



SITE RESOURCE PACKET

SKOKIE LAGOONS NORTH (GLENCOE)



A green leaf-shaped graphic with the word "WELCOME" written inside in white capital letters.

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

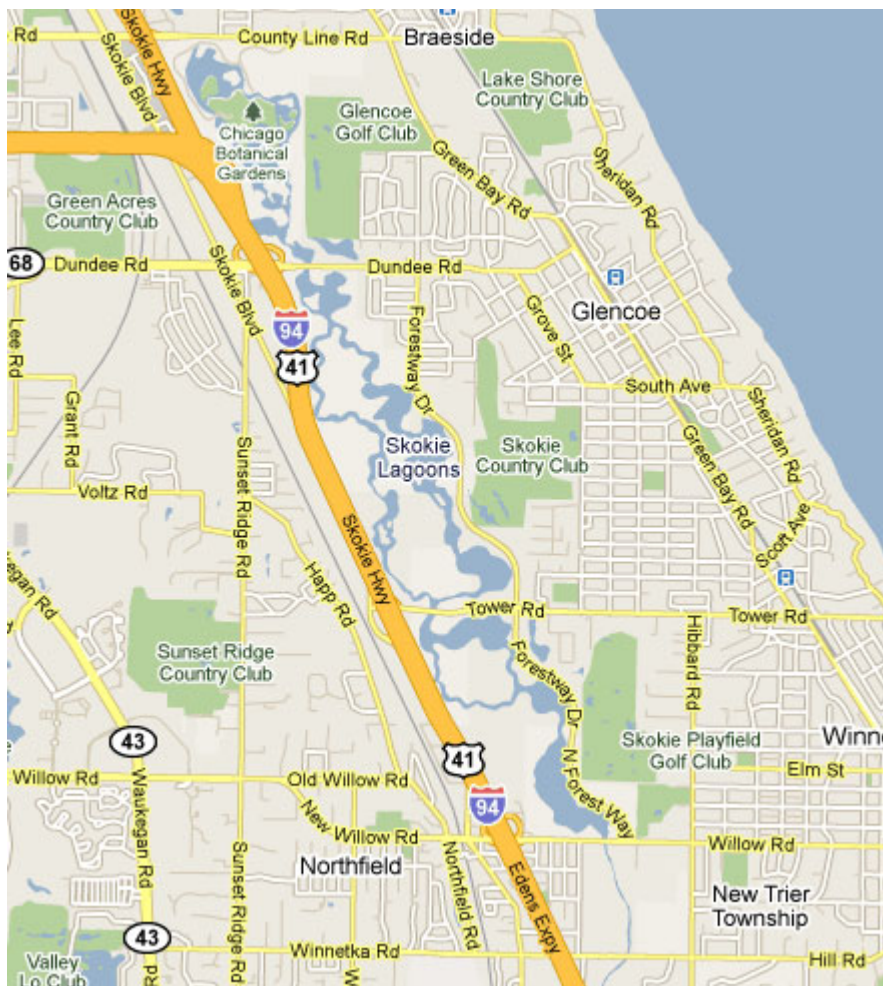
Please let us know how we can make your encounter with nature more meaningful. Contact us for more information and give us your comments about your experience. BYNC looks forward to hearing from you!

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.



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.

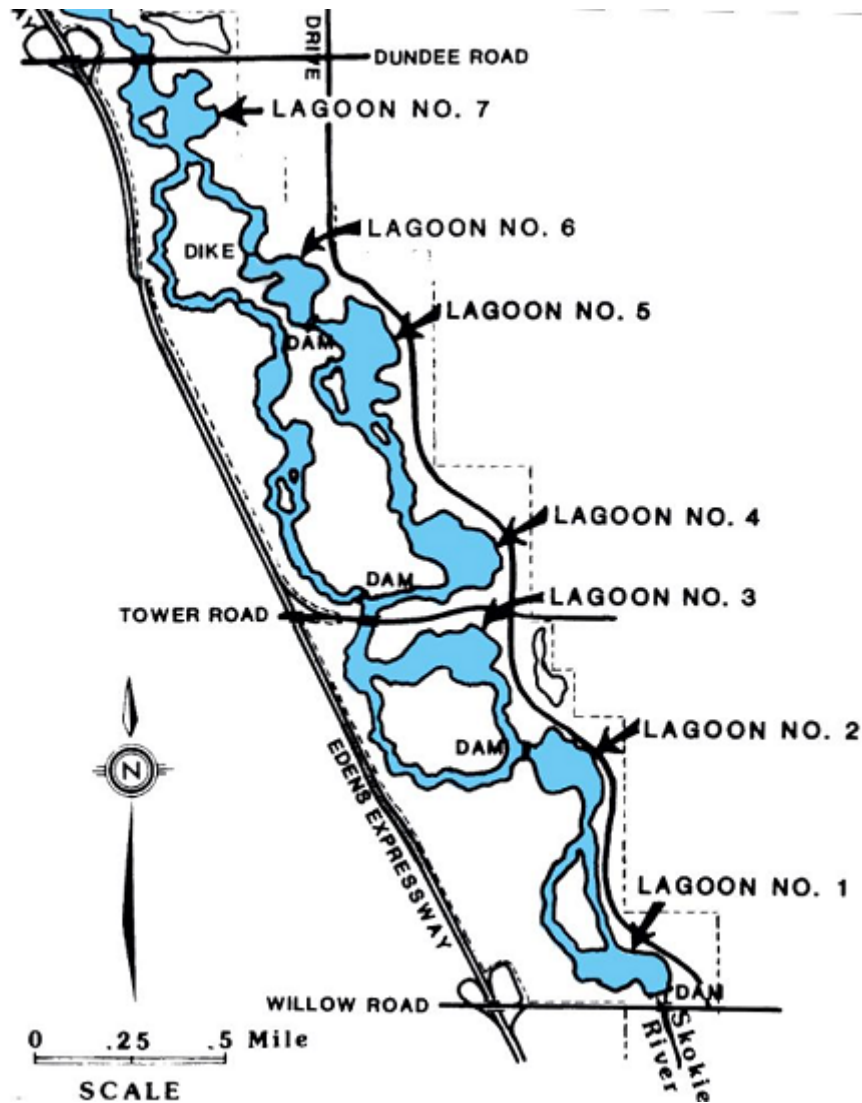
Faced with a ruined marsh that troubled neighbors with spring floods and fall peat fires, the Forest Preserve District decided to turn the site into a series of lagoons for flood control, recreation, and scenic beauty. The lagoons were dug by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) - almost entirely by 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 $2 \frac{3}{4}$ miles long by $\frac{1}{2}$ 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.

AREAS
OF INTEREST

SKOKIE LAGOONS NORTH



Featured Areas

- A** North side restoration area
- B** Historical area
- C** Prairie restoration area
- D** Comprehensive restoration area with facilities
- E** Historical dredge hill
- F** South side restoration area

AREAS
OF INTEREST

SKOKIE LAGOONS NORTH

The north section of the Skokie Lagoons is bounded by Tower Road on the south and Dundee Road on the north. The area from Dundee Road north to Lake-Cook Road is hydrologically part of the Skokie Lagoons, but it is managed by the Chicago Botanic Garden. Look for details about that section in the Backyard Nature Center’s Chicago Botanic Garden Resource Packet.

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. There is a picnic shelter along Forest Way Drive; shoreline fishing access is also good there. The North Branch Bicycle Trail forms a loop around the northern half of the Lagoons.



Area A: North Side Restoration Area

The northeast corner of the Lagoons is a woodland area with some wildflower stands. Watch for wildlife, including the state-endangered black-crowned night heron, along the shores of the lagoon.



Area B: Historical Area

This historical area was once part of a Nike anti-aircraft site. Following budget reductions, almost all Nike sites in the continental United States were deactivated by April, 1974.

Today the remains can still be seen on the North Branch Trail on a leveled-off hill; the launch area has been fenced off and used as a dumping ground for dredging operations and is not open to the public, although the complex perimeter can be viewed from the bicycle trail. The portion of the bike trail from Tower Road to the launch complex was the actual road used to access the base.

AREAS OF INTEREST



Area C: Prairie Restoration Area

Along Forest Way Drive, north of the picnic shelter and just south of a residential neighborhood is a small restored prairie. Extensive volunteer restoration efforts have helped rid this area of invasive Canada thistle and allow native prairie plants to be re-established. This is a great place to look for wildflowers and butterflies. Future restoration of this site may include prescribed fire.



Area D: Restored Area with Picnic Facilities

Along Forest Way Drive and the North Branch Bicycle Trail, on the peninsula separating Lagoons 5 and 6, there is a picnic area with a shelter. This area has been extensively restored, both in terms of shoreline access and native vegetation. Look for barn swallows nesting around the picnic shelter. You may also see white-tailed deer grazing at the edges of the woodland.

Area E: Historical Dredge Hill

From 1955 to 1974, Area E was home to air defense missiles! Nike Hercules Site C-93, along with several other sites in the Chicago area, was the last line of defense against the threat of Soviet bombers approaching from over the North Pole. The missiles were visible from the Edens Expressway.

The Skokie Lagoons have suffered from degradation due to the accumulation of sediment at the lake bottom. As part of the EPA Clean Lakes Program, extensive dredging was undertaken in the early 1990s to remove accumulated sediment and improve aquatic habitat. The dredged material was piled up in Area E, obliterating any remains of the Nike missile site.

AREAS
OF INTEREST

Area F: Tower Road Restoration Area

This strip between Tower Road and the water is heavily invested with European buckthorn, an invasive shrub which establishes dense thickets, crowding out native plants. This area has been the site of vigorous volunteer restoration efforts.

When work began, an impenetrable wall of buckthorn made it impossible to see the water from Tower Road. Now, the area has gone from a jungle choked with buckthorn to an open oak woodland more typical of northern Illinois. This restored area is a great habitat for both resident and migratory birds.



AREAS
OF INTEREST

SKOKIE LAGOONS NORTH

SUMMARY

Access

On-site parking/roadside parking

General Features

Extensive woodland and lagoon surface

Bike path

Walking path

Open space – minimal grassy areas adjacent to path

Primitive port-a-potty facilities

Ecological Features

Combination of landscaped areas, many trees and wildflower stands

Some native prairie grasses and wildflowers are present

Biological Features

Managed and unmanaged forest area

Small areas of prairie and savanna plants

Many small bird species in migration

Other comments

Historically significant area

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