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ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION TO BEGIN ON NORTHERLY ISLAND

Park District Expands Programs for Campers, At-Risk Youth, as Army Corps of Engineers Begins Work

CHICAGO - Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Park District General Superintendent Michael Kelly announced today that the ecological restoration of Northerly Island Park will begin in the fall as the park becomes a new urban camping hub for families, children and at-risk youth.

"Northerly Island is undergoing a tremendous transformation to reflect the natural coastline of Lake Michigan, and as part of that transformation, we will be providing families and children with more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and the park with onsite camping," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "We will also exclusively reserve opportunities for at-risk youth to participate, giving children who grew up in the city and likely never camped, the chance to learn outdoor skills and new responsibilities while having fun."

The total budget for the restoration project is \$4.3 million, with \$2.8 million covered by a federal Great Lakes Fisheries Ecosystem Restoration (GLFER) grant. The Park District is providing \$1.5 million out of the reserve from revenues generated by the concert venue at Northerly Island. The concert revenues will also help fund the cost of the camping programs, including spots for at-risk youth.

The new programs will add 900 family camping opportunities at Northerly Island annually; 600 of these slots are for family campers and 300 are for young people ages 12-to-15 in the Wilderness Camping program. Some of these opportunities are timed to coincide with breaks in the Chicago Public Schools year-round school schedule.

"Expanding the camping programs will help Chicagoans of all ages experience nature right here in the city," said Michael Kelly, General Superintendent and CEO of the Chicago Park District. "Research has shown that participating in wilderness programs have a major impact on the emotional and intellectual development of a child. We plan to reach as many children as possible, including slots designated exclusively for at-risk youth who may have never even considered camping as an activity."



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Building on the Urban Campers program, which offers 180 camping spots for 9-12 year-olds, Wilderness Camping will provide young people with two weeks of sailing, adventure courses and survival skills, including shelter building, flint knapping and fire building. During each two week session, instructors will teach children outdoor survival skills during the first week of activities, and then during week two campers take the lead and perfect the skills they have learned. To encourage future camping excursions, participants will be provided a sleeping bag, fishing pole and compass to take home.

Offered six-times a year throughout three seasons, the Nature Oasis Family Camping program will allow families from across the city to enjoy outdoor activities, include fishing, bird watching, kayaking, stewardship hikes and storytelling around the campfire. The new program will bring up to 100 camping enthusiasts to Northerly Island Park six times a year, connecting residents to nature in the city and striving to create life-long stewards of this unique nature park.

Under the new program, experienced campers will be allowed to bring their own tents and equipment, instead of the current policy of using camping gear provided by the Park District. For inexperienced campers, the Park district will continue to offer equipment, supplies and assistance.

The Field Museum, Adler Planetarium and Shedd Aquarium are adding depth to the programs by providing experts and educational opportunities. Scientists from the Field Museum will work with campers to identify birds and mammals at Northerly Island and Adler Planetarium staff will teach campers how to read the stars and identify planets by telescope. The Shedd Aquarium is creating and monitoring Mud Puppy habitats to help prepare the new habitat area at the park.

The new programs will start to be offered in 2013 and will continue to increase to full capacity after the park is completed in 2014.

The Park District currently offers 40 camping spots four times a year at Northerly Island and a rotation of neighborhood parks, and 180 spots for 9-12 year olds. It also offers 80 spots in its Under Illinois Skies initiative, which brings children to campgrounds outside the city with an emphasis on astronomy.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will begin Phase One of the restoration plan in the fall. In 2010, the Chicago Park District completed the Framework Plan for Northerly Island and recently, the Park District Board of Commissioners approved an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that will develop the southern 40 acres of Northerly Island. The scope of work includes the restoration of shoreline habitats, coastal wetland and other coastal plant communities. The Army Corps of Engineers will install a pond hydraulically controlled through Lake Michigan ground water, multi-purpose trail, nature trails, boardwalks, camping areas, viewpoints, rolling hills, native plantings, and tree plantings.

Construction is expected to begin in November 2012 and be completed in spring of 2014 which also includes a five-year plant maintenance program with portions of the park, such as the trail, opening in the fall of 2012.

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