NORTH BRANCH CHICAGO RIVER WATERSHED WORKGROUP

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Alternate: Nick Huber

Robyn Flakne, Glenview
Alternate: Adriana Webb

Monitoring & Water Quality Impairment Abatement Committee

Committee Chair
Rob Flood, NSWRD
Alternate: Josephine Meincke

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Alternate: James Fitzgerald

Christopher Johnson, Sierra Club
Alternate: *Vacant*

Janice Aull, SCDD
Alternate: Mary Scanlan Hogan

Leonard Dane, Hey & Associates
Alternate: *Kirsten James*

Michael Warner, Gewalt Hamilton
Alternate: *Vacant*

Wally Dittrich, Lincolnshire
Alternate: Cecylia Wzsolek

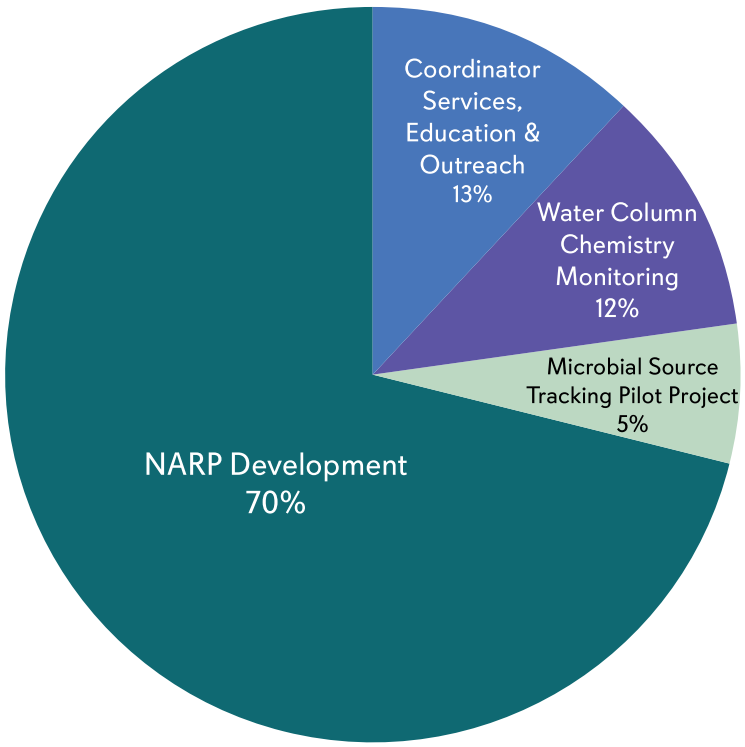
NORTH BRANCH CHICAGO RIVER WATERSHED WORKGROUP 2025 ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

The North Branch Chicago River Watershed Workgroup (NBWW) is a voluntary, dues-paying organization. The workgroup is governed by bylaws, an elected Executive Board, and voting dues-paying members. The NBWW monitors water quality in the North Branch Chicago River watershed planning area upstream (north) of Dempster Street in Morton Grove, which includes the three subwatersheds: West Fork, Middle Fork, and Skokie River. In addition to meeting members' Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements, the NBWW can prevent duplicated monitoring efforts and will accomplish more with less! Membership dues are used to implement the water quality program, which includes: data collection, analysis, and identification of potential water quality impairments based on collected water quality data.

WORKGROUP MISSION

To bring together a diverse coalition of stakeholders to preserve and improve water quality in the North Branch Chicago River and its tributaries through long term monitoring and gaining a better understanding of the stressors to the aquatic system.

2025 NBWW EXPENSES



2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

WATER COLUMN CHEMISTRY

- North Shore Water Reclamation District (NSWRD) was contracted to conduct water column chemistry monitoring at all 25 monitoring sites. NSWRD sampled water column chemistry five times a year in the months of February, May, July, August, and September.

NPDES PERMITTING

- Compiled and submitted the March 1, 2024 - February 28, 2025 annual report to the Illinois EPA which satisfies the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) water quality monitoring component of the permit reporting requirements for NBWW agency members
- NBWW maintained the NBWW MS4 Resources page, **www.nbwwil.org/resources**.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

- NBWW held 14 meetings in 2025; 4 executive board, 2 general membership, 2 monitoirng water quality impairment abatement comittee, and 6 joint executive and monitoring comittee meetings.
- NBWW sent 26 letters to entities tributary to the five NBWW monitoring sites in the watershed with the highest chloride levels (based on February 2025 monitoring). These letters also shared responsible winter maintenance resources and awareness.
- NBWW provided a scorecard with program activities that can be included in reporting as measurable goals to meet the minimum control measures (MCMs) of the NPDES ILR40 permit requirements.
- Maintained NBWW website: **www.nbwwil.org**, for posting information on the workgroup and distributing updates to NBWW members and the public
- See Page 4 for NBWW Education and Outreach Sponsorships.

TARGETED WATER QUALITY PILOT PROGRAMS

IN-STREAM RE-AERATION IMPACTS TO DISSOLVED OXYGEN

The NBWW collaborated with workgroup member Skokie Consolidated Drainage District (SCDD) on their upcoming Skokie River streambank stabilization project between Danny Cunniff Park and Old Elm Golf Course in Highland Park. This 1,400 linear feet streambank stabilization will be implemented on both sides of the stream and includes the installation of four reaeration structures (pool/riffle structures). Preliminary findings of the Nutrient Assessment Reduction Plan (NARP) (see report page 37) indicated in-stream reaeration measures may be beneficial to Dissolved Oxygen (DO) and its relation to Total Phosphorus. In June 2025, the NBWW requested a scope of work expansion to NSWRD's 2025 water chemistry monitoring contract to deploy three datasondes in the Skokie River upstream/downstream of the SCDD project's boundaries. Two datasondes were deployed upstream of Danny Cunniff Park and downstream of the reaeration structure for two weeks at a time, and one datasonde monitored for 30 days about 1,000 feet downstream of the project. The DO monitoring will be repeated in 2026 to compare results once the project is completed.

E.COLI MICROBIAL SOURCE TRACKING

The NBWW contracted with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in May 2025 for microbial source tracking services. The NBWW selected the 5 highest E. coli monitoring locations (averaged from the 2023-2024 monitoring data) for this pilot project. Each of the 5 selected sites were sampled for E. coli four times by NSWRD between May 2025 and September 2025 and then sent to GVSU to be tested for 3 microbial source markers: human, dog, and gull. The data showed human markers at three monitoring sites. The NBWW Monitoring Committee will consider next steps in 2026 based on a full evaluation of the microbial source tracking results.

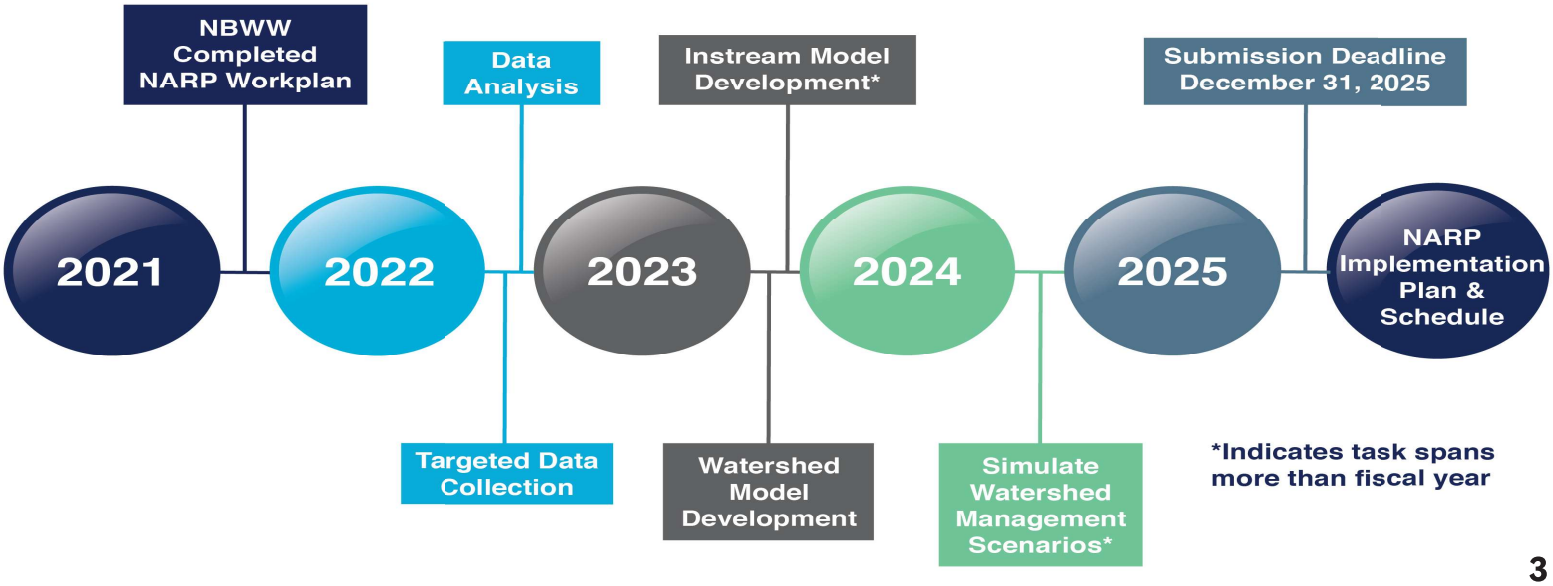
NUTRIENT ASSESMENT REDUCTION PLAN

The NBWW completed and submitted the Nutrient Assessment and Reduction Plan (NARP) on December 22, 2025. The NARP aims to address phosphorus-related impairments in the North Branch Chicago River watershed. It is required by a Special Condition in the NPDES permits of Village of Deerfield and NSWRD Water Reclamation Facilities (WRFs). The NARP development includes four phases: 1. Data Collection and Analysis 2. Develop Modeling Tools; 3. Evaluate Management Scenarios; 4: Implementation Planning and Schedule (timeline below). In 2025, modeling tools developed in 2024 and 2023 were used to assess watershed management strategies for phosphorus-related impairments. The key takeaways from this work were:

- WRFs total phosphorus reductions beyond 0.5 mg/L have minimal impact on water quality in the Skokie River and West Fork
- Reduction in urban runoff loading would result in substantial improvement in water quality after WWTPs have achieved a total phosphorous limit of 0.5 mg/L
- The effect of enhanced reaeration has localized impact on improving low Dissolved Oxygen
- Bypassing the Skokie Lagoons would reduce Chlorophyll *a* levels due to shorter residence time

NBWW created an implementation plan and schedule informed by stakeholders based on the above takeaways. A 2025 public survey was distributed to NBWW members —including permittees, water treatment plants, non-profits, and agencies— and highlighted objectives such as improving water quality, meeting regulatory requirements, education, outreach, and collaboration. Through public surveys and meetings, stakeholders identified NBWW's post-NARP roles as implementation, ongoing monitoring, and advocacy. Many NBWW members felt current public engagement was adequate, but some recommended more targeted communications and sharing of member-specific watershed updates. Members also supported stream restoration, flood control, and lagoon maintenance actions, with most stakeholders favoring a 10- to 20-year timeframe for NARP compliance and expressing willingness to support phosphorus reduction efforts. Recommended actions in the NARP implementation plan are organized into three-time frames: short-term (less than 5 years), mid-term (5–15 years), and long-term (more than 15 years). This implementation schedule with realistic milestones allows the NBWW and other watershed stakeholders to pursue, support, and implement the NARP recommended measures.

NBWW NARP DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE



NBWW EDUCATION & OUTREACH SPONSORSHIPS

MS4 POLLUTION PREVENTION WORKSHOP

NBWW sponsored the May 21, 2025 MS4 Pollution Prevention Workshop hosted by the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (SMC) and McHenry County Planning & Development. The Workshop provided important information about pollution control and the MS4 Permit program. Featured speakers provided a unique insight into the MS4 audit process and updates to the MS4 program. Additional presentations provided guidance on good housekeeping practices vital to maintaining compliance and protecting water quality, followed by case studies of best management practices implemented by Lake and McHenry County transportation entities. The workshop had 72 in-person attendees and over 120 virtual attendees. Visit the *Lake County SMC* website for the presentations.

WINTER BEST PRACTICES WORKSHOPS

The NBWW sponsored nine Winter Best Practices Workshops (virtual/in-person) for Roadways, and Parking Lots and Sidewalks (Sept-Nov. 2025). The NBWW has sponsored and supported the Northeastern Illinois Regional Winter Best Practices Workshops since 2021. The workshops aim to help municipalities and public works facilities implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce the amount of salt used in operations and to address NPDES Permit Requirements. Watershed workgroup members were highly encouraged to attend these workshops and were offered a discount code to reduce the cost of attendance. Over 1,200 individuals were trained both in person and virtually through these workshops.

Alana Bartolai, LCHD, presents "What is Deicing" at the Winter Best Practices Workshop in Libertyville, IL on September 30, 2025.

LAKE COUNTY CALIBRATION EVENT

The NBWW also sponsored a Lake County Calibration Event on November 4, 2025 at Lake County Divison of Transporation. This free event was targeted towards people who are responsible for calibrating snow removal vehicles or those that will be training their staff on how to calibrate. Participants chose a one-hour timeslot to have a one-on-one calibration session with Force America representatives to prepare for the winter season. This event sold out for the 2nd year in a row and was a big success in helping our local winter maintenance workers better understand vehicle calibration. Ten entities from around the county attended this year!

The NBWW encourages members to look for ways to reduce road salt use while ensuring safe travel on transportation surfaces. Check out the *Salt Smart Collaborative* and *Lake County SMC* websites for resources to use and share on winter BMPs.

A Calibration Event attendee calibrates their vehicle with a Force America representative on November 5, 2025.

NBWW MEMBERS

2025 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES $202,218 & 44 NBWW MEMBERS

32 AGENCY MEMBERS

- City of Evanston
- City of Highland Park
- City of Lake Forest
- City of North Chicago
- City of Park City
- City of Waukegan
- Cook County
- Cook County Dept. of Trans. & Highways
- Illinois Department of Transportation
- Lake County Division of Transporation
- Lake County Health Department
- Lake County Forest Preserve District
- Libertyville Township
- North Shore Water Reclamation District
- Skokie Consolidated Drainage District
- Union One Middle Fork Drainage District
- Union One West Fork Drainage District
- Vernon Township
- Village of Bannockburn
- Village of Deerfield
- Village of Glencoe
- Village of Glenview
- Village of Green Oaks
- Village of Lincolnshire
- Village of Morton Grove
- Village of Niles
- Village of Northbrook
- Village of Northfield
- Village of Riverwoods
- Village of Skokie
- Village of Wilmette
- Village of Winnetka

12 ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

- Chicago Botanical Garden
- Christopher Burke Engineering
- Deerfield Park District
- Engineering Resource Associates Consultants
- Friends of the Chicago River
- Geosyntec Consultants
- Gewalt Hamilton
- Hey & Associates
- Illinois Sierra Club
- Lake County Stormwater Management Commission
- Lake Forest Open Lands
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

2026 WORKGROUP GOALS

NPDES PERMITTING

- Perform and analyze watershed monitoring results and implement the NBWW Monitoring Strategy
- Compile the *March 31, 2025 - March 31, 2026* NBWW monitoring data in a format to be included in an annual report that satifies NPDES water quality reporting requirements
- Continue to provide NBWW members with an annual scorecard and benefits pertaining to their NPDES permit requirements and MCMs, with additional support following August 1, 2025 permit updates

WATER QUALITY

- Evaluation of February 2026 chloride levels to determine high chloride NBWW monitoring sites, and provide outreach to tributary entities
- Evaluate next steps for microbial source tracking based on 2025 sampling results
- Complete DO sampling (Fall 2026) after implementation of Skokie River streambank stabilization and compare to 2025 DO results. Utilize this data to inform NARP implementation measures
- Use management scenarios created from NBWW NARP to guide NARP Implementation next steps

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

- Continue to host meetings that provide education and outreach targeted towards achieving attainment of water quality standards and designated uses for the watershed
- Support the North Branch Watershed Planning Committee and the North Branch Watershed Consortium through fostering general membership forums
- Continue to sponsor local winter best practice education and outreach efforts, which will help achieve NBWW bylaws and objectives

NBWW MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

NBWW MEMBERSHIP DUES PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT COST SAVINGS TO THE WATERSHED AND INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES.

Over $200,000 Saved Every Year

General NPDES Permit No. ILR40, Part V, Item A

- An individual monitoring program mamaged by a MS4 community can cost upwards of $10,000 annually.
- The NBWW annual water quality and monitoring program costs $82,000 on average.
- Collectively, the workgroup saves the watershed over $200,000 annually thanks to collaborative monitoring.

MS4 Permit Compliance for Chlorides

General NPDES Permit No. ILR40, Part III, Item D

- "If permittee performs any deicing activities that can cause or contribute to a violation of an applicable State chloride water standard...
- The permitee shall participate in a watershed group, where feasible, organized to implement control measures which will reduce the chloride concentration in any receiving stream in the watershed."

NARP Implementation

NPDES Permit Special Condition for POTWs and WRFs

- NBWW members worked with Geosyntec Consultants to fulfill this Special Condition by submitting a NARP report in December 2025.
- The NARP includes water quality goals, load reduction targets, and nutrient-reducing projects for NBWW members.
- Development of this NARP was supported by membership dues, and implementation is ongoing.

NBWW 2025 MONITORING SITES

Collaborative Monitoring and Reporting

General NPDES Permit No. ILR40, Part V, item A.b.x.

- NBWW has designed and implemented a watershsed monitoring program.
- NBWW assesses the water quality of the water bodies and the sources of pollutants.
- Monitoring data is analyzed and summarized into a comprehensive report to meet Illinois EPA annual submittal requirements.