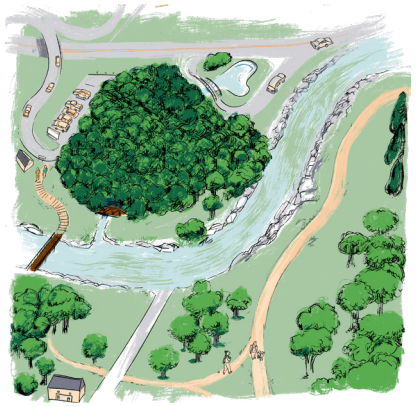
This document is part of MPC's 'Understanding Our Rivers' research project, which notes how the Chicago river system and its surrounding communities have changed over time. Consistent with the project structure, the findings are organized into the themes of inviting, productive, and living.



Understanding the Chicago River System (All Reaches)

The Chicago River system is comprised of the North Branch, Main Branch, South Branch of the Chicago River, the Calumet River, and the Des Plaines River. Together, these waterways total more than 150 miles, making the rivers a defining feature of the city's landscape and an incredibly powerful asset for Chicago and its communities. As a vital economic engine, destination for recreation, and habitat for fish, birds, and other wildlife, the Chicago River System has the potential to support thriving neighborhoods, connect communities, and ensure environmental and economic well-being for the entire region.

KEY TO ICONS

Increasing | Decreasing | Same or Similar | Good | Fair | Poor

How has the area changed over time?

(2014-2022)

Demographics

Chicago's population was stable between 2014 and 2022. While tracts far from the river lost population, the population near the river grew—in fact, the population in tracts closest to the river grew by 8%, mostly driven by population growth in the Main Stem downtown.

Population change along Chicago's river system

	Total population (2014)	Total population (2022)	% Change in population	# Change in population
Tracts by river proximity				
All tracts citywide	2,712,209	2,721,126	0.3%	8,917
All river tracts	322,090	346,447	7.6%	24,357
All river adjacent tracts	543,605	557,981	2.6%	14,376
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	1,846,514	1,816,697	−1.6%	−29,817
River tracts by reach				
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	70,396	72,871	3.5%	2,475
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	62,601	63,493	1.4%	892
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	74,607	97,717	31.0%	23,110
Reach 4 (South Branch)	67,441	67,298	−0.2%	−143
Reach 5 (Calumet)	40,245	38,155	−5.2%	−2,090
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	6,800	6,913	1.7%	113

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010-2014 and 2018-2022 Five-Year Estimates

The growth looked different by racial group. The population of white and Asian residents near the river increased (7% and 38%, respectively), while the population of Black residents remained stable, and the population of Latinx residents decreased (0.4% and 6%, respectively). Chicago lost a greater percent of Black residents overall (10%), whereas the Latinx population remained stable citywide even as fewer Latinx residents lived near the river.

Population change by race and ethnicity along Chicago's river system

	% Change in total population (2014-2022)	# Change in total population (2014-2022)	% Change in Black population	# Change in Black population	% Change in white population	# Change in white population	% Change in Latinx population	# Change in Latinx population	% Change in Asian population	# Change in Asian population
Tracts by river proximity										
All tracts citywide	0.3%	8,917	−9.5%	−81,381	2.1%	18,473	0.4%	2,784	22.1%	34,061
All river tracts	7.6%	24,357	−0.4%	−156	6.5%	9,326	−5.8%	−5,049	37.5%	16,549
All river adjacent tracts	2.6%	14,376	2.5%	1,823	2.8%	6,168	−4.0%	−7,784	12.3%	5,833
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	−1.6%	−29,817	−11.2%	−83,048	0.6%	2,980	3.1%	15,617	18.6%	11,678
River tracts by reach										
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	3.5%	2,475	−5.6%	−112	−0.7%	−302	1.1%	154	15.6%	1,897
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	1.4%	892	7.9%	186	5.0%	1,815	−22.5%	−4,103	53.4%	1,975
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	31.0%	23,110	3.2%	187	17.8%	8,535	76.2%	4,098	64.9%	8,451
Reach 4 (South Branch)	−0.2%	−143	0.9%	62	12.0%	1,256	−12.2%	−4,149	19.6%	2,879
Reach 5 (Calumet)	−5.2%	−2,090	−3.0%	−677	−18.2%	−478	−8.6%	−1,254	212.6%	79
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	1.7%	113	220.6%	196	−27.6%	−1,500	45.6%	205	218.6%	1,268

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010-2014 and 2018-2022 Five-Year Estimates

Socioeconomics

Since 2014, the median household income in Chicago increased at a slightly higher rate of 53% near the river, compared to the citywide rate of 49%. Owners of tracts adjacent to, but not directly along, the river saw an even higher income increase of 59%.

Changes in household incomes along Chicago's river system

	Average median HH income (2014)	Average median HH income (2022)	% Change in average HH income	# Change in average HH income
Tracts by river proximity				
All tracts citywide	$49,019	$73,178	49.3%	$24,159
All river tracts	$60,888	$92,926	52.6%	$32,037
All river adjacent tracts	$58,240	$92,469	58.8%	$34,229
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	$45,063	$65,654	45.7%	$20,591
River tracts by reach				
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	$70,977	$98,308	38.5%	$27,330
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	$78,892	$128,485	62.9%	$49,593
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	$91,012	$137,369	50.9%	$46,356
Reach 4 (South Branch)	$38,088	$59,752	56.9%	$21,664
Reach 5 (Calumet)	$29,957	$43,910	46.6%	$13,953
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	$45,036	$77,395	71.9%	$32,359

HH stands for Household
Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010-2014 and 2018-2022 Five-Year Estimates

Rental costs increased slightly more in river tracts (39%) and river adjacent tracts (40%) than they did citywide tracts (33%).

Changes in gross rents along Chicago's river system

	Average median rent (2014)	Average median rent (2022)	% Change in average median rent	# Change in average median rent
Tracts by river proximity				
All tracts citywide	$992	$1,316	32.6%	$324
All river tracts	$1,081	$1,499	38.6%	$418
All river adjacent tracts	$1,050	$1,466	39.6%	$416
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	$966	$1,254	29.8%	$288
River tracts by reach				
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	$992	$1,420	43.2%	$428
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	$1,199	$1,752	46.1%	$553
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	$1,707	$2,371	38.9%	$664
Reach 4 (South Branch)	$827	$1,128	36.5%	$301
Reach 5 (Calumet)	$756	$937	23.9%	$181
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	$1,110	$1,309	18.0%	$199

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010-2014 and 2018-2022 Five-Year Estimates

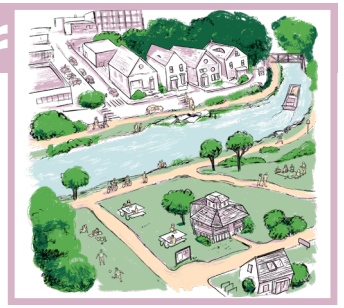
Home values increased along the river (38%) at a similar rate as the city (37%). Home values increased slightly more in river adjacent tracts (42%).

Changes in home values along Chicago's river system

	Average median home value (2014)	Average median home value (2022)	% Change in average median home value	# Change in average median home value
Tracts by river proximity				
All tracts citywide	$239,511	$328,859	37.3%	$89,349
All river tracts	$279,536	$384,242	37.5%	$104,706
All river adjacent tracts	$299,062	$423,529	41.6%	$124,467
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	$219,018	$297,720	35.9%	$78,702
River tracts by reach				
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	$330,247	$411,439	24.6%	$81,192
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	$383,528	$569,767	48.6%	$186,239
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	$374,385	$483,858	29.2%	$109,474
Reach 4 (South Branch)	$200,895	$293,073	45.9%	$92,178
Reach 5 (Calumet)	$109,123	$138,251	26.7%	$29,128
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	$201,550	$328,098	62.8%	$126,548

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010-2014 and 2018-2022 Five-Year Estimates

Inviting Rivers Data



General Findings

Land use data provides a picture of Chicago riverfronts and the number of inviting opportunities, such as riverside access for pedestrians, retail opportunities, and recreation. This data reveals that Chicago's riverfronts are inviting in places, but that most such opportunities are on the North Side, revealing there is much work to be done to make Chicago's rivers inviting systemwide.

Overall, areas near the river have more industrial land uses, utility, and waste—remnants of days when waterways were predominantly used for industry, particularly in industrial corridors along the South Branch of the Chicago River and the Calumet River, which have significantly more such land uses than the other river reaches.

There is also far less single-family housing near those rivers than in the city overall. Single family homes predominate on the north side, near the North Branch/North Shore and North Branch/Goose Island river areas. Significantly more multi-family homes than the city average are located in the Main Branch/South Branch area. Commercial uses are almost exclusively located in this area, as well.

There are large amounts of open space alongside the Des Plaines River, representing 77% of the land use. This space consists primarily of Forest Preserve District of Cook County land and the North Branch/North Shore reach, which has significant amounts of Park District land. Open space is a much smaller proportion of the land uses across other reaches.

Since 2010, the amount of open space near the river has increased, while the city overall has seen a very slight decrease in open space. River areas have experienced a slight decrease in commercial uses, while commercial uses grew citywide. Otherwise, most land use in river areas has remained relatively stable and consistent with citywide land use trends.

Land uses along Chicago's river system
The share of each tract grouping's total land area comprised of each land use category in 2020

Tracts by river proximity	% share SF residential	% share MF residential	% share commercial	% share industrial	% share institutional	% share open space	% share transportation	% share ROW	% share utility and waste	% share vacant
All tracts citywide	32.2%	15.8%	14.2%	9.0%	8.0%	5.4%	4.1%	6.8%	1.2%	3.2%
All river tracts	16.5%	10.8%	10.4%	16.7%	6.4%	9.9%	10.9%	10.2%	4.6%	3.3%
All river adjacent tracts	32.9%	19.1%	15.2%	10.0%	6.2%	5.3%	1.6%	5.3%	0.5%	3.4%
River tracts by reach										
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	46.7%	11.1%	6.4%	2.3%	10.3%	13.8%	0.2%	7.8%	0.3%	0.2%
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	22.5%	16.8%	28.9%	14.3%	4.6%	4.5%	1.0%	4.7%	0.5%	2.1%
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	3.0%	43.7%	30.5%	1.9%	7.5%	1.6%	3.3%	5.2%	0.5%	2.5%
Reach 4 (South Branch)	14.3%	5.8%	9.5%	40.4%	9.1%	0.8%	3.1%	10.8%	3.2%	2.8%
Reach 5 (Calumet)	9.7%	3.3%	2.4%	19.2%	3.6%	5.4%	25.3%	15.4%	10.0%	5.9%
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	5.6%	3.9%	6.4%	0.0%	7.2%	76.7%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Excludes the following land use categories: 'Other Residential' and 'Non Parcel or Unclassified.' SF stands for Single-Family; MF stands for Multi-Family, ROW stands for Right-of-Way.
Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning Land Use Inventory (2020)

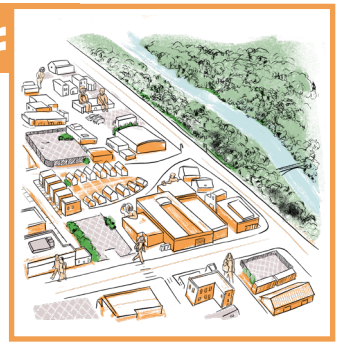
Connectivity and riverfront access vary across the city. There is greater trail coverage in less industrialized reaches of the Chicago River like the downtown (where 60% of the river edge has a trail) and the North Branch/North shore (where 98% of the river edge has a trail). The Calumet has the least trail coverage (6%).

Access to trails along Chicago's river system

	Length of existing trail (ft)	Length of river edge (ft)	% Share of river edge with a trail	# Total river trail access points
Citywide river edge	245	669	37.0%	313
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	129	132	98.0%	43
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	33	84	40.0%	186
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	23	38	60.0%	58
Reach 4 (South Branch)	17	90	18.0%	17
Reach 5 (Calumet)	14	258	6.0%	4
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	28	67	42.0%	5

Source: Chicago Department of Transportation, Chicago River Edge Access Study (2024)

Productive Rivers Data



General Findings

Our riverfronts are productive areas, typified by increasing jobs and decreasing vacancies. Specific economic indicators provide a picture of how the Chicago region depends on its rivers as business generators and employment hubs that grow jobs and strengthen the economy. The river—which runs through downtown and includes many industrial corridors—is a significant job provider. The City of Chicago had 1,320,135 jobs in 2021, and more than half (712,116) were located in river tracts. The majority of jobs (578,035) were located in the downtown river reach, Main Branch/South Branch.

Outside of the downtown, many of these jobs are also located along the South Branch reach, as well as the North Branch/Goose Island reach. A smaller amount are found in the other three reaches.

Since 2012, jobs in river tracts increased more than jobs citywide, indicating that employment is growing in businesses and industries located along the river. Most of this growth was centered in the downtown reach, and somewhat in the North Branch/Goose Island Reach, and the Calumet River.

Although Chicago jobs grew, from 2013 to 2023, the overall number of businesses decreased by almost 25% citywide and 31% in river areas. This decrease was relatively consistent across all river reaches. By 2023, there were 42,171 businesses in Chicago, and approximately a quarter (10,106) were in river tracts.

Change in businesses and jobs along Chicago's river system

	Total businesses (2013)	Total businesses (2023)	% Change in total businesses	# Change in total businesses	Total jobs (2012)	Total jobs (2021)	% Change in total jobs	# Change in total jobs
Tracts by river proximity								
All tracts citywide	56,115	42,171	−24.8%	−13,944	1,279,376	1,320,135	3.2%	40,759
All river tracts	14,629	10,106	−30.9%	−4,523	651,406	712,116	9.3%	60,710
All river adjacent tracts	12,595	10,193	−19.1%	−2,402	214,364	226,316	5.6%	11,952
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	28,891	21,872	−24.3%	−7,019	413,606	381,703	−7.7%	−31,903
River tracts by reach								
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	1,241	805	−35.1%	−436	15,873	17,614	11.0%	1,741
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	2,356	1,678	−28.8%	−678	47,852	53,045	10.9%	5,193
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	8,348	5,622	−32.7%	−2,726	525,396	578,035	10.0%	52,639
Reach 4 (South Branch)	1,956	1,517	−22.4%	−439	39,661	37,471	−5.5%	−2,190
Reach 5 (Calumet)	533	359	−32.6%	−174	8,731	12,320	41.1%	3,589
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	195	125	−35.9%	−70	13,893	13,631	−1.9%	−262

Source: City of Chicago data portal business licenses (2013 and 2023); U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (2012 and 2021)

In 2022, the city had 33,712 vacant parcels (meaning land with no development), with a vacancy rate of 6%—an increase of 5% from 2014. River areas, which have the same vacancy rate overall of 6%, saw a 4% decrease in vacant parcels during this time period, indicating that river areas were experiencing more turnover than across the city generally.

Much of this decrease was driven by the South Branch Reach and, to a lesser extent, the Calumet Reach. The North Branch/Goose Island river area saw a 13% increase in vacancy.

Change in vacancies along Chicago's river system

	Total vacant parcels (2014)	Total vacant parcels (2022)	% Share of parcels vacant (2014)	% Share of parcels vacant (2022)	% Change in vacant parcels	# Change in vacant parcels
Tracts by river proximity						
All tracts citywide	32,227	33,712	5.3%	5.6%	4.6%	1,485
All river tracts	4,562	4,396	6.3%	6.1%	−3.6%	−166
All river adjacent tracts	4,296	4,272	3.8%	3.8%	−0.6%	−24
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	23,369	25,044	5.6%	6.0%	7.2%	1,675
River tracts by reach						
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	132	109	0.7%	0.6%	−17.4%	−23
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	499	565	3.5%	4.0%	13.2%	66
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	402	386	6.1%	5.9%	−4.0%	−16
Reach 4 (South Branch)	1,101	956	6.5%	5.7%	−13.2%	−145
Reach 5 (Calumet)	2,425	2,376	15.6%	15.3%	−2.0%	−49
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	3	4	0.3%	0.4%	33.3%	1

Source: Cook County Assessor's Office (2014 and 2022)

Between 2015 and 2025, commercial development like office, industrial, and multifamily properties near the river saw an overall vacancy rate increase of 5 percentage points. This increase in vacancy of commercial properties (meaning units in existing buildings that are not occupied) was largely driven by the Main Stem and Goose Island reaches.

The asking rent price per square foot saw a moderate increase in commercial property near the river, most substantially in the South Branch Reach of the Chicago river (where there was an $11 increase per square foot). The average sale price of commercial property conversely decreased by $47 per square foot on average across the river citywide. This decrease was largely driven by the Main Stem Reach, which saw a $161 per square foot decrease. The North Branch/Goose Island Reach saw an increase in properties for sale, and these properties sold at much higher rates per square foot (a $223 increase) between 2015 and 2025.

Development conditions and property sales activity along Chicago's river system

Vacancy rates, asking rents, and sale prices for all office, industrial, and multifamily properties located 2 blocks of Chicago's river system by reach from 2015 to 2025

	Average vacancy rate (2015)	Average vacancy rate (2025)	% Change in vacancy rate	Average asking rent/sqft (2015)	Average asking rent/sqft (2025)	$ Change in asking rent/sqft	Average sale price/sqft (2015)	Average sale price/sqft (2025)	$ Change in sale price/sqft	# Total for sale properties (2015)	# Total for sale properties (2025)	# Change in for sale properties
City of Chicago	8.8%	13.8%	4.9%	$19.60	$25.52	$5.92	$178.25	$131.00	-$47.25	3,810	3,231	−579
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	12.1%	1.3%	−10.9%	$11.65	$15.63	$3.98	$99.00	$171.50	$72.50	27	6	−21
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	5.3%	24.1%	18.8%	$15.45	$20.85	$5.40	$117.50	$340.33	$222.83	41	97	56
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	12.0%	23.2%	11.2%	$33.97	$41.79	$7.83	$264.25	$103.00	-$161.25	124	91	−33
Reach 4 (South Branch)	8.9%	2.3%	−6.6%	$7.28	$18.31	$11.03	$51.00	$63.50	$12.50	42	25	−17
Reach 5 (Calumet)	6.1%	6.2%	0.1%	$5.73	$9.06	$3.32	$28.00	$33.50	$5.50	18	16	−2
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	7.3%	15.0%	7.7%	$14.86	$19.92	$5.06	$100.25	$71.33	-$28.92	63	46	−17

City of Chicago includes the entire city. Source: CoStar Group, costar.com



General Findings

Our riverfronts are living, but there's still much to be done to improve the health of the rivers.

By analyzing data, such as fish diversity, open space, and combined sewer overflows (CSOs), we can better understand Chicago's rivers and how they can serve as supportive places for human and ecological health.

The river system has historically been used for industry in Chicago, a legacy that continues to this day. Some river areas have experienced significant improvements in water quality, while others are still struggling. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Cook County (MWRD) maintains a monitoring station in each reach area of the river system. We used this monitoring station data to evaluate fish species diversity and CSO events over time.

The biodiversity of the Chicago river system's fish population has come a long way. In the 1970s, there were fewer than 10 species of fish in our river system. Today, thanks to decades of habitat restoration and advocacy from organizations highlighted throughout this website and beyond, there are more than 80 recorded species. Fish move throughout the river system, and the number of recorded species in a given reach provide only a snapshot in time based on when the data was collected. Though there are these limitations to collecting fish species counts, MWRD monitoring station data averages over time show that fish diversity was lower in the North Branch/North Shore and higher in the other reaches. There was no fish diversity data for the Des Plaines reach or the Main Branch/ Downtown reach.

Fish biodiversity along Chicago's river system

	# Total species of fish
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore) - Albany Ave	4
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island) - Wilson Ave	19
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island) - Diversey Pkwy	14
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown) - Wells St	No Data
Reach 4 (South Branch) - Loomis St	14
Reach 4 (South Branch) - Archer Ave	No Data
Reach 4 (South Branch) - Cicero Ave	29
Reach 5 (Calumet) - Halsted St	19
Reach 5 (Calumet) - Indiana Ave	22
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	No Data

Fish species diversity is based on the annual average of each station between 2016 to 2021. Albany and Wilson Ave stations sit near the border between reach 1 and 2. The MWRD does not monitor fish species diversity in reach 3 or 6.

Source: Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, GeoHub.

Chicago has a combined sewer system, meaning that sewage and stormwater from rainfall and melting snow enters the same pipe system. When this system is overwhelmed, the combined sewage and stormwater is emptied directly into our river system, polluting the river and increasing the risk of flooding. This emptying of sewage and stormwater into the river system is called a combined sewer overflow (CSO). Across almost all reaches, the number of CSO events was significantly higher in 2016 than in 2021. In particular, CSO events in the North Branch/Goose Island reach decreased from triple digits to single digits, while events in the South Branch decreased from triple to low double digits. CSO events are complex: the severity of each event depends on the location, amount of impervious surfaces that exacerbate runoff, weather conditions, and other factors. MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan, also known as the Deep Tunnel, has played a major role in the reduction of CSOs in the Chicago river system. MWRD has been building a system of tunnels and reservoirs designed to hold water during major storm events

and prevent CSO's in Chicago's rivers since 1975. The project is still in process, with an additional stage of one of the largest reservoirs planned to be operational by 2032. Despite this progress, our region has not seen a complete elimination of CSO events, and some years continue to see more severe CSOs than others. It is important to continue to make ongoing efforts to reduce stormwater runoff and mitigate CSO events, as the effects of climate change, such as the heavy rainfall events we saw in the summer of 2026, continue to pose pollution and flooding challenges to the Chicago region.

Combined sewer overflows along Chicago's river system

The total number of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) across all outfall locations along Chicago's river system by reach, 2016 to 2021

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	# Total CSOs (2016-2021)	% Change in total CSOs (2016-2021)
City of Chicago	1,025	1,879	601	494	244	33	4,276	−97%
Reach 1 - North Branch/North Shore	161	197	61	44	12	0	475	−100%
Reach 2 - North Branch/Goose Island	462	923	218	238	113	8	1,962	−98%
Reach 3 - Main Stem Downtown	122	234	36	39	1	3	435	−98%
Reach 4 - South Branch	248	484	264	153	90	12	1,251	−95%
Reach 5 - Calumet	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0%
Reach 6 - Des Plaines	32	40	22	20	28	10	152	−69%

Source: Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Chicago, processed by The Field Museum

Most of the reaches are surrounded by land uses that are relatively low in open space, with the exception of the North Branch/North Shore, which has a moderate amount of open space, and the Des Plaines River, which has a very high amount of open space.

Change in open space land use along Chicago's river system

	% Share open space (2010)	% Share open space (2020)	% Change in share open space	# Change in acres of open space
Tracts by river proximity				
All tracts citywide	5.7%	5.4%	−0.3%	−346
All river tracts	8.4%	9.8%	1.4%	384
All river adjacent tracts	4.7%	5.3%	0.6%	106
All non river and non river adjacent tracts	4.9%	3.6%	−1.3%	−836
River tracts by reach				
Reach 1 (North Branch/North Shore)	12.1%	13.8%	1.7%	69
Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)	3.4%	4.5%	1.1%	31
Reach 3 (Main Stem Downtown)	1.8%	1.5%	−0.3%	−9
Reach 4 (South Branch)	0.5%	0.8%	0.3%	15
Reach 5 (Calumet)	2.1%	5.4%	3.3%	346
Reach 6 (Des Plaines)	80.8%	76.7%	−4.1%	−69

The % Change in open space reflects the percentage point change, or the difference in the share of each tract groupings that were comprised of open space land use between 2010 and 20209.
Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning Land Use Inventory (2010 and 2020)

Methodology

Research Approach
This project examined how areas (census tracts) along the river changed over time, from approximately 2015 to 2025. Data related to demographic, socioeconomic, and development changes, and ecological and river quality changes, were compiled to understand how areas along the river evolved over the decade. Trends/variables included:

- Population changes by racial and ethnic group
- Rent and home value changes
- Job, business, and vacancy rate changes
- Land uses
- Trails and access points
- Community projects and activations
- Fish count and water quality changes

In addition to breaking down the river geography at the citywide and "reach"-level scale, we examined data by census tracts based on their proximity to the river:

- River tracts: Census tracts that touch a river in the City of Chicago
- River adjacent tracts: Tracts that touch the "river tracts." Data in these tracts act as a proxy to the nearby neighborhood in order to differentiate general neighborhood trends from findings that are unique to tracts that directly abut the river.

Research Questions
For each data area, we asked the following questions, which allow for a nuanced look at how river areas have developed, when compared to other parts of the city:

- How do trends/changes compare across specific river areas (aka "reach areas")?
- How do trends/changes along the river compare to changes in areas immediately adjacent to river census tracts (i.e. comparison group)?
- How do trends/changes along the river compare to changes across the city as a whole (all city census tracts)?