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Illinois Coastal Management Program Issue Paper

Public Access and Recreational Resources

Introduction

The Chicagoland metropolitan area is home to more than eight million people. No recreational resource in this area is used more than the public venues within the Illinois coastal zone. This includes the open-water area of Lake Michigan, the network of lakeshore parks and open space that extend along the Illinois coast, the museums and public gathering areas that are a prominent part of the Chicago lakefront, the tour boats and pleasure craft that use the Inland Waterways, and the boaters and fishing enthusiasts that frequent the many small-boat harbors and marinas.

Maintaining, improving and expanding public access and recreational resources along the Illinois coastal zone are critical for the quality of life in Chicagoland. The Illinois coastal zone includes the Illinois portion of the open waters of Lake Michigan, the lakeshore, coastal bluffs and ravines, and the Inland Waterways (Chicago, Little and Grand Calumet Rivers). The public access to these coastal areas not only serves the local municipal residents, but also has the potential of serving visitors from across the broader metropolis.

The Illinois Coastal Management Program (ICMP) offers the opportunity for grant monies to aid the efforts in planning and implementing public access and recreational resources throughout the Illinois coastal zone. The purpose of this Issue Paper is to provide a framework of perspectives, focus, concerns and interests that will benefit the decision making as to how ICMP grant monies can be best utilized with regard to access and recreational resources.

Overarching Issues

With time there will be changes in the types of public access and recreational resource issues that will be important for coastal management. For example, several decades in the past there was little if any interest in providing water access for launching and recovering kayaks or canoes along the Lake Michigan shore or the Inland Waterways. However, in recent decades such personal watercraft has significantly grown in popularity and access has become an issue. There are also differences in what is important for public access and recreation along the varied settings of the Illinois coast. For example, the North Shore bluff coast will have some access and recreation issues different than those along the Chicago lakeshore.

Despite changing perspectives with time and different perspectives with location, several overarching issues will always be pertinent and should be considered a framework.

1. Honoring Private Shoreline Property The Lake Michigan shoreline, the banks along the Calumet River and the Inland Waterways, and the coastal ravines of the North Shore all include private property along which public access is denied other than with permission of the property owner. Based on Illinois Supreme Court Case Law, riparian ownership along the Illinois coast extends to the still-water shoreline (but does not include artificial accretion that the property owner may have caused to occur). Enhancement and expansion of public access and recreational resources must recognize private property and not compromise the distinction or security between public and private land areas.

2. Recognition of Diverse Access and Recreation Interests Maintaining, enhancing and expanding swimming beaches along the Illinois coast is an important issue, but this is only one of a spectrum of access and recreation issues to be addressed. Boating, fishing, bird watching, bicycling, strolling, jogging, picnicking, meditating and finding solitude are a few of the diverse access and recreation interests of this diverse and primarily urban coastal populace. The urban lifestyle also supports activities such as lakeshore concerts or outdoor movie showings, both of which may require special infrastructure. Beach areas specifically designated as dog beaches are also important. The challenge in the stewardship and development of the Illinois coastal zone is to provide for this diversity of access and recreation interests.
3. Access and Recreation along the Inland Waterways For the entire designated Illinois coastal zone, the Inland Waterways, as well as Lake Calumet and the Calumet River, provide the greatest opportunities for improving pedestrian public access to the water's edge and watercraft public access to these water areas. This relates to a lack of such access and interest in recreational uses in previous generations. However, any efforts to enhance or increase public access/recreation along these water areas must be in harmony with both commercial uses of these waterways and the use in storm and wastewater management. Both of these uses remain the primary roles of these waterways.
4. Access at North Shore Municipal Beaches A long-established beach-management practice along several of the North Shore municipalities is to require the purchase of beach tokens or parking passes to use the municipal beach. An increased fee is charged to non-municipal residents. The ICMP will recognize the discretion of these municipalities whether there is such controlled access along their municipal beaches and how that controlled access is accomplished (fees, tokens, *etc.*). However, in managing the controlled-access beaches, it is recommended that fences or other physical barriers be discouraged because of the visual barriers and aesthetic compromises that these cause.
5. Unique Character and Role of the Chicago Lakeshore The public land, public access and public recreational amenities along the Chicago lakeshore and the Main Stem Chicago River benefit Chicago and Chicagoland residents, but also contribute to national and international tourism from which there are regional and state benefits. Investing in the maintenance, enhancement and expansion of public access and recreational amenities along the Chicago lakeshore has wide-ranging economic advantages.
6. The Vision for a Complete Park-Dominated Chicago Lakeshore A long-term vision for the Chicago lakeshore is for a continuous lakeshore park system stretching the entire length of the Chicago lakeshore from the Evanston city line on the north to the Indiana state line on the south. Realization of such a continuous lakeshore park will require innovative park planning and design to accommodate private lakeshore property on the city's far north and far south lakeshore. The vision for a park-dominated Chicago lakeshore is a worthy pursuit to further improve the public access along this world-class urban shoreline.
7. Lakefill as a Means of Expanding Public Access Filling of the lake bottom to make new land for public-access lakeshore parks and beaches is permitted by Illinois state law. This was a legal basis for creation of much of the man-made land that is now the parkland of the Chicago lakeshore. The low slope of the lake bottom along the Illinois coast and the geology of the lake bottom are favorable for filling and constructing made land. Well-designed and environmentally friendly filling to create islands, peninsulas, promontories and headlands are a viable means to increase parkland, public access and lakeshore amenities.
8. Scope of Access and Recreational Opportunities Access and recreation opportunities are to be maintained, enhanced and expanded to the highest degree possible, but the goal is not ubiquitous,

unrestricted access to beaches, shorelines and riverbanks across the public-owned coastal zone. The goal is sound management of access and recreational opportunities. This may mean that, as part of prudent stewardship and a comprehensive coastal management plan, some publicly owned localities will have restricted or denied access and recreational uses. For example, the designated Nature Preserves of Illinois Beach State Park are best managed with restricted access. In addition, enforcing restricted access is important as at the Magic Hedge in Chicago's Lincoln Park where human trespass can be adverse to the plant communities. There may be other public-owned areas in the coastal zone where access is controlled for purposes of habitat, restoration or other management needs.

Recommendations for Public Access and Recreational Resource Projects

The ICMP will provide the opportunity for grant monies to assist in the planning and development of projects that address public access and recreational resources along the Illinois coastal zone. The "Overarching Issues" previously discussed are a foundation for considering relevant projects. The following discussion provides general recommendations for the variety of studies or projects that would be beneficial for the Illinois coastal zone. These are the types of projects that should be encouraged by the ICMP and be given thorough consideration for ICMP grant funding.

Building on Existing Municipal Planning

Many of the lakeshore and Inland Waterway municipalities already have planning documents that address access or recreational amenities along their shore areas. Other municipalities may develop such documents in the future. The ICMP can provide a partnership with these municipal efforts to provide financial assistance in the planning and early development stages, help to integrate efforts with neighboring municipalities, and provide a means to relate local efforts to a regional framework.

Improved Access to Lakeshore Parks and Beaches

Improving access to lakeshore parks and beaches needs to take multiple approaches to assure that the greatest number of citizens can benefit. Improving access must also recognize the urban nature of many of the public parks and beaches and the urban lifestyle of many of the citizens along the Illinois coast. Efforts that address the following are of prime interest:

- improving public transportation to lakeshore parks and public beaches
- improvements for bicycle parking and locking at public beaches
- making park and public beach access available to a full age-range of users from children to seniors as well as handicapped users
- providing beach shoreline access for personal vehicles such as wheelchairs and buggies to select public beaches through use of mats, ramps, or other appropriate means
- increasing the accessibility across arterials, major roadways, or railroad tracks that may form barriers or hindrances to beach and lakeshore access such as Lake Shore Drive in Chicago or the Metra tracks in Waukegan, Zion and Winthrop Harbor
- making signage related to access and recreational resources available to English speaking and other language users, reflecting the language needs of the particular groups of users having a prominent local presence
- incorporating Braille signage in appropriate places and in conformance with state, federal and municipal ordinances
- increasing access and aesthetic continuity between lakeshore parks and beaches

Access Considerations in Designing Shore-Protection Structures

A variety of shore-protection structures exist along the lakeshore built for the purpose of erosion defense or beach retention. Revetments are shore-parallel structures that protect the land from erosion. Groins are shore-perpendicular structures that hold beach sand. Jetties are structures (usually in pairs) that provide wave protection on either side of an entrance channel to a harbor. Breakwaters can be offshore or attached to shore and serve in breaking waves and creating quiet-water areas. Each of these structures needs to satisfy its primary shore-protection function, but the design does not need to create a complete barrier to shoreline or water access. The following design elements are recommended for shore-protection structures along public lakeshore.

Groin and Jetty Design: Groins built to retain beach sand, and jetties at harbor entrances, can be built as wide structures in order to provide along the top of the structure a safe walkway for public access. Such groin and jetty design has been used extensively along the Chicago lakeshore (e.g., North Avenue Beach groins; Montrose Harbor jetties), and opportunities exist for similar designs elsewhere on the Illinois coast. The wide design provides for the desired beach retention and harbor-entrance protection as well as providing for water's edge access for fishing and strolling.

Aids for Crossing Shore Structures: Shore structures that are built perpendicular across a beach can present a major obstruction or barrier for persons wanting to traverse the shore. Because of sand impoundment against one side of the structure, there may also be considerable difference in beach elevation between the updrift and downdrift sides of the structure. Including steps, ramps or ladders as part of the shore structure will facilitate beach walkers in crossing this type of barrier.

Revetments and Visual Access: Access to the Lake Michigan shore includes the visual access of being able to see the shore and/or lake from the inland parts of lakeshore parkland. Visual access can be denied by revetments, berms, or other erosion-protection structures that parallel the shore and have a crest elevation of sufficient height that they block the lake view from the more inland parkland. Along all of the lakeshore parks and public spaces, visual access should not be diminished by shore structures. Either the design of these structures or the land elevations within the parkland should be such that lake views (and ideally shoreline views) are maintained within the parkland. The designs should take into account the importance of controlling rodent and gull populations.

Opportunities for Trail and Water's Edge Access along the North Shore Channel

The municipalities of Wilmette, Evanston, Skokie, Lincolnwood and Chicago have all developed some type of parkland and public access along the upland bordering the North Shore Channel. There are walking/jogging/bike trails along these parks, but arterial-street crossings prevent a trail system that is without disruption. A pathway dipping below a bridge crossing has been built in Chicago along the channel at Peterson and Foster Avenues. This is a model of what could be done at other bridge crossings along the channel. A trail system along the length of the channel that is continuous across municipal boundaries and free of street crossings is a worthy access and recreation vision. Trails along the channel cut bank would provide actual or visual access of the water area. Because of vegetation or elevation difference, views of the water area are presently not easily available from the adjoining upland parks.

Public Access across the Coastal Bluffs

The municipalities of the bluff coast from North Chicago south to Glencoe, and to a lesser extent continuing south to north Evanston, are challenged with providing safe access for pedestrians between the upland parts of lakeshore parks and the beach part of the parks at the toe of the coastal bluffs. As an

extreme example of this coastal relief, the difference in elevation between the bluff top and beach portions of parkland at Highland Park can be 80 to 90 feet.

Access up and down the coastal bluffs needs to provide for both pedestrians as well as people moving wheeled devices (*i.e.*, strollers, bicycles, *etc.*). Repairs, improvements and upgrades to the stairs and ramps that traverse the bluff face are an important access issue. This access needs to be geared to a full age range of park users from children to seniors. Pathways for walkers, bicyclists or people pushing wheeled devices along the incline between the beach and bluff top should be separate from any roadways for vehicle passage.

Access along the Coastal Zone Ravines

The ravines of the North Shore are a distinct and notable landscape feature. Ravines also occur inland from the coast in the Far North municipalities of North Chicago, Waukegan, Beach Park, Zion and Winthrop Harbor. Much of the ravine system is in private ownership, but the municipal and county parkland that has been developed along these ravines provides local public access. Trails, walkways, stair and ramp systems and bridges are all critical infrastructure along these ravine parks. This infrastructure needs to be maintained. Opportunities exist for infrastructure enhancement and expansion.

Marinas, Small-Boat Harbors, and Boat-Launch Facilities

The need exists for achieving a balance between the demand for marinas, small-boat harbors and boat-launch facilities and the location and capacity of these facilities along the Lake Michigan shore and the Inland Waterways. Chicago has and will continue to have a lead role in harbor sites along the Illinois coast. Efforts to study, plan and implement increased capacity of the network of small-boat harbors along the Chicago lakeshore should be supported. All of the Chicago harbors need to be planned and designed to best complement neighboring parkland. Opportunities should be explored for increasing transient slips at the public harbors and marinas along the Illinois coast to accommodate visiting boaters.

Access and Recreational Opportunities for Paddlers

Kayaks and canoes are popular, low-cost watercrafts that provide healthful and environmentally safe water recreation. Interest in these types of watercraft continues to grow. Public facilities for the efficient launch and recovery of kayaks, canoes, and other human-powered watercraft should be an integral part of the parkland bordering Lake Michigan and the Inland Waterways. Studies would be beneficial to establish a management plan for the safe use by paddlers along the Inland Waterways, particularly along the Main Stem Chicago River.

Lakeshore/Inland Waterway Recreational Fishing

The access and site amenities for shoreline/river line fishing need to be sufficient to meet demand. Opportunities exist for creating habitat or fish attractions that will improve fishing recreation at select sites along the shore. At all designated fishing sites, the need for multilingual signage should be considered to provide information related to safety and public health issues as well as fishing rules.

Offshore Recreational Fishing

Studies and evaluation are needed to identify opportunities for constructing offshore reefs as habitat or attraction areas for fish. An offshore reef constructed in 1999 off Chicago's south lakeshore is a prototype for such projects.

Offshore Scuba Parks

Scuba diving is a popular recreation along the Illinois coastal waters to view sunken ships, barges and planes. Several dive sites are maintained by regional diving associations. The Rachel Carson Scuba Park is a designated underwater park that contains a variety of sunken artifacts. Maintaining, enhancing and expanding scuba parks are encouraged as well as promoting scuba diving along the Illinois coast.

Maintaining Existing Access and Recreational Infrastructure

New projects for expanding access and recreational amenities should not be done at the expense of deferring maintenance on existing access and recreational infrastructure. Existing facilities should be maintained for function, safety, aesthetics, and protection of the original capital investment.

Other Public Access and Recreational Resource Opportunities

1. North Point Marina: The state-owned and managed North Point Marina is the largest marina on the Illinois coast. This facility needs to be maintained and upgraded as needed in order to sustain its status as one of the premier public marinas in the Great Lakes. Sand accumulation at and near the marina entrance must be periodically monitored and removed to assure unobstructed boat access through the marina entrance.
2. Waukegan - Restoration of Waukegan Moorlands: The opportunity exists for constructing a ridge and swale topography along coastal land north of Waukegan Beach. This area, referred to as the “Waukegan Moorlands,” has been degraded for many decades but is now appreciated for its potential as a natural area. Once restored, this area can provide opportunities for birding as well as provide an aesthetic enhancement for this coastal area.
3. Waukegan - Lakeshore Redevelopment Project: The City of Waukegan is embarking on an ambitious lakeshore redevelopment project that will transform former industrial land into residential, commercial and public land areas. Public access along the harbor and lake shoreline should be a significant component of this redevelopment effort. The ICMP provides an opportunity for assistance in planning and implementing this redevelopment.
4. North Chicago - Foss Park Improved Lakeshore Use: The lakeshore area at Foss Park in North Chicago is notably underutilized compared to the heavily used park area atop the coastal bluff. The opportunity exists for improving recreational amenities that will make the lakeshore area a more common destination for park users.
5. Lake Forest - Lake Forest Nature Preserve: The Lake Forest Nature Preserve protects an exceptional natural area of coastal upland, ravine and bluff. Improved trails and signage would be beneficial to Nature Preserve visitors. This Nature Preserve offers one of the last remaining examples of actively eroding coastal bluff along the Illinois coast. The Nature Preserve has educational and scientific significance as well as providing habitat.
6. Fort Sheridan - Lakeshore, Bluff and Ravine Open Space: Coastal land at the former Fort Sheridan (U.S. Army) is being protected as public land by the Chicago-based Openlands organization. Unprecedented opportunities exist for public access along this reach of Lake Michigan coast which for decades was military property and closed to the public.
7. Highland Park - Rosewood Park and Beach: Rosewood Park, once the private estate of the Rosewood family, preserves landscape architecture of the famous landscape architect Jens Jensen (1860-1951).

One of the most notable landscape elements in this park is Jensen's Rosewood Bridge which crosses the local ravine. Preservation and restoration of the Jens Jensen landscape elements of this park have historical and cultural significance. Opportunities exist for using signage or other information means to inform visitors of the significance of the landscape architecture preserved in the park.

8. Kenilworth - Mahoney Farm Preserve: This parkland on the Kenilworth lakeshore also preserves landscape design by Jens Jensen. Preservation, restoration and enhanced historical information are all important for this uniquely designed park.
9. Evanston - Grosse Point Lighthouse and Lighthouse Park: This historic 1873 lighthouse is a state and Great Lakes landmark. Maintaining and enhancing access to the lighthouse and surrounding park is important for educational and cultural purposes because this is the only land-based lighthouse along the Illinois coast (The Chicago Lighthouse is an offshore structure.).
10. Evanston-Skokie-Lincolnwood-Chicago-Inland Waterway Transit: The opportunity exists for using the North Shore Channel and the North Branch Chicago River as a water taxi route for limited transit between Evanston-Skokie-Lincolnwood and the Chicago Loop area. Opportunity exists for expanding existing water taxi transit along the South Branch and Main Stem Chicago River between the Union Station area and Michigan Avenue.
11. Chicago - Lincoln Park: This is the longest of Chicago's string of lakeshore parks and, because of its diversity of amenities and the proximity of a large residential populace, this parkland is heavily used. Many areas in the park are in need of updating, rehabilitation, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Opportunity exists for elevated vantage points where park visitors can have better line of sight to the lake. The northern portion of Lincoln Park has historically not received the degree of amenities that have occurred at the park's south end. Better balance of amenities is needed.
12. Chicago - Lakefront Bike Path: What was originally built in the 1970s solely as a bike path has become an extremely successful lakeshore amenity and has required several stages of widening to accommodate walkers, joggers and skaters as well as bikers. Efforts are encouraged to improve, expand and develop best management of this path to accommodate the different uses.
13. Chicago - DuSable Park: The site for the proposed DuSable Park of the Chicago Park District is a unique parcel bound by the Main Stem Chicago River, the entrance to Ogden Slip, and North Lake Shore Drive. Public access to this site would allow visitors to reach a peninsula having incomparable vistas to the Chicago Lock as well as views of river traffic entering and leaving the lock and boat traffic to and from Ogden Slip. Development of DuSable Park will provide additional riverbank access along the highly used Main Stem as well as commemorate Jean Baptiste DuSable who was the first permanent settler of Chicago and built a cabin near the mouth of the Chicago River.
14. Chicago - Chicago Lock: The Chicago Lock, which is owned and maintained by the Chicago District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is the second-busiest lock in the United States and, like the O'Brien Lock and Dam on the Calumet River, is a gateway between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River System. Pedestrian public access to observe the lifting and lowering of boats at the Chicago Lock would be a recreational amenity to this notable focal point on the Chicago lakeshore.
15. Chicago - Northerly Island: The City of Chicago and the Chicago Park District have a unique opportunity at Northerly Island (former Meigs Field site) to create parkland on an extensive tract of land that is also somewhat remote from the rest of the Chicago lakeshore. As park development advances, it is important to assure access by the greatest number of potential park visitors as well as to consider unique recreational amenities that might be suited specifically for Northerly Island.

16. Chicago - Lake Calumet Shoreline Access: Public access to the shoreline of Lake Calumet is minimal despite the fact that nearly all of the shore and adjoining land is in public ownership. Opportunities for improved shoreline access occur at parkland and a public golf course that are located at the north end of the lake. Opportunities for shoreline access can occur in the southern half of the lake as former commercial slips and other port facilities are decommissioned.
17. Chicago - The “Last Four Miles” Effort: Approximately four miles of Chicago lakeshore remain along which there is no public access because of private ownership. Various community and interest groups are working to evaluate possibilities to complete lakeshore parkland along these last four miles. Some of the innovative design options include offshore islands and/or peninsulas. This effort is noble and in the spirit of the earliest recorded vision for the lakeshore as being open, free and clear.

Summary

The preservation and maintenance of existing public access and recreational amenities is a necessity along the Illinois coastal zone. Access and recreation are quality-of-life issues and are important to the social and economic well being of all of Chicagoland as well as the State of Illinois. There are also numerous opportunities for enhancing and expanding the public access and recreational amenities. The challenge is to provide the highest-quality access and recreational assets for the diverse interests of this primarily urban population.

There is limited opportunity for expanding public access along the Illinois coast because of the built up nature of the coastal setting. However, as land uses have changed along the Illinois shore, opportunities have occurred such as the lakeshore redevelopment planned at Waukegan in the vicinity of Waukegan Harbor, and on Chicago’s far south lakeshore in the vicinity of the former U.S. Steel plant near the mouth of the Calumet River. In the planning for any new public areas in these redevelopment projects, or in the planning for any modifications at existing lakeshore public parks and beaches, consideration should be given to increasing capacity of park and beach users, offering greater variety of recreational amenities, and assuring that all necessary signage is in place and designed in such a way to be informative but not visually distracting.

A considerable opportunity for planning and development of public access and recreation exists along the Inland Waterways as well as Lake Calumet and the Calumet River. Although this lake and river are technically part of the Lake Michigan coastal zone, they share more geographic characteristics with the Inland Waterways. Previous generations have not had ready access or recreational benefits of these areas primarily because of former commercial and industrial land and water uses, different generational recreation interests, issues of water quality, and a lack of perspective of these areas as a recreational resource.

As noted earlier (Overarching Issue 3), the primary role of the Inland Waterways remains commercial use and storm and wastewater management. However, these waterways offer intra-urban recreational opportunities that are unprecedented in Chicago’s history. The ICMP can be an effective vehicle for sustained planning and implementing improved access and recreation along the Inland Waterways as well as access and recreation interaction between these inland waters and the Lake Michigan coast.