

NBWW WORKPLAN 2018-2023

North
Branch
Chicago
River
Watershed
Workgroup

The NBWW is currently operating under the 2018-2023 Workplan. The NBWW Workplan will be updated in 2026 after the completion and submission of the Nutrient Assessment Reduction Plan (NARP), December 2025.

Last Updated: 11.10.2021

Introduction

The North Branch of the Chicago River watershed encompasses over 95 square miles, with northern and southern boundaries roughly extending from Illinois Route 132 (Grand Avenue) in the City of Waukegan in Lake County south to Dempster Street in Morton Grove in Cook County. The total watershed area is 60,658 acres, with 32,240 acres in Lake County and 28,418 acres in Cook County. The watershed is comprised of twenty-five municipalities, eleven townships and four drainage districts. The North Branch of the Chicago River is formed from three tributary streams: the 17-mile Skokie River, 24-mile Middle Fork and the 14-mile West Fork. From their origins in Lake County, these tributaries flow south into Cook County where they converge to form the main stem of the North Branch of the Chicago River.

In response to concerns about water quality, a local group of communities, Publicly Owned Treatment Works Facilities (POTWs) and other organizations have come together to form the North Branch Chicago River Watershed Workgroup (NBWW) and better determine the stressors to the aquatic systems through a long-term water quality monitoring program.

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. Develop and implement short and long-term viable management strategies and recommendations that accurately address water quality problems identified by the monitoring program.

Vision

A watershed where biodiversity is high and streams fully support their designated uses.

Long Term Goals (2018-2030)

- Water bodies meet or exceed water quality standards and designated uses within the North Branch of the Chicago River in Lake County and Cook County.

Short Term Goals

- The Workgroup will develop a database of monitoring data including fish, macroinvertebrates, habitat, and water and sediment chemistry.
- The Workgroup will implement a comprehensive monitoring program that includes chemical, physical, and biological components that accurately identifies the quality of the aquatic ecosystems as well as stressors associated with non-attainment of water quality standards and designated uses.
- The monitoring program will be refined based on first-year implementation and advice from industry experts.
- Lake County Stormwater Management Commission will update the North Branch of the Chicago River Watershed-Based Plan with support through matching funds from the NBWW.

- The Workgroup will develop a chloride reduction strategy.
- The Workgroup will develop a Nutrient Assessment and Reduction Program (NARP).
- The Workgroup will develop and implement interim/short-term management strategies to address water quality issues identified during the monitoring program.
- The Workgroup will identify nonpoint source pollution issues and develop and implement short and long-term strategies to address these issues (NPDES Phase II).
- 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.

Strategy 1 – Monitoring and Water Quality Assessment

OBJECTIVE 1:

Assess water quality status and trends in the watershed and enhance these efforts as impairments and pollution sources are identified and resources allow (see Attachment A NBWW scorecard).

5-YEAR ACTION STEPS

The Workgroup’s Monitoring & Water Quality Impairment Abatement Committee will:

- Annually review the monitoring program to assess site locations, data parameters, and budget.
- Consult with outside experts to ensure the most efficient use of resources in data collection, and that appropriate parameters are being monitored to achieve the goals of the NBWW.
- Make data available for watershed planning and to Workgroup members.
- Use monitoring results to identify the extent of the impaired waterbodies and utilize water quality models to prioritize remediation efforts.
- Analyze monitoring results to pinpoint the sources of pollution.
- Compile the data in a format to be included in an annual report prepared to satisfy the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) water quality monitoring permit reporting requirements.
- Use the monitoring results to evaluate effectiveness of watershed projects and initiatives.
- Develop and maintain appropriate water quality models of the watershed to assess attainment of the Workgroup’s long-term goals.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Assess the feasibility of creating a watershed-wide database of monitoring data.

5-YEAR ACTION STEPS

The Workgroup's Monitoring & Water Quality Impairment Abatement Committee will:

- Determine data needs of Workgroup members.
- Identify other databases and evaluate the ease of interfacing with them, cost to create and maintain them, and the frequency that members query the database.

Strategy 2 – Regulatory Relationships and Requirements

OBJECTIVE 1:

Create a working relationship with Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA), US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), and other agencies with regulatory oversight within the watershed to discuss NPDES Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs) and Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) permit requirements and explore the feasibility of alternative means to achieve water quality goals, such as the implementation of projects to improve water quality and feasibility of a water quality trading program.

5-YEAR ACTION STEPS

The NBWW Executive Board & Staff will:

- Meet one-on-one with Regulators
 - Discuss the Workgroup's goals, implementation plan, and resource needs.
 - Keep them informed of Workgroup progress.
 - Stay abreast of regulatory program nuances and new requirements.
 - Explore options regarding alternative methods to achieve water quality goals.
 - Explore economically beneficial permit allowances for POTWs.
- Provide input to the IEPA regarding the TMDL report for the North Branch watershed based on data obtained during the Workgroup's water quality monitoring effort.
- Develop a chloride reduction strategy that includes an education and outreach component (such as involvement in workshops or training opportunities).
- Attend other workgroup meetings or trainings, as time permits, to stay informed about what other groups are doing and proposed regulatory changes.
- Create an annual report to satisfy the NPDES water quality monitoring component of the annual permit reporting requirements of its members.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Encourage and support MS4's to review and revise local ordinances to include innovative water quality guidelines and best management practices (BMPs).

5-YEAR ACTION STEPS

The NBWW Executive Board & NBWW Staff will:

- Identify MS4s who are leaders in this field.
- Organize an annual tour/training event of BMPs and green infrastructure projects/sites.
- Provide support and attendance at Municipal meetings as requested, for technical support.
- Identify MS4 permit requirements that the NBWW can provide supplemental services to address.

Strategy 3 – Water Quality Improvement Initiatives

OBJECTIVE 1:

Encourage MS4 communities to identify and implement Water Quality Improvement initiatives and assist with developing funding and support for these initiatives.

5-YEAR ACTION STEPS

To support MS4 member initiatives, the NBWW Staff will:

- Create a list of potential initiatives.
- Provide education about the benefits of these initiatives.
- Encourage municipalities to adopt at least one initiative.
- Attend board meetings when these initiatives are being discussed.
- Provide input on funding sources and strategies, educational and marketing materials.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Identify funding sources and provide support for watershed projects.

5-YEAR ACTION STEP

- Develop a list of high priority watershed improvement projects based on the action plan recommendations from the North Branch of the Chicago River Watershed-Based Plan.
- Investigate and list all possible sources of funding, including in-kind services and local sponsor contributions to implement watershed improvement projects.
- Inquire how other groups are funding watershed projects.
- Assist in identifying and coordinating multi-jurisdictional implementation projects.
- Enlist watershed experts to review funding proposals for projects and offer advice to applicants, helping them to develop better, more competitive proposals.
- Request funding and/or in-kind services and/or draft permit language.
- Manage and administer the funding sources.
- Develop educational/outreach materials or other support services for the project.
- Implement the chloride reduction strategy.

Strategy 4 – Leadership & Engagement

OBJECTIVE 1:

Grow our members into game changer leaders through education, training, watershed experiences, and role modeling.

5-YEAR ACTION STEPS

- Allow every member to express and employ their talents, ideas, experiences, skills and expertise.
- Sponsor quarterly guest speaker series to educate about pressing watershed issues and to identify collaborative opportunities to address them.
- Collaborate with existing groups to sponsor a variety of Watershed awareness events (i.e. stream/lake clean ups, canoe trips, Earth Day events, deicing events, etc.) with an education component.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Develop an education and information program that identifies benefits the Workgroup provides to the public (stakeholders) in the watershed for recruitment of members and public education.

5-YEAR ACTION STEPS

NBWW Staff with assistance from the Workgroup will:

- Maintain an informative and useful web site.
- Prepare an annual accomplishments publications.
- Host events and speaking engagements with public officials in order to update them on crucial watershed issues and identify partnership opportunities.
- Reach out to additional public-sector stakeholders – townships, park districts, drainage districts, school districts etc. - to inform them of the Workgroup’s activities and invite them to become Workgroup members.
- Reach out to private sector stakeholders – developers, consultants, homeowner and lake owner associations, large property owners, farmers, churches – to inform them of the Workgroup’s activities and invite them to partner with us.
- Recognize individuals and groups who are making substantial contribution to the Workgroup’s Vision.

OBJECTIVE 3:

Maintain day to day and annual operations of the Workgroup.

ANNUAL ACTION STEPS

- Develop, adopt, and disseminate an annual:
 - Workplan for the Workgroup.
 - Budget for the Workgroup.

- Report on Workgroup accomplishments.
- Review member dues annually, and send out notices for dues payment.
- Review Workgroup Bylaws.
- Organize and facilitate 4 quarterly general member meetings each year in conjunction with the North Branch Planning Committee (February, May and August meetings) and North Branch Watershed Consortium (November quarterly meeting).
- Review NBWW scorecard (see Appendix A) annually to monitor progress towards achieving the workplan goals and objectives.