

Executive Summary



A rare and historic opportunity exists in the Saint Louis metropolitan area to return 5,500 acres of land to the general public for conservation and recreation use. This vision to create one of the largest conservation and recreational areas in southwestern Illinois is now underway and includes a diverse mix of outdoor recreation opportunities and expansive restorations of wetlands, woodlands and prairies. Thanks to the assistance and tremendous support

from the local community as well as the region, the successful preparation of the Chouteau Island Master Plan is now complete and presented herein. This cultural, conservation, recreation and interpretive opportunity has been embraced and guided into reality by numerous stakeholders, citizens and the Chouteau Island Coordination Team (CICT). The CICT is a collaboration of local, state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations, with a common interest in the future of Chouteau Island. Formed in 2000 with a vision to make the Chouteau Island project a reality, the CICT has been dedicated to creating a master plan and implementing the long-term management and operation of Chouteau Island.

The area known as Chouteau Island is actually comprised of three islands, Mosenthein, Gabaret and Chouteau, which totals 5,500 acres of land. Chouteau Island is located within the Island District of The Confluence Greenway, a forty-mile open space network currently under development in the region. The Chouteau Island complex is bounded by the Mississippi River to the west and the Chain of Rocks Canal to the east. The island is directly across the canal from the new Lewis and Clark Center, approximately one mile south of the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, and two miles north of the Saint Louis Arch. Almost five times larger than Forest Park in Saint Louis, the island complex is rich in wildlife such as deer, turkey, coyote, dove, quail, songbirds and various species of duck, herons, egrets and much more. There have been regular sightings and nesting of Peregrine Falcons on Chouteau Island, and of course, the American Bald Eagle is frequently observed in the winter months. Excellent fishing exists in the Mississippi River near the Old Chain of Rocks

Bridge. The 10 miles of Mississippi River that borders the Chouteau Island complex to the west is the only natural stretch of river without barge traffic between St. Paul and New Orleans. The Mississippi River here contains some of the cleanest water in the river system as evidenced by a high quality fish community. The island complex is rich in cultural and historical resources as well. Lewis & Clark camped on the southern tip of Gabaret Island, December 11, 1803, the night before establishing their winter camp at Wood River.

Chouteau Island is accessed from Illinois by the Canal Bridge, a vehicular bridge that crosses the Chain of Rocks Canal. It is accessed from Missouri via the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge, a former vehicular bridge associated with historic U.S. Route 66 that was recently renovated and dedicated for bike and pedestrian use only. Presently, this is the only bridge spanning the Mississippi River and the second largest bridge in the United States dedicated to pedestrian and bike traffic only.

Over 60% of the island complex is in public ownership. Presently, the Army Corps of Engineers owns 1,300 acres, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources now owns 2,200 acres. Soon, the City of Madison, Illinois, will own 780 acres. The last project of comparable size was in 1932, when 8,000 acres were dedicated to the public, establishing Pere Marquette State Park, in Grafton, Illinois.

The Master Plan includes a network of trails consisting of 13 miles of multi-use trails that can be used for horse, bicycle or foot; 20 miles of bike/hike trails that will be used for walking and bicycling; over 19 miles of combined horse trails; and 6 miles of nature trails. Chouteau Island connects the Confluence Bikeway in Illinois and the Riverfront Trail in Missouri and is at the crossroads of The Great River Birding Trail, The American Discovery Trail, The Mississippi River Trail, The Mississippi River Flyway and Historic Route 66.

The Master Plan includes a comprehensive list of recommendations. A green viewshed corridor will parallel the alignment of I-270 through Chouteau Island for the purpose of preserving and enhancing the green views and vistas experienced by passing visitors. Other activities in the

Master Plan include primitive and tent camping, hunting, fishing, a boat ramp, dock landings for visitor excursion boats, canoeing, picnicking, birding and a host of other outdoor educational and recreational activities. A visitor center has been proposed that would be a re-creation of the original toll booth on the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge. The \$2.4 million Toll Booth Visitor Center would be located at the Illinois entrance to the bridge and provide meeting rooms, offices, restrooms, concessions, parking, and serve as a trail head to the network of trails on the island.

The Master Plan for Chouteau Island includes 2,455 acres of proposed ecosystem restoration. The ecosystem restoration improvements consist of 670 acres of native grasslands restoration; the conversion of 880 acres of agricultural fields and open space to woodlands; the reestablishment of 3 miles of Chouteau and Gabaret Sloughs; and approximately 430 acres of restored wetlands. These restoration projects will provide enhanced habitat, additional natural water purification, soil stabilization, increase recreation opportunities, create living classrooms, increase interpretive learning, enhance biodiversity and improve views and vistas. Currently, the COE and IDNR are preparing plans to restore 245 acres on Chouteau Island. The restoration will include the establishment of prairie grass and tree plantings that will create higher quality habitat, stabilize soil conditions and improve visual quality on Chouteau Island. This project may be expanded by as much as 500 acres to include other restoration plans within the Master Plan.

The total implementation cost of the Master Plan recommendations is approximately \$26.1 million. Twelve priority projects have been identified as essential to continue the implementation of the vision for Chouteau Island. The priority projects total approximately \$12.5 million and consist of \$3.2 million for trails and roads; \$5.5 million for environmental restoration; and \$3.8 million for visitor orientation and comfort.

The continuing efforts to preserve and enhance Chouteau Island will stand out over time as one of this region's most important conservation and recreation efforts, forever preserving and protecting open space for future generations in the heart of our urban community.



Chouteau Island Master Plan

- | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <p>1 Green Viewshed Corridor Area
Green Gateway to The Confluence Greenway
Preservation of Views & Vistas
Restricted Commercial Development
Reforestation
Perennial Zones</p> <p>2 Orientation & Interpretive Area
Old Chain of Rocks Bridge
Toll Booth Visitor Center
Connection to North Riverfront Trail
Connection to Chouteau Island
Connection to Confluence Bikeway</p> <p>3 Environmental Education Area
Interpretive Overlook
Environmental Restoration
Trails & Signage
Outdoor Classrooms</p> | <p>4 Green Use Area
Preservation of Views & Vistas
Open Space Compatible Uses
Land Fill Compatible Uses
Interpretive Overlook</p> <p>5 Equestrian Staging Area
Open Space
Access & Staging
Open Structures
Primitive Camping</p> <p>6 Slough Restoration Area
Chouteau Slough
Gabaret Slough
Water Flow From Canal to Slough
Wetland Restoration
Day Use
Interpretive Overlook
Canal Dock</p> | <p>7 Wetland & Prairie Mix Area
Mesic / Semi-Moist Prairie
Dry Prairie
Wet Prairie / Marsh
Reforestation
Wetland Restoration
Water Flow From Canal to Slough
Bank Stabilization
Levee Stabilization
Hunting
Hike/Bike Across Canal Connection
Interpretive Overlook</p> <p>8 South Reforestation Area
Hardy Plantings
Interpretive Overlook
Lewis & Clark Campsite</p> <p>9 Mosenthein Island Area
Preservation
Hunting
Public Access</p> | <p>10 River Access Area
Interpretive Overlook
Bank Fishing Access
Small Craft Access
Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration</p> <p>11 Recreation Area
Picnic Areas
Group Camping
Primitive Camping
Day Camping
Open Space
Fishing Pier (pond)
Small Craft Access (pond)
River Dock
Boat Ramp</p> <p>12 Habitat Restoration Area
Hardy Plantings
Bank Fishing Access
Preservation of Views & Vistas</p> | <p>13 North Reforestation Area
Hardy Plantings
Canal Sign
Hunting
Interpretive Overlook</p> <p>14 Off-Site Commercial Use Area
Chouteau Island Gateway
Compatible Theme Development
Trail Connection to Confluence Bikeway</p> <p>Other
P Parking
M Multi-Use Trail
B Bike/Hike Trail
E Equestrian Trail
N Nature Trail</p> |
|---|--|--|--|--|

Vision Statement

Chouteau, Gabaret and Mosenthein Islands will provide new opportunities for preservation and outdoor recreation through restoration, facility improvements and interpretation of the Island's resources.

From the founding of Saint Louis, the Chouteau Island complex has been recognized as a great river landmark. Lewis and Clark camped on Gabaret; Route 66 and the fabulous 50s passed through Chouteau Island; river navigation hazards required engineered solutions; and the Great Flood demonstrated nature's superiority.

New opportunities for open space preservation, environmental restoration and connecting communities will continue to bring visitors to Chouteau Island. The challenge will be in the coexistence of visitors and wildlife habitat while addressing sustainability and recognizing the cultural and environmental significance of the "place apart" that is Chouteau Island.