake Calumet. The Steering Committee recommends that an agreement be pursued between the Illinois International Port District and potential land managers for long-term public access.

Build the Blue Island Intercollegiate Rowing Center and Marina
Rowing crew is one of the oldest intercollegiate sports in America. In recent years, there’s been an explosion of growth and interest in rowing by both women and men. For high level competitions, universities, high schools and rowing clubs require waterways that meet certain criteria, and currently there are few such locations available in the Midwest.

The 16-mile channel of the Cal-Sag is well-suited for rowing competitions. It has no current, and no bends or turns; its high, steel sides provide protection from the wind. However, it lacks docks and other necessary infrastructure. In 1959, the Cal-Sag served as the venue for the rowing competition in the Pan American Games, and in more recent years, even with minimal infrastructure, it has been the location of intercollegiate regattas. Each regatta attracts approximately 1,000 people, an economic boon to local shops and restaurants. If the site were developed, it could host more regattas and could be expected to have regular, weekly use by recreational rowers and local crew teams.

The proposed site for the rowing center is on the Cal-Sag Trail, at Fay’s Point, in Blue Island. With a marina, a rowing center, a trail, adjacent housing, and a potential restaurant, the rowing center will be a revenue-generating operation.

Develop and Implement the Millennium Reserve Natural Areas Conservation Compact
Working in concert with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, Chicago Park District and The Nature Conservancy, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) will develop, sign, and begin implementation of a Conservation Compact to protect and manage ecologically important sites. The sites to be addressed are the 23 different locations that appear on the Illinois Natural Area Inventory (INA), a list of the state’s most ecologically important areas. The partners will identify compatible, shared, and coordinated conservation outcomes for these sites, and will undertake protection and restoration activities necessary to provide effective long-term conservation.

The INAI sites in the Millennium Reserve total nearly 6,000 acres. Thirteen harbor natural plant and animal communities of global significance for conservation. Twenty are owned or managed by one of the partners. Because of their importance, some of these natural areas in the Millennium Reserve have been designated as Illinois Nature Preserves, the highest form of protection offered under Illinois state law.

The sites vary considerably in natural quality, restoration challenges, and current land uses. The partners note that while each agency is dedicated to improving conditions at its own sites, current individual activities are insufficient to assure the long-term ecological health across
the archipelago of related natural areas. Some lack management plans for the key species and natural communities that live in them. There is insufficient coordination in management, and some share problems that are better addressed at a larger scale. Hydrological issues, environmental contamination, and the identification and securing of monetary resources are examples of issues requiring broad-scale solutions.

One area of particular emphasis will be the bird populations. The Compact calls specifically for the development and implementation of a regional habitat management plan for wetland wildlife habitats, with a focus on deep marshes and the restoration of hydrology and vegetation sufficient to support marsh-nesting birds. Overall, the Compact will help define the management objectives for each site, and will ensure that actions taken will support biodiversity goals throughout the Millennium Reserve.

**Implement a Millennium Reserve Industrial Jobs Work Plan**

Currently, a mismatch exists between the skills needed by manufacturers in the region and those available in the local labor force. The Millennium Reserve Industrial Jobs Work Plan project would address the need for workforce training that would lead to careers in manufacturing.

The Industrial Jobs Work Plan builds on the successful Calumet Green Manufacturing Partnership initiative, which has effectively upgraded area residents’ skills but at a rate far below demand for such workers. It utilizes a dual customer approach to build career advancement pathways for low-skilled and underprepared workers and to meet employer demands. The Industrial Jobs Work Plan is intended to weave deep, long-lasting interconnections among employers; the public workforce system; and the providers of education, training, and support services. It will provide education, training, career coaching, asset development, job placement, job retention, and advancement at a scale commensurate with employer requirements.

The Industrial Jobs Work Plan aims to serve all residents who have not recognized the potential of manufacturing to support middle-class prosperity and have not acquired the technical and workforce skills to work in jobs in this sector. To provide employers with an effective workforce, the Industrial Jobs Work Plan will complement ongoing efforts in the region’s extensive economic and community development programs through the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation, the Calumet Area Industrial Commission and the Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative that integrate economic and community development with projects in housing, jobs, workforce, site development and infrastructure.

**Catalyze the Redevelopment of Brownfields**

The Calumet region continues to support manufacturing businesses, particularly in metal fabrication, chemical processing, industrial equipment manufacturing, and logistics. It has pockets of strong economic vitality. But it also has an inventory of over 3,000 acres of vacant or severely underutilized, industrially zoned land. These parcels require a catalyst for redevelopment so that they, too, can become the home of thriving businesses.

South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, the Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative, Cook County, and the Calumet Area Industrial Commission have worked together to create a platform of programs that support the private redevelopment of such sites. The groups have identified four key properties of approximately 20 acres, each served by rail lines, that are well positioned for redevelopment. One of these sites has just been acquired by a manufacturing company, which will bring almost 200 jobs. But for the other sites to be redeveloped on an accelerated basis, the Calumet region needs the support of the State of Illinois to secure seed funding and the alignment of policies to finance acquisition and predevelopment work. The Millennium Reserve Steering Committee recommends support for an array of financial and policy tools that support redevelopment of brownfields.

**Propose and Fund a Millennium Reserve Land Development Program**

The Steering Committee supports the raising of $1.5 million in grants to provide capital investment in the not-for-profit Southland Community Development Fund. This money will be made available to private investors pursuing the purchase of property for redevelopment. An infusion of capital early on will help private investors and manufacturing firms survive what is often a long period of uncertainty. With brownfields, it is common for investors to confront property titles clouded with numerous liens and issues of environmental contamination.

Most of the industrial land within the Millennium Reserve must at least be evaluated for environmental contamination. Usually, a professional assessment cannot be conducted until control of the property is secured, placing the prospective developer in a chicken-or-egg dilemma regarding property ownership and the potential costs of environmental cleanup.

The value of having the vacant lands become the home for job-generating businesses is so important, it is worth the investment by government and by other private interests to make it happen.

**Communicate the Assets of the Calumet**

To effectively convey the strengths of the Calumet region and the Millennium Reserve to potential investors, it is important that investors learn about the opportunities that are available. The Steering Committee recommends expanding the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association’s South Suburban Atlas, an online map that uses a geographic information system (GIS) platform that can be used to highlight features of the region. It can showcase interesting sites and topics of related interest; it explores techniques, strategies and best practices of web-based storytelling to reach a targeted audience; and it fosters the development of other story maps. This application will provide the tools for the community to record, analyze, plan, educate and discover the many opportunities to live, work, and recreate in the Millennium Reserve.

**Support National Heritage Designations For Distinctive Regional Landscapes**

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated by Congress to showcase landscapes that tell important stories of the nation’s history and culture. NHAs are developed by locally driven, public-private collaborations to support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, and heritage tourism. An NHA is not a national park, but the National Park Service does provide technical assistance and distributes matching federal funds to NHAs.
The Millennium Reserve presents opportunities for three distinctive and interlinked NHAs, and the committee recommends that their fullest potential be realized. The Illinois and Michigan (I&M) Canal National Heritage Corridor became the nation’s first NHA in 1984. When it was reauthorized by Congress in 2006, the boundaries of the I&M were extended through Chicago to Lake Michigan along the path of the Cal-Sag Channel and the Calumet River.

The proposed Black Metropolis National Heritage Area on Chicago’s south side stretches from 18th Street on the north to 71st street on the south; and from Lake Michigan on the east to Canal Street on the west. It includes several different neighborhoods, including Bronzeville, Hyde Park and Woodlawn. The area anchored the Great Migration of 1910 to 1920, a demographic movement where African Americans came north in search of better opportunities. The assemblage of natural, historic, educational, and recreational resources forms a cohesive, distinctive, place-based heritage worth preserving.

The Calumet National Heritage Area is a proposal to make the Millennium Reserve part of a larger corridor that extends into Indiana. This would make it possible to plan priorities for the whole corridor instead of site by site and state by state. In the case of Wolf Lake, the state line runs down the center; it is the most obvious example of the value of cooperative planning and management. It makes sense to seek Federal involvement in the protection of and economic stimulus of the entire Calumet National Heritage Area.

Support and Promote the Proposed Pullman National Historical Park
More than 100 partner organizations have signed on in support of a National Park designation for the community of Pullman. The proposed park would fit the model of other urban national parks, which feature small businesses, tourist attractions, and residential neighborhoods within the park’s boundaries. The park would provide an economic stimulus for Pullman and the surrounding communities.

Elevating Pullman’s status from a National Historic Landmark to a National Historical Park or a National Monument will help build local historic preservation efforts, bring new funding sources to the area, and spur tourism and new business growth to support visitors and residents alike. A Pullman National Historical Park would be likely to increase visitation to Chicago’s South Side and connect many urban residents with a “neighborhood” national park.

Based on successful examples like Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts,

The presence of the Millennium Reserve in a densely populated area creates the potential for building an outstanding and comprehensive program of environmental education. Over time, this can make a big difference in the quality of people’s lives: young adults will have strong skills in science, which can lead to careers, and communities will develop cultural relationships with the natural world. Photo: Karen Bean, The Field Museum
a national park has the opportunity to provide an important boost to Chicago’s economy.

**Develop Future Conservation Leaders**

Nearly a quarter million of the roughly one million inhabitants of the Millennium Reserve area are ages five to nineteen. Providing this large population of children with excellent environmental education is a high priority. To create a more detailed recommendation with specific measurable outcomes will require more discussion and coordination going forward. The Steering Committee agreed that this goal requires continued focused discussion among stakeholders with expertise in education.

**Acquire and Build the Strategic Connections Missing in the Calumet Area Trail System**

Over the past 15 years, various agencies and partners have made substantial investments in the Calumet regional hiking and biking trail system. Collectively, all project segments create a trail system unlike any other in the region, offering multiple experiences along a beautiful Great Lakes shoreline, through wooded natural areas, past peaceful inland lakes with views of windsurfers, kayakers, swans and waterfowl, along the perimeter of wetlands and prairies, over open water on long-distance bridges and past welcoming picnic grounds. Trailheads will be built at an outdoor performing arts center (in Hammond, Indiana) and at the visitor’s center at the William Powers Recreation Area in Chicago. When marketing the Millennium Reserve, this trail system will be a primary attraction used to highlight recreational assets.

The trails within the Millennium Reserve will be linked to regional trails that stretch throughout Illinois and Indiana, and on into Wisconsin and Michigan. The more extensive and well-linked a trail system becomes, the greater its draw for visitors who are vital customers for restaurants, recreational vendors, and hotels. For residents and people who work in the area, the improved trail system creates alternative and safe means of transportation and it improves quality of life.

**Review and Revive the Ford Calumet Environmental Center**

Artfully designed, strategically sited and properly programmed, an environmental center would be a source of pride for regional residents. It would provide a gateway to begin the exploration of a region that can sometimes seem fragmented and difficult to grasp. Studio Gang, a prominent Chicago architectural firm, created an inspiring design for the building 10 years ago.

However, since the design was completed, a great deal has changed in the region and the economy. The original estimated cost of $10 million for construction and programming for the center has increased greatly. The Steering Committee recommends that the idea of the center be both revived and revised. Over the course of six months, a dedicated project team will come up with a plan of action to build a new center with available resources. The components to be assessed include the center’s purpose; what its programming might be and who would deliver it; the location; whether its current design can be adapted to fit the budget; what an appropriate budget is; and how operations and maintenance would be carried out long term.

**Improve Stormwater Management Through Investments in and Coordination of Green Infrastructure Solutions**

Strategically located green infrastructure practices will aid in mitigating stormwater runoff, providing water quality benefits, improving habitat, linking neighborhoods, and contributing to the region’s sustainability and livability. The Millennium Reserve is an excellent and practical place to use such practices in concert with more conventional infrastructure solutions. Green stormwater practices can be deployed to solve specific flooding and stormwater problems and can be integrated into the larger stormwater infrastructure systems.

At present, there are many green infrastructure initiatives within the Millennium Reserve, but they are mostly uncoordinated and sometimes only loosely related to the needs or operations of watersheds or sewersheds. Rarely are they designed as part of comprehensive stormwater management plans. In order to achieve maximum impact, these current efforts must be better aligned, and future investments must be planned and executed in a coordinated fashion.

**Develop the Millennium Reserve Outdoor Recreation Partnership and Framework Plan**

The Chicago Park District, IDNR, Forest Preserve District of Cook County, and the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association will work together to develop outdoor and adventure recreation attractions in the Millennium Reserve that will serve as destinations for outdoor adventure and bring economic development. The first step is to create a framework plan to establish what is needed, what the priorities are, and which locations are well-suited for specific activities.

Outdoor spending supports 6.1 million recreation jobs in the United States. Each year, outdoor enthusiasts spend $646 billion per year and generate $39.7 billion in taxes for state and local governments. During the recession between 2005 and 2011, when other economic sectors contracted, the outdoor recreation economy grew approximately five percent per year.

The region is already home to recreational resources, including hiking and biking trails and “water trails,” which are routes on navigable waterways marked and made accessible for people using small boats. Fishing and boating are popular, and Lake Michigan beaches are an iconic draw. Improving and connecting existing resources and developing new recreational opportunities will help define and make the Millennium Reserve an attractive regional destination for more types of ecotourism. Attractions might include ropes courses, ziplining, rowing, kayaking, obstacles courses, kite boarding, disc sports, paintballing, orienteering, geocaching, backpacking, camping, cross-country skiing, sledding, and horseback riding, as well as many others.

**Conclusion**

Within the state of Illinois, there’s no opportunity for growth and change quite like the one found at the Millennium Reserve. Its tremendous resources in people and land make this region ripe to become an engine for economic growth. Its astounding array of natural resources make it a key location to target for conservation.

At the Millennium Reserve, the three pillars that help build a healthy metropolis—economy, community, environment—can and will be made stronger for the well-being of all, for now and for future generations.
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Consultant to Millennium Reserve Steering Committee
Suzanne Malec-McKenna

Editor
Jill Riddell

Brochure Design and Map Artwork
Sandbox Studio, Chicago

Cover Photo
Laura Milkert, The Field Museum

For more information, contact
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Coastal Management Program
160 North LaSalle Street, Suite 700
Chicago, IL 60601
Phone: 312 814-1405