

Climate-Smart Community Profile: Chicago



With a metropolitan area population of nearly 10 million, Chicago is the largest city in Illinois and the third largest in the US. Located on the shores of Lake Michigan, Chicago's international economy is driven by finance, commerce, industry, telecommunications, and transportation. The city also has a thriving port industry, as Lake Michigan connects to the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence Seaway. Chicago experiences a humid continental climate, with four distinct seasons. Summers are hot and humid and the bitterly cold winters are made more harsh by the persistent and famous winds sweeping off the lake.

Cities and towns across the United States are preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change, a process known as climate change adaptation. Chicago is using a variety of nature-based approaches to protect people and property that also confer adaptation value for wildlife and habitat areas. Chicago is particularly concerned with preparations for **flooding, extreme heat, severe weather, and ecosystem degradation.**

Climate Planning Activities

- The Mayor's office released the **Chicago Climate Action Plan** in 2008. The plan outlines a road map of what the City hopes to achieve by the year 2020 in terms of reducing emissions to limit global warming and preparing for the effects of climate change via adaptation strategies. The plan centers on five strategies: energy efficient buildings, clean and renewable energy resources, improved transportation options, reduced waste and industrial pollution, and adaptation.
- Within the adaptation section of the Climate Action Plan, the City highlighted 9 major actions; managing heat, pursuing innovative cooling, protecting air quality, managing stormwater, implementing **Green Urban Design**, preserving plants and trees, engaging the public, engaging business, and planning for the future.
- Summer 2010: **first progress report** for the Climate Action Plan was released, highlighting achievements and summarizing progress on each of the five key strategies. Each strategy summary was accompanied by an outline of next steps and (in some cases) acknowledgment of key partner NGOs such as the world-famous **Field Museum**.



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Implementation of Adaptation Activities

Stormwater (Chicago Climate Action Plan)

- Climate change is increasing storm frequency and intensity, putting more stress on already outdated stormwater infrastructure systems.
- The City has recommended the use of green roofs, rain gardens, and urban tree planting to absorb and purify stormwater via natural processes. Chicago has also increased permeable surfaces in the city by 55 acres, and converted over 120 alleys into green spaces.
- These measures will help offset the effects of increased rain in Chicago, while providing new and improved habitat for wildlife.



Urban Heat Island Effect (Chicago Climate Action Plan)

- High percentages of paved surfaces cause urban areas to absorb and retain more heat, increasing temperatures of the city and surrounding areas in what is known as the "urban heat island effect. These changes create problems for wildlife both wildlife and people living in cities.
- Chicago is using green roofs (four million sq. ft. planned or completed) and tree canopy expansion (more than 9000 acres in last 20 years) to provide more shade and lower temperatures. The city is also expanding open spaces like parks, to help offset the UHIE and provide habitat for wildlife.



Habitat Loss (Chicago Wilderness)

- In partnership with the Field Museum, the NGO Chicago Wilderness has developed a specific **Climate Action Plan for Nature (CAPN)**, outlining steps necessary for protection of species, habitat, and ecosystems in the greater Chicago area.
- The first priority action of the CAPN is to promote climate-friendly gardens and lawns to provide habitat for wildlife. As the underlying conditions supporting ecosystems are altered by climate change, they will struggle to persist. By encouraging planting of hardy, change-tolerant species, Chicago Wilderness is protecting valuable ecosystem services and habitat for wildlife.



What's helping Chicago?

- A strong and thorough Chicago Climate Action Plan
- Commitment to releasing progress reports every two years will help keep the City accountable.
- Partnerships with groups like The Field Museum and Chicago Wilderness.

