

# Industry News

## Chicago Region Launches Award-Winning Wilderness Protection Plan

When you think about the role of protecting natural wilderness in the course of creating livable communities, chances are “Chicago” would not immediately pop into your head. Yet members of Chicago Wilderness, a partnership of 124 public and private conservation, resource management, citizen advocacy, and planning groups, have joined together to create the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan, described as a model for regional plans throughout the country. The plan is designed to protect and restore the natural communities of the Chicago region, 200,000 acres of protected natural lands—including woodlands, forests, grasslands, streams, and wetlands—that stretch from southeastern Wisconsin to the six-county Chicago region through northwestern Indiana.

The plan includes a number of specific goals:

- Creating a network of protected land and waters for wildlife habitat
- Ensuring the long-term viability of native plants and animals
- Reducing invasive species
- Incorporating human-constructed environments with parks and forest preserves
- Providing ecological and economic vitality to Chicago-area residents.

By pledging to work toward these goals, the member groups, all of which are active in local preservation efforts, ensure that their efforts are on the same track. Specifically, the plan makes six recommendations:

1. Protect and restore biodiversity in land already preserved for conservation
2. Preserve more land with existing or potential biodiversity benefits
3. Develop and implement water-resource management programs, policies, and regulations sensitive to the need for sustaining native communities

4. Conduct more monitoring and other research to understand the effects that human disturbance and ecological restoration efforts are having on biodiversity
5. Increase citizens' awareness of the importance of biodiversity conservation, and increase opportunities for people to participate in efforts that enhance biodiversity
6. Reflect in local and regional development policies the need to restore and maintain natural areas and biodiversity.

Although it was launched a mere four months ago, the plan has garnered national acclaim, including the American Planning Association's 2001 Outstanding Planning Award for a Plan. “The Chicago Wilderness region has tremendous value in its extensive biodiversity,” said Bruce Knight, chair of the Planning Association's awards jury. “The fact that this plan is being applied to a metropolitan area makes it unique, and also sets an example that many other regions can look to before it becomes too late.”

The plan also recently garnered the National Association of Regional Councils 2001 Achievement Award for Regional Excellence, which honors regions that develop projects that promote regional cooperation and address cross-jurisdictional issues and challenges.

To learn more about the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Plan, visit [www.chicagowilderness.org](http://www.chicagowilderness.org) or call Lucy Hutcherson, 708-485-0263.

Local governments can schedule a presentation on how to protect nature in their communities by contacting Dennis Dreher, 312-454-0400 or [dreher@nipc.org](mailto:dreher@nipc.org).

Copies of the Biodiversity Recovery Plan are available free of charge at the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission Publications Center. (For mail order copies, there is a \$3.20 postage charge.) Call 312-454-0400, ext. 210, for more information on obtaining the plan. It can also be downloaded in three parts as Adobe Acrobat PDF files from the NIPC Web site, [www.nipc.org.il.us/new-pubs.htm](http://www.nipc.org.il.us/new-pubs.htm). ■

