

## Governor Quinn Tours Mud-to-Parks Site in Chicago

Written by Brooke Anderson  
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### Innovative Project Turns Illinois River Silt into Chicago Lakefront Park

CHICAGO – Governor Pat Quinn today visited an old steel mill site to showcase the final phase of the innovative Mud-to-Parks program, which makes use of reclaimed topsoil dredged from the Illinois River to create a new park near Lake Michigan. Mud-to-Parks is a component of Governor Quinn’s Millennium Reserve Initiative to restore habitat, rehabilitate brownfields and create green space in Chicago’s South and Southeast Side and south suburbs.

“Mud-to-Parks is helping return the soil to where it belongs while providing habitat and boosting recreational opportunities,” Governor Quinn said. “Some of the richest soil on the continent originally came from the watershed. We’ve put people to work taking sediment that was clogging the Illinois River and putting it to good use on this magnificent site.”

The last of 79 barges filled with sediment dredged from the Illinois River near Peoria have traveled 163 miles to the old U.S. Steel (USX) South Works site at 86th Street and Lake Michigan. There, the sediment has been unloaded and spread out, providing tons of rich soil for green space and community recreational use along the shoreline.

The Mud-to-Parks project is the latest phase of a project begun in 2004 during which 232,000 tons of Illinois River mud have been shipped and spread over 25 acres at the USX site. Native grasses and small trees are now sprouting on land that was largely steel mill slag.

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The silt taken from the Illinois River's Peoria Lake has the consistency of toothpaste when dredged and loaded onto barges. After the two-day trip up the Illinois River, Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal, Calumet Sag Channel and Little Calumet River to a Lake Michigan slip, the mud is off-loaded and spread on the slag. The mud then dries and develops a granular soil structure prior to final grading on the park parcel.

"Mud-to-Parks is a true green initiative. Removing silt from the Illinois River opens shipping lanes, enhances habitat and improves recreational access," said Marc Miller, Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), which administers Mud-to-Parks.

The innovative idea was first conceived in the 1990s by Dr. John Marlin, then an IDNR scientist. Grasses now grow from a pilot project he ran in 2002 in which sediment collected near Peoria was barged to a Chicago landfill and spread out. In 2003, Dr. Marlin approached then-Lt. Governor Pat Quinn in his role as chair of the Illinois River Coordinating Council and the Mud-to-Parks project at the USX site was underway.

"Reclaiming soil from the river is a far-better alternative which can be used to address reservoir sedimentation in many other areas," said Marlin, now with the University of Illinois Sustainable Technology Center. Dr. Marlin plans to meet soon with authorities responsible for Shanghai's silt-choked Huangpu River to share the lessons of Illinois' Mud-to-Parks Initiative.

"There's enough sediment in Peoria Lake to fill a football field 10 miles high," observed University of Illinois soil expert, Dr. Robert Darmody. "It was eroded from some of the best farmland in the world. After drying, it regains its favorable structure and is an excellent media for growing a variety of plants."

Sedimentation is the biggest problem facing the Illinois River, and was particularly evident during last year's drought. Each year, 14 million tons of sediment goes into the river basin, the equivalent of 17,808 truckloads daily. This reduces navigability of barge traffic, hinders recreational boating and destroys habitat. Meanwhile, Chicago has many distressed properties and old industrial sites needing restoration. Since each barge hauls the equivalent of 75 dump-trucks of soil, the barges are saving wear and tear on state highways and city streets.

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The project will enhance the 589-acre Chicago Lakeside project – a joint venture of McCaffery Interests, Inc., and U.S. Steel – which will include 13,000 new residential units, 17.5 million square feet of commercial and institutional space, the new Lake Shore Drive extension and 130 acres of lakefront parkland to continue the 18-mile Lakefront Trail.

Mud-to-Parks is funded by \$8 million in bond funds appropriated in 2009. Recipients of Mud-to-Parks funds include the Litchfield Park District, Chicago Park District, City of East Peoria, City of Decatur and Fox Waterway Agency. University of Illinois Prairie Research Institute scientists have worked on the concept of beneficial reuse of sediment for years. Dredged soil has been also used for cover at a Pekin landfill and a strip-mined portion of the Banner Marsh State Fish and Wildlife Area.

Sportsmen, boaters and bird-watchers in Peoria and Chicago will benefit from the project. The dredging improves fish habitat, and migratory birds using the Illinois River flyway or Lake Michigan shoreline will find better-protected habitat and food sources.

To learn more, please visit [istc.illinois.edu](http://istc.illinois.edu).

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