



SITE RESOURCE PACKET

**SKOKIE LAGOONS SOUTH
(WINNETKA, NORTHFIELD)**



A large, green, leaf-shaped graphic with a white outline, containing the word "WELCOME" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font.

WELCOME

WELCOME TO BACKYARD NATURE CENTER'S SITE RESOURCE PACKETS!

BackYard Nature Center (BYNC) has selected and described five nature sites in New Trier Township that represent the diversity of the Township's open spaces. It is our hope that these Resource Packets serve as your roadmap to discovery as you explore and enjoy the various parks, managed natural lands, and forest preserves.

BYNC's mission is to connect children and adults, individuals and groups, with the joys and wonders of nature. We believe this connection benefits both the natural world and the lives of the participants.

Each Site Resource Packet offers:

- Road map to the site
- Site map with highlighted areas of interest
- Physical features, e.g., picnic pavilions, restrooms, playgrounds, nature trails, boat access, swimming beaches, school bus parking, restored prairie areas
- Ecological and biological features, e.g., tree and flower diversity, shoreline, bird species
- Potential activities

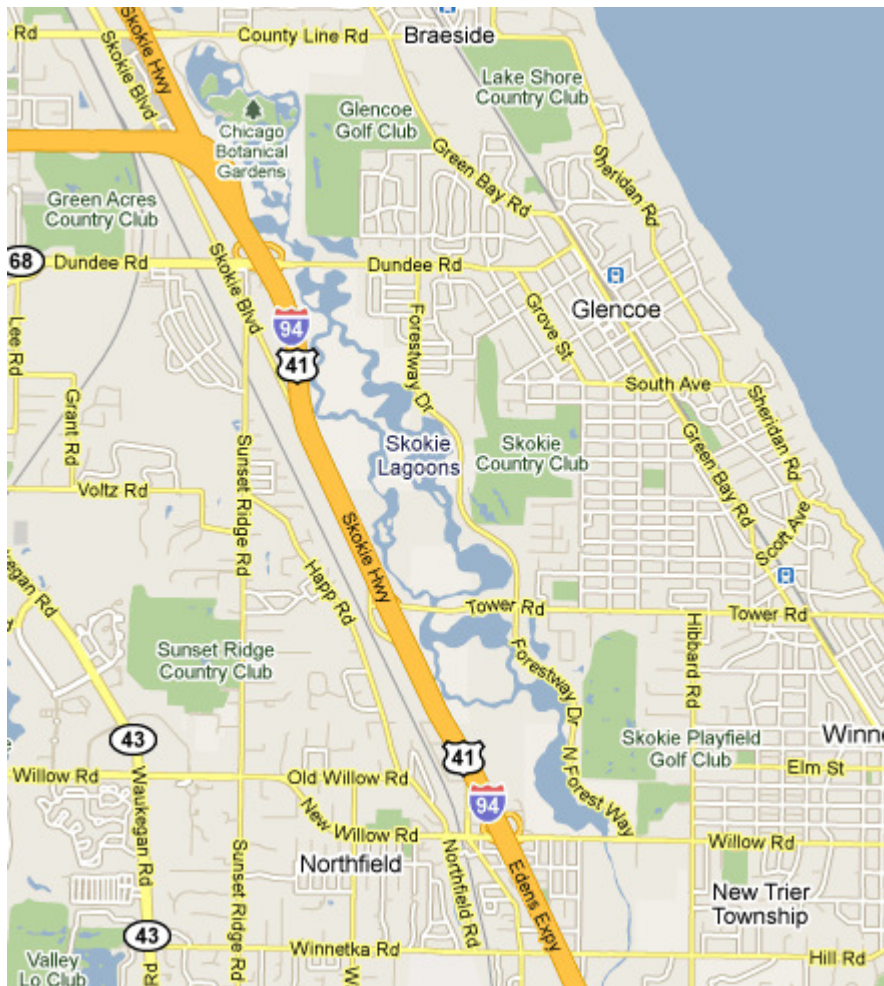
Please let us know how we can make your encounter with nature more meaningful. Contact us for more information and give us your comments about your experience. BYNC looks forward to hearing from you!

ROAD MAP

THE SKOKIE LAGOONS

ROAD MAP TO SITE

The Skokie Lagoons are located just east of the Edens Expressway (I-94) between Willow Road and Lake Cook Road. The area between Dundee Road and Lake Cook Road is occupied by the Chicago Botanic Garden. Parking is available at the Willow Road dam (north side of Willow Road just east of the Edens – look for the red Forest Preserve sign saying “William Erickson Preserve”), at the Tower Road boat launch and bike trail parking lot (south side of Tower Road just east of the Edens), and on the shoulder along Forest Way Drive.



An orange leaf-shaped graphic pointing to the right, containing the word "HISTORY" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font.

HISTORY

HISTORY OF THE SKOKIE LAGOONS

When the glaciers receded, they left a marshy valley between two moraines. The Potawatomi knew the area as the Chewab Skokie, the great wet prairie, and it was described as teeming with wildlife. When Euro-American settlers arrived, they began to systematically drain the marsh to exploit its fertile peat soil for agriculture, effectively destroying it.

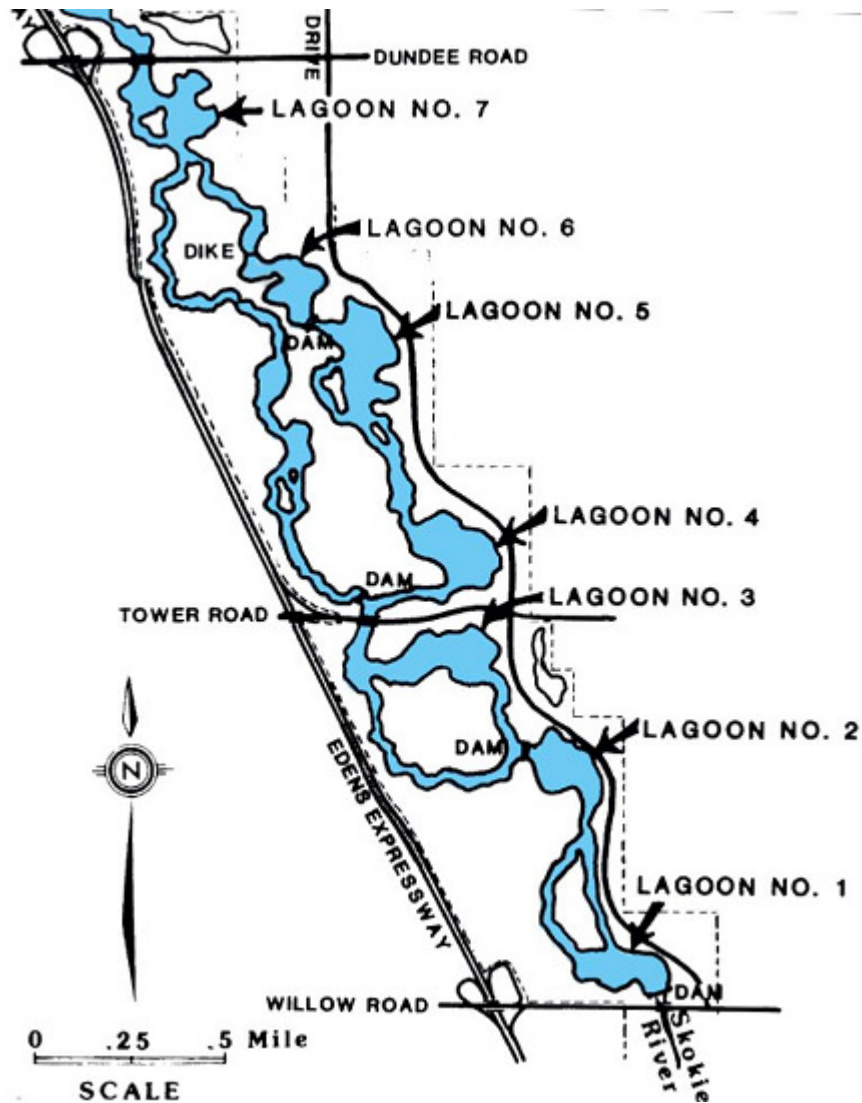
Faced with a ruined marsh that troubled neighbors with spring floods and fall peat fires, the Forest Preserve District decided to turn the site into a series of lagoons for flood control, recreation, and scenic beauty. The lagoons were dug by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) - almost entirely by hand - between 1933 and 1942.

In light of its history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Skokie Lagoons are what ecologists call a "highly disturbed" area. The peat is gone, and much of the soil on the site is clay dug from what is now the lagoon bottom. In much of the land area of the preserve, oak woodlands took hold, only to be overrun by invasive plants such as European buckthorn and garlic mustard. The two remnant prairie areas that avoided disturbance by both the CCC and the construction of the Edens Expressway face incursions of Canada thistle and takeover by woody plants.

However, all is not lost. The Lagoons provide a quiet retreat in the middle of a densely populated area and are enjoyed by hundreds of bicyclists, paddlers, and fishermen each week. The preserve provides excellent bird habitat. Volunteers from the Chicago Audubon Society and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County Volunteers have been working for almost twenty years to remove invasive plants and plant native species. Their efforts are most visible along Tower Road, where extensive buckthorn thickets have been removed.

The Skokie Lagoons feature a wide variety of wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities. Come take a look at any time of year!

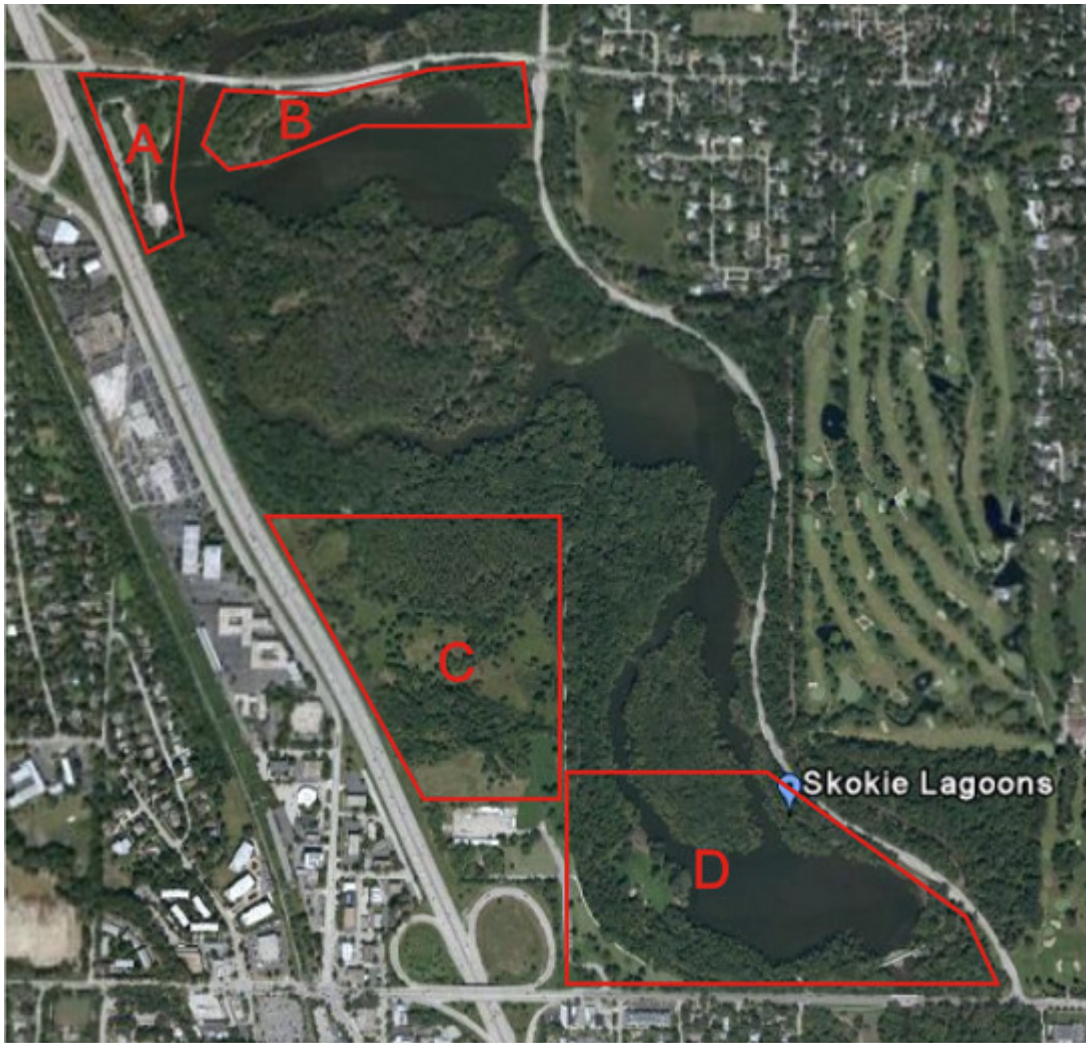
AREAS
OF INTEREST



The Skokie Lagoons site is roughly 2 ¾ miles long by ½ mile wide. The water areas consist of seven interconnected lagoons with a main dam at Willow Road and several low-head dams between the lagoons. The North Branch Bicycle Train runs along the west side of the Lagoons from Willow Road to Tower Road, and then forms a loop around the Lagoons between Tower Road and Dundee Road.

Because it is such a large site, this document will divide the Skokie Lagoons into parcels, one north and one south of Tower Road.

SKOKIE LAGOONS SOUTH



Featured Areas

- A** Boat launch area
- B** North edge restoration area
- C** Ecologically significant sedge meadow and burr oak
- D** Erickson Woods lagoon dam and picnic area with facilities

AREAS
OF INTEREST

SKOKIE LAGOONS SOUTH

The south section of the Skokie Lagoons is bounded by Tower Road on the north and Willow Road on the south. The western boundary of the site is the Edens Expressway, and the eastern boundary is Forest Way Drive. Ample parking is available in the bike trail parking lot on Tower Road or anywhere along Forest Way Drive. The North Branch Bicycle follows the western edge of the lagoons here.



Area A: Boat Launch

There is a boat launch with pier and trailer parking here. Remember that gasoline engines are not allowed on the Lagoons. Electric motors are fine. The lagoons are well-suited to canoes, kayaks, sailboats, and fishing boats. A porta-potty is located adjacent to the parking area.

Just south of the boat launch is a woodland area where some restoration work has been done. Thickets of invasive buckthorn have been removed to restore the site to the open woodland typical of northern Illinois. Look for wading birds, especially great blue herons, along the shore.



AREAS
OF INTEREST



Area B: Tower Road Restoration Area

This area is a major hub for recreational activities – canoe and kayak rentals, fishing, and picnicking. The bike path, which runs the full length of the Skokie Lagoons, passes through this area, and many bikers, walkers, and joggers stop here for a rest or just to take in the beautiful sights.

Many volunteers from high schools, Cub Scouts, and even first graders have helped to pick up litter and make the area clean for the visitors. This area was once choked with invasive buckthorn, but extensive volunteer efforts have removed the thickets. In some areas, native vegetation has been planted, making for a beautiful wildflower display.

There is a long, narrow parking lot parallel to Tower Road which has about 20 parking spaces, it is the ideal place for school buses to park and unload.



**AREAS
OF INTEREST**



Area C: Sedge Meadow and Burr Oak

This area remained undisturbed throughout the construction of the Skokie Lagoons and the Edens Expressway. This is a sedge meadow populated by a wide variety of native plants for a beautiful summertime display.

Along the north edge of this area is a 400-year-old burr oak tree – a true survivor!

Area D: Erickson Woods Lagoon Dam and Picnic Area

There is a picnic shelter just east of the bike trail here. The Willow Road Dam is also a popular fishing area.



AREAS OF INTEREST

Area D: Erickson Woods Lagoon Dam and Picnic Area



Mayapple (big leaves, looks like an umbrella, very common)

- All the parts of the plant, excepting the fruit, are *poisonous*.
- Though the common name is mayapple, it is the flower that appears in early May, not the "apple".
- Mayapple can be used topically for warts.
- Water from a boiled root can treat stomach aches.

Lesser Celandine (yellow flower, very common)

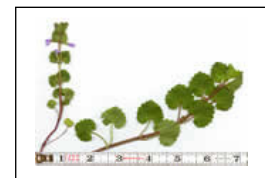
- Considered an *invasive* species
- Emerges well before most native species, which allows it to establish and dominate natural areas rapidly
- *Poisonous* if ingested raw



Creeping Charley [AKA: Moneywort]

(low to the ground purple plant, very common, invasive, all over the place)

- Considered an *invasive* plant, sometimes choking out native wildflowers.
- Has culinary and medicinal uses which were the cause of its being imported to America by early European settlers
 - The fresh herb can be rinsed and steeped in hot water to create an herbal tea which is rich in vitamin C.
 - Has a distinctive, mildly peppery flavor; can be cooked as a pot herb, or eaten as a fresh salad green



Wild Violet (interspersed among the Creeping Charley)

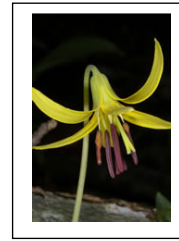
- Edible
- Contains anti-oxidants



Area D: Erickson Woods Lagoon Dam and Picnic Area

Trout Lily (variegated pointed leaf that may have a white or yellow flower)

- Edible as a root vegetable or leaf vegetable
- Can be ground into flour



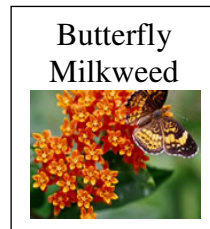
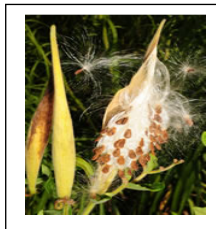
Burdock (the plant that has the burrs, by the water on the way to the bridge)

- The burrs attach to fur (and clothing), aiding in seed dispersal
- Source of inspiration for the invention of Velcro by George de Mestral
- The [taproot](#) of young burdock plants can be eaten as a root vegetable



Milkweed (has a pod on a 3-ft stem, just before the bridge)

- Important nectar source for native bees, wasps, and other nectar-seeking insects
- Larval food source for monarch butterflies and their relatives specialized to feed on the plants despite their chemical defenses



Canada Thistle

(very thorny, only 6-inches high, just before the bridge)

- *Invasive* species
- The seeds are an important food for goldfinch and linnet.



Area D: Erickson Woods Lagoon Dam and Picnic Area

Goldenrod (about 4-ft. high, just before the bridge)

- Mostly native to North America.
- Young goldenrod leaves are edible.
- Native Americans used the seeds for food.
- Unfairly blamed for causing hay fever – the pollen causing hay fever is mainly produced by ragweed.



Queen Anne's Lace

(4-ft stem with lacey cup on top, just before the bridge)

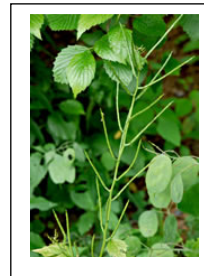
- Introduced and naturalized in North America
- Both Anne, Queen of Great Britain and her great grandmother Anne of Denmark are taken to be the Queen Anne for which the plant is named.



Garlic Mustard

(6-inch stem with white flower, along the bike path)

- Classified as an *invasive* species
- Early European settlers brought the herb to the New World to use as a garlic type flavoring and a good source of vitamins A and C.
- The herb's medicinal purposes include use as a disinfectant and diuretic
- Also planted as a form of erosion control.
- In the first year of growth, plants form clumps of round shaped, slightly wrinkled leaves, that when crushed smell like garlic.



Multiflora Rose (thorny rose along the bike path)

- Generally considered an *invasive* species
- Originally introduced from Asia as a soil conservation measure, as a natural hedge to border grazing land, and to attract wildlife.



SKOKIE LAGOONS SOUTH

SUMMARY

Access

On-site parking/roadside parking

Map Areas

General Features

Extensive woodland and lagoon surfaces

A B D

Bike path

A B C D

Walking path

C D

Open space – significant grassy areas adjacent to path

D

Primitive port-a-potty facilities

A D

Boat launch

A

Ecological Features

Combination of landscaped areas, many trees and shoreline

A B D

Some native prairie grasses and wildflowers are present

B C D

Biological Features

Managed and unmanaged forest areas

B C D

Small areas of prairie and savanna plants

B D

Many small bird species in migration

A B C D

Other Comments

Historically significant areas

C D

A red, leaf-like shape with a white border containing the text "READING & ACTIVITIES" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font.

READING &
ACTIVITIES

FOR FURTHER READING

Hill, Libby. (2000). *The Chicago River: A Natural and Unnatural History*. Lake Claremont Press.

Greenberg, Joel. (2004). *A Natural History of the Chicago Region*. University of Chicago Press.

Official Web Site: Forest Preserve District of Cook County:

http://www.fpdcc.com/tier3.php?content_id=68&file=map_67x

1961 Forest Preserve District of Cook County report:

<http://www.newton.dep.anl.gov/natbltn/600-699/nb646.htm>

Stewardship Report by the Chicago Audubon Society

http://www.chicagoaudubon.org/pages/main1203_02.shtml