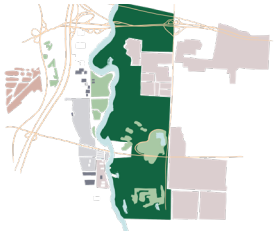
This document is part of MPC's 'Understanding Our Rivers' research project, which notes how the Chicago river system and its surrounding communities have changed over time. Consistent with the project structure, the findings are organized into the themes of inviting, productive, and living.



Understanding the Calumet River (Reach 5)

This reach includes the Calumet River, Lake Calumet, and Little Calumet River. The overall length is 13 miles and it is home to the Illinois International Port District as well as many other industrial uses. It touches the community areas of West Pullman, Riverdale, South Deering, Hegewisch, East Side, Calumet Heights, and South Chicago. The Calumet River reach is characterized by its active industrial landscape, expansive waterways, and working port facilities thought the reach also includes important natural areas that support ongoing ecological restoration.



KEY TO ICONS

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

How has the area changed over time?

(2014-2022)

Demographics

The Calumet reach is the only reach that saw notable population loss (about 2,000 people) between 2014 and 2022.

Population change along Reach 5 (Calumet)

	Total population (2014)	Total population (2022)	% Change in population	# Change in population
River tracts - Reach 5	40,245	38,155	−5.2%	−2,090
River adjacent tracts - Reach 5	74,484	74,977	0.7%	493
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

This population loss was largely due to more than 1,200 Latinx residents leaving the area, but the Latinx population increased slightly in adjacent tracts, indicating the Latinx population *loss* may have been related to the area near the river.

Population change by race and ethnicity along Reach 5 (Calumet)

	% 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 5	−5.2%	−2,090	−3.0%	−677	−18.2%	−478	−8.6%	−1,254	212.6%	79
River adjacent tracts - Reach 5	0.7%	493	−0.9%	−419	−7.7%	−495	4.0%	793	−5.1%	−13
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

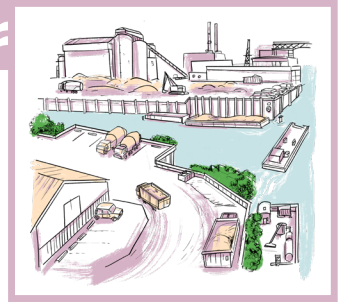
Socioeconomics

The Calumet Reach as the lowest median household income, rent, and home value across Chicago's river reaches, and these indicators increased at a lower rate than citywide in Chicago. Household incomes and costs are generally consistent between the river tracts and river adjacent tracts, indicating these are likely neighborhood trends and not directly related to proximity to the river.

Changes in household incomes, rents, and home values along Reach 5 (Calumet)

	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 5	$29,957	$43,910	46.6%	$756	$937	23.9%	$109,123	$138,251	26.7%
River adjacent tracts - Reach 5	$34,101	$44,917	31.7%	$898	$1,118	24.4%	$112,348	$148,443	32.1%
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

Transportation and industrial land uses make up the greatest share of land along the river in the Calumet reach (25% and 19%, respectively). Transportation land uses include parking, maintenance yards, freight terminals, and commercial docks. Transportation uses decreased by about 150 acres between 2010 and 2020, while industrial uses increased by 140 acres. Right of way and utility uses also make up a notable share of land in this reach, which can include uses like rail, roadway, communications infrastructure, waste management, and utility companies. Residential and commercial uses make up a very small portion of land near the river compared to adjacent tracts and other river reaches. The share of open space is also relatively small, at 5% in this reach, but it increased between 2010 and 2020 by nearly 350 acres.

Land uses along the Calumet 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	9.7%	3.3%	2.4%	19.2%	3.6%	5.4%	25.3%	15.4%	10.0%	5.9%
River adjacent tracts	32.5%	9.3%	9.4%	11.2%	6.5%	10.6%	0.9%	9.6%	1.5%	6.6%
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 Calumet 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	-0.6%	-0.5%	-0.0%	1.3%	0.6%	3.3%	-1.6%	2.4%	-0.8%	-4.1%
River adjacent tracts	-1.2%	0.4%	2.7%	-1.5%	1.2%	3.5%	-0.9%	-2.7%	1.3%	-1.7%
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

The Calumet has the least access to trails of Chicago's river reaches with just 6% of the river edge covered in trail and just 4 access points.

Calumet Connect, a local coalition of community and civic stakeholders, is a key force in shaping land use in the Calumet region, focused on improving the health and well-being of communities and residents in Southeast Chicago based on community vision. Funded by the Our Great Rivers grant over the last decade, the partnership conducted community engagement and research to create the Calumet Connect Databook, highlighting the environmental and public health challenges in the Calumet Industrial Corridor. This initiative (along with years of organizing efforts by many other community groups and activists) helped inform the HUD investigation that found "the city of Chicago is violating the civil rights of its residents by relocating polluting businesses from white communities into Black and Latino areas that already are overwhelmed with environmental and health issues." The agreement settled from the investigation requires the City of Chicago to take actionable steps to protect neighborhoods in the Calumet region that have been burdened by environmental harm and led to the creation of City's Environmental Justice Action Plans and Cumulative Impact Assessment.

Led by The Southeast Environmental Task Force, the Calumet Connect continues engage community voices to drive changes in the Calumet region, including remediation of the Schroud Site, activating the 100th street site, and helping shape the Department of Planning and Development's update to the Calumet Design Guidelines and Calumet Area Land Use Plan.

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)



Office, Industrial, and Multifamily Development

Of Chicago's river reaches, the Calumet reach has the lowest average sale price ($33.50) and rental cost ($9) per square foot for office, industrial, and multifamily property within two blocks of the river of all the reaches. The average sale price and rental cost both increased over the last decade, by about 20% an 50%, respectively.

Vacancy rates in office, industrial, and multifamily units (meaning units in existing buildings that are not occupied) remained relatively low and steady at 6%.

Change in vacancies along Reach 5 (Calumet)

	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 5	2,425	2,376	15.6%	15.3%	-2.0%	-49
River adjacent tracts - Reach 5	1,966	2,081	7.8%	8.3%	5.9%	115
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)

Vacancy

The rate of vacant parcels, meaning lots without development, has remained steady relative to the number of parcels in this large reach. The number of vacant parcels has decreased by 49 units, one of the greatest decrease in number of vacant parcels across all river reaches. However, the overall vacancy sits at the highest rate of all reaches at 15%.

Jobs and Businesses

The Calumet reach saw the greatest increase in jobs of all the reaches, with a 41% increase and more than 3,500 additional jobs between 2012 and 2021. These jobs were notably located in river tracts, as jobs decreased in adjacent tracts.

The number of businesses decreased, following the citywide trend.

OAI Inc., an Our Great Rivers grantee, has been contributing to workforce development in the Calumet region with their High Bridge program, which trains municipal staff and students entering the workforce in Green Stormwater Infrastructure installation and maintenance.

Change in businesses and jobs along Reach 5 (Calumet)

	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 5	533	359	−32.6%	−174	8,731	12,320	41.1%	3,589
River adjacent tracts - Reach 5	911	622	−31.7%	−289	8,188	7,529	−8.1%	−659
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 Calumet reach had only one CSO event between 2016 and 2021—the fewest CSO events by far of all of Chicago's river reaches. The Calumet reach benefits in part from receiving more Lake Michigan water than other river reaches and from The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's (MWRD) Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP), which 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 Thornton Composite Reservoir, which was completed in 2015. Located in Chicago's South Suburbs, the reservoir captures sewage and stormwater along the Cal-Sag Channel, Little Calumet River, Grand Calumet River, and the Calumet River. The Thornton Composite Reservoir is the largest combined sewer reservoir in the world, capturing up to 7.9 billion gallons. 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 Calumet reach MWRD monitoring stations, Halsted Street and Indiana Avenue, saw an average annual count of 19 and 22 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

The Calumet reach has very limited open space, making up just 5% of land along the river. Nearly 350 acres of open space were added between 2010 and 2020. Ongoing efforts to establish more open space in this reach need continued investment.

Change in open space land use along Reach 5 (Calumet)

	% Share open space (2010)	% Share open space (2020)	% Change in share open space	# Change in acres of open space
River tracts - Reach 5	2.1%	5.4%	3.3%	346
River adjacent tracts - Reach 5	7.0%	10.5%	3.5%	191
Citywide river tracts	8.4%	9.8%	1.4%	384
All tracts citywide	5.7%	5.4%	−0.3%	−346

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)?