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**MAYOR EMANUEL, SENATOR DURBIN, CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT
CELEBRATE GRAND OPENING OF NORTHERLY ISLAND RESTORATION PROJECT**

Interior park trails, overlooks now open to the public

Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Senator Dick Durbin, representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Chicago Park District Superintendent and CEO Michael Kelly joined community members today to officially open Chicago's newest nature area on Northerly Island. The 43-acre project, which includes topography changes, natural plantings and the creation of a large pond, has transformed nearly half of Northerly Island into an urban oasis in the heart of Chicago. The interior park trail and overlooks are now open to the public; other areas of the island continue to be fenced off due to ongoing restoration efforts.

"The remarkable transformation of Northerly Island has fulfilled Daniel Burnham's ultimate vision for the area, creating a spectacular green space in the midst of a bustling city, protecting and enhancing our lakefront for generations to come," said Mayor Emanuel. "This world-class urban oasis doubles as a giant educational campus for our kids; children from every Chicago neighborhood will now have the opportunity to camp and learn about nature through programming offered by the Park District and our museums."

Ecological restoration of the southern portion of Northerly Island Park has transformed it into a beautiful nature area featuring a one mile multi-purpose trail; a five-acre lagoon that is hydraulically connected to Lake Michigan; nature trails; boardwalks; rolling hills providing views of the city and refuge for migratory birds; native plantings to attract a wide range of birds and insects; camping locations; educational areas for park programming; and a lacustrine shelf along Burnham Harbor to provide fish habitat.

"The opening of the Northerly Island nature preserve brings a new way for Chicagoans to enjoy Lake Michigan and explore the outdoors. With more than \$6 million in federal assistance, the Army Corps and the Chicago Park District worked together to restore natural habitat and benefit our local ecosystem," said Senator Durbin. "One thing that sets Chicago apart from other major metropolitan areas is the incorporation of natural spaces and resources into the heart of the city. I commend Mayor Emanuel, the Park District and the Army Corps for their hard work in making this

restoration a reality.”

Public access will be increased to the wetland area, hills, camping grounds and other locations with the installation of ADA-accessible trails, boardwalks and a bridge at the south end of the island. The multi-purpose trail will be a mile long and 12 feet wide; fencing will be in place around the trail until the fall of 2017, when the plantings are established. The access paths will allow the public to interact with landscape and wildlife without disturbing the prairie and wetland plantings.

“As the closest natural area to the city center, Northerly Island can now offer a unique perspective of Chicago,” said Superintendent Kelly. “With rolling hills, a serene lagoon and thriving flora and fauna, this new area of Northerly Island Park will connect Chicagoans to nature right in the city.”

The transformation of Northerly Island includes the restoration of shoreline habitats, coastal wetland and other coastal plant communities and the installation of native plants and trees. More than 150 types of native plants will be installed, including more than 20,000 trees and shrubs. These plantings are designed to attract migratory birds and local insect populations.

“It has been our privilege to be part of the team working to create 40 acres of coastal habitat on Northerly Island including savannas, prairies, marshes and pond habitats,” said Col. Christopher Drew, Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District. “A unique aspect of this project is that it involved creating a variety of habitats that once existed in the center of the city and are now back as a part of the Museum Campus.”

The five acre pond’s inlet on the south will allow fish to transfer to and from the lake, and the pond will serve as an estuary for fish and amphibians. The retaining wall from the 1933 World’s Fair has been unearthed and has been incorporated into the project design.

The Park District will team with Chicago museums to establish educational programming to provide Chicago’s children with opportunities to camp and learn about nature. For example, the pond feature of the island will include an educational video display of the underwater habitat with a live feed to the Shedd Aquarium.

The total project cost, including feasibility and design phases, construction and construction oversight, is estimated to be \$9.5 million, including a federal share of about \$6.2 million secured by the Army Corps Great Lakes Fisheries and Environmental Restoration (GLFER) project. The non-federal share of Park District funding is about \$3.3 million, consisting entirely of revenue from FirstMerit Bank Pavilion at Northerly Island. The project is part of the Northerly Island framework plan completed in 2009 by Studio Gang, JRR and Smith Group.

The transformation of Northerly Island is just one of the investments Mayor Emanuel is making to rebuild the lakefront – from the north end to the south end. Last year, ground was broken on the Navy Pier Flyover to complete the 18 miles of scenic biking and walking trail along the lakefront. The new \$100 million development at the old U.S. Steele site along the south shore will include a park for families to enjoy. And South Lakeshore Drive has been extended to accommodate new redevelopment, opening up more of the lakefront to make it more accessible to residents.

For more information, visit www.chicagoparkdistrict.com or call 312.742.PLAY, 312.747.2001 (TTY).

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The Chicago Park District is the 2014 Gold Medal Award winner, recognized for excellence in park and recreation management across the nation. For more information about the Chicago Park District's more than 8,300 acres of parkland, 585 parks, 26 miles of lakefront, 12 museums, two world-class conservatories, 16 historic lagoons, nearly 50 nature areas, thousands of special events, sports and entertaining programs, please visit www.chicagoparkdistrict.com or contact the Chicago Park District at 312/742.PLAY or 312/747.2001 (TTY). Want to share your talent? Volunteer in the parks by calling, 312/742.PLAY.