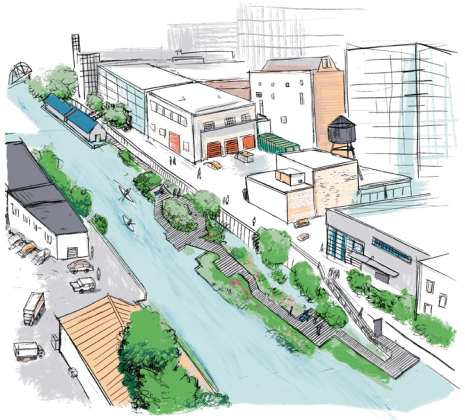
This document is part of MPC's 'Understanding Our Rivers' research project, which notes how the Chicago river system and its surrounding communities have changed over time. Consistent with the project structure, the findings are organized into the themes of inviting, productive, and living.



Understanding the North Branch/Goose Island (Reach 2)

The North Branch / Goose Island Branch includes the North Branch of the Chicago River, Goose Island, and North Branch Canal. Bounded by Ontario Street to the south and Gunnison to the north, the overall length is 4.5 miles. It touches the community areas of Lincoln Square, Albany Park, North Center, Irving Park, Avondale, Lincoln Park, Logan Square, West Town, and Near North Side. The southern portion of the reach that includes Goose Island is characterized by its industrial legacy, with a more industrial and commercial landscape than the northern end. The canal is home to Urban Rivers' Wild Mile. Further north in this reach has a more residential character, and is home to Clark Park and Horner Park.



KEY TO ICONS

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

How has the area changed over time?

(2014-2022)

Demographics

The population in the North Branch/Goose Island reach has remained relatively steady. Population growth was greatest among Asian and white residents. The Asian population saw a 53% increase with 1,975 Asian residents. The white population grew by 1,815 residents, which was a 5% increase from the population of white residents in 2014.

Population change along Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)

	Total population (2014)	Total population (2022)	% Change in population	# Change in population
River tracts - Reach 2	62,601	63,493	1.4%	892
River adjacent tracts - Reach 2	135,293	136,680	1.0%	1,387
Citywide river tracts	322,090	346,447	7.6%	24,357
All tracts citywide	2,712,209	2,721,126	0.3%	8,917

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

There were significant losses of Latinx residents both in river and adjacent tracts – a decrease of roughly 4,100 (23%) and 6,900 (19%) respectively. While this was a trend across citywide river tracts, the rates of Latinx population loss in this reach was about three to four times greater than citywide river tracts, indicating this was a significantly more salient trend in this reach.

Population change by race and ethnicity along Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)

	% 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
River tracts - Reach 2	1.4%	892	7.9%	186	5.0%	1,815	−22.5%	−4,103	53.4%	1,975
River adjacent tracts - Reach 2	1.0%	1,387	−3.8%	−321	5.1%	4,117	−18.9%	−6,948	28.7%	1,902
Citywide river tracts	7.6%	24,357	−0.4%	−156	6.5%	9,326	−5.8%	−5,049	37.5%	16,549
All tracts citywide	0.3%	8,917	−9.5%	−81,381	2.1%	18,473	0.4%	2,784	22.1%	34,061

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

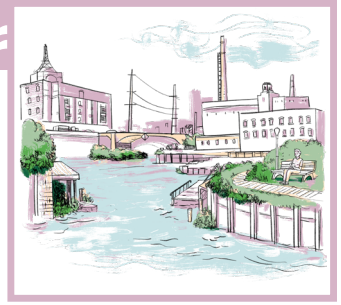
Socioeconomics

The median household income, home value, and rent are all higher and increasing at a greater rate in this reach than along the river citywide. This trend largely mirrors the trends in the river adjacent tracts, indicating it may be part of an overall neighborhood increase in household incomes and costs.

Changes in household incomes, rents, and home values along Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)

	Average median HH income (2014)	Average median HH income (2022)	% Change in average HH income	Average median rent (2014)	Average median rent (2022)	% Change in average median rent	Average median home value (2014)	Average median home value (2022)	% Change in average median home value
River tracts - Reach 2	$78,892	$128,485	62.9%	$1,199	$1,752	46.1%	$383,528	$569,767	48.6%
River adjacent tracts - Reach 2	$81,754	$140,461	71.8%	$1,219	$1,875	53.8%	$462,859	$699,822	51.2%
Citywide river tracts	$60,888	$92,926	52.6%	$1,081	$1,499	38.6%	$279,536	$384,242	37.5%
All tracts citywide	$49,019	$73,178	49.3%	$992	$1,316	32.6%	$239,511	$328,859	37.3%

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



Land Use

The area saw a slight decline in commercial land use between 2010 and 2020 (about 32 acres of commercial land use were lost , or 1.2 percentage points), though a significant proportion (about 30%) of the tracts along the river are commercial uses still. Industrial uses are also a large portion of the reach's land use at 14%.

There is less open space in the reach than in citywide river tracts overall, but the share of open space has increased along the river (about 31 acres were added between 2010 and 2020, a 1.1 percentage point increase).

Single family residential homes have increased and industrial uses have decreased in share in tracts directly along the river and in adjacent tracts, reflecting a wider neighborhood trend. These land use trends may have been influenced by the North Branch Framework plan, which was approved in 2017 as part of the city's Industrial Corridor Modernization initiative. The plan led to rezoning much of the area to allow for mixed use, commercial, open space, and residential land uses. The plan maintained some industrial uses, but encouraged "business expansion and relocation to elsewhere within Chicago's Industrial Corridor system."

Land uses along the North Branch/Goose Island reach
The share of each tract grouping's total land area comprised of each land use category in 2020

	% 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
River tracts	22.5%	16.8%	28.9%	14.3%	4.6%	4.5%	1.0%	4.7%	0.5%	2.1%
River adjacent tracts	37.3%	31.9%	15.3%	2.8%	6.1%	1.8%	0.1%	3.8%	0.0%	0.8%
Citywide river tracts	16.5%	10.8%	10.4%	16.7%	6.4%	9.9%	10.9%	10.2%	4.6%	3.3%
All tracts citywide	32.2%	15.8%	14.2%	9.0%	8.0%	5.4%	4.1%	6.8%	1.2%	3.2%

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)

Land use changes along the North Branch/Goose Island reach
The change or difference in the share of each tract grouping's total land area comprised of each land use category from 2010 to 2020

	% change SF residential	% change MF residential	% change commercial	% change industrial	% change institutional	% change open space	% change transportation	% change ROW	% change utility and waste	% change vacant
River tracts	1.5%	0.2%	-1.2%	-0.9%	0.8%	1.1%	-0.1%	0.3%	-0.2%	0.0%
River adjacent tracts	3.1%	-2.3%	0.3%	-0.8%	-0.3%	-0.2%	0.0%	0.5%	-0.0%	-0.3%
Citywide river tracts	-0.2%	0.6%	-0.8%	0.1%	0.7%	1.5%	-1.1%	1.8%	-0.2%	-1.8%
All tracts citywide	0.1%	0.1%	3.8%	-0.7%	0.7%	-0.3%	-4.2%	1.2%	0.0%	-0.4%

These percentages reflect percentage point changes, or the difference in the share of each tract groupings that are comprised of each land use category. 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)

Physical Improvements

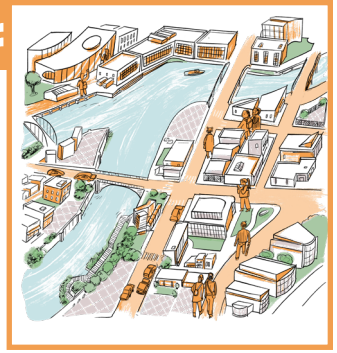
North Branch/ Goose Island is relatively well connected. Around 40% of this reach's river edge has a trail, and this reach has by far the greatest number of places to access these trails compared to other reaches with 186 trail access points. Trail access expanded in the region when Urban Rivers established the Wild Mile in 2021.

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)

Ongoing redevelopment of Lathrop Homes along a half-mile stretch of the North Branch added more than 400 new and rehabbed apartments in 2019 and a public riverwalk with a new kayak launch. In a project funded by the Chicago Community Trust's Our Great Rivers grant, Lathrop Community Partners and Friends of the Chicago River hosted events to connect community members to the river through kayaking and river advocacy.



Office, Industrial, and Multifamily Development

The average sale price per square foot for office, industrial, and multifamily property within 2 blocks of the river in this reach is higher than in any other reach at $340.

The sale price has also increased at a higher rate than other river reach properties around the city. The same trend is true for the number of these kinds of properties up for sale—the North Branch/Goose Island Reach is the only reach with an increase in properties for sale over the last decade. However, vacancy rates in office, industrial, and multifamily properties (meaning units in existing buildings that are not occupied) increased by 19 percentage points in the last decade, and sit at 24% in 2025. This increase in vacancy may be due in part to the North Branch Industrial Framework Plan released during this time period, which resulted in changes to land uses and zoning that could have resulted in increasing vacancies as older businesses left the area.

Development conditions and property sales activity along the North Branch/Goose Island reach

Vacancy rates, asking rents, and sale prices for all office, industrial, and multifamily properties located 2 blocks of the North Branch/Goose Island 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

Vacancy

The share of vacant lots without any building overall in river tracts on the North Branch/ Goose Island is just 4%, but this is an increase of 66 new vacant parcels from 2014 to 2022. This is distinct from river adjacent tracts that saw 41 vacant parcels become developed, indicating the area near the river in particular saw an uptick in vacancies.

Change in vacancies along Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)

	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
River tracts - Reach 2	499	565	3.5%	4.0%	13.2%	66
River adjacent tracts - Reach 2	557	516	2.2%	2.0%	−7.4%	−41
Citywide river tracts	4,562	4,396	6.3%	6.1%	−3.6%	−166
All tracts citywide	32,227	33,712	5.3%	5.6%	4.6%	1,485

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

Jobs and Businesses

Jobs increased in this reach by 11%, more than in river adjacent parcels, which only saw a 2% increase.

The number of **businesses decreased**, following the citywide trend.

Change in businesses and jobs along Reach 2 (North Branch/Goose Island)

	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
River tracts - Reach 2	2,356	1,678	−28.8%	−678	47,852	53,045	10.9%	5,193
River adjacent tracts - Reach 2	3,242	2,430	−25.0%	−812	38,878	39,611	1.9%	733
Citywide river tracts	14,629	10,106	−30.9%	−4,523	651,406	712,116	9.3%	60,710
All tracts citywide	56,115	42,171	−24.8%	−13,944	1,279,376	1,320,135	3.2%	40,759

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



Water Quality

The North Branch/Goose Island reach had the greatest number of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) between 2016 and 2021 compared to the other river reaches, reaching nearly 2,000 CSO events. The number of CSO events, however, has declined over time with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's (MWRD) efforts in the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP), that built large, deep tunnels and reservoirs that store stormwater and sewage until it can be treated, mitigating CSO events. The TARP reservoir that affects this reach is the McCook Reservoir. The first stage of the McCook Reservoir began operations in 2017. It is located between the Des Plaines River and Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal in Bedford Park, and captures stormwater along the Des Plaines River, Salt Creek, Addison Creek, and the Chicago River from the North Branch and North Shore Channel, through the Main Steam, South Branch, Bubbly Creek, to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. This first stage of the McCook reservoir was designed to contain up to 3.5 billion gallons. The second stage, set to be completed in 2032, has capacity for an additional 6.5 billion gallons. The tunnels and reservoirs built under TARP have played a major role in reducing CSOs in Chicago's water system. The number of CSOs notably declined across all Chicago river reaches and the Des Plaines reach after the McCook Reservoir became operational in 2017. 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. 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

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 this reach sustains a diverse fish population. Between 2016 and 2021, the two North Branch/Goose Island reach MWRD monitoring stations, Diversey Parkway and Wilson Avenue, saw an average annual count of 14 and 19 fish species, respectively.

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.

Open Space

Just 5% of the North Branch/Goose Island reach is dedicated to open space, which is lower than the 10% of river tract area that is dedicated to open space across the city overall. The share of open space increased slightly in the reach between 2010 and 2020.

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 2020.
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)?