



## **Plunge into a new urban oasis** **Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo**

**What:** Visitors to Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo will be able to immerse themselves in a multi-sensory, interactive ecosystem. The landscape of this newly naturalized oasis in the heart of the city has been completely transformed to provide a haven for native trees, plants and animals and will offer unique opportunities for visitors to engage and connect with the natural world like never before. Educational programming will be a key feature of the pond ecosystem experience between Lincoln Park Zoo and the Farm-in-the-Zoo Presented by John Deere.

The massive revitalization of what was once a dilapidated manmade pond will now provide shelter to native fish. More than 100 newly planted trees and acres of prairie and wetland grasses and plants will provide shade, food and habitat for local wildlife. An estimated half-mile of boardwalk surrounds the entire body of water, giving the public maximum access to enjoy the serene environment.

Rare migratory birds, such as the black-crowned night heron, can be spotted nesting, while turtles sun themselves and dragonflies skim the water. The newly restored habitat is expected to attract many more spectacular wildlife sightings than ever before in the pond's 140-year history. Open to the community every day, the boardwalk will host naturalist interpreters during regular zoo hours that provide informative and engaging interactive opportunities.

**Size:** 14 acres

**Opens:** **June 24, 2010**

**Cost:** Approximately \$12 million

**Funding:** Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo has been made possible through the support and generosity of the Chicago Park District, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Brooks McCormick, Robert R. McCormick Foundation, Peoples Gas, The Regenstein Foundation, the Women's Board of The Lincoln Park Zoological Society as well as the generosity of numerous zoo friends and other private and corporate foundations.

### **Hours of**

**Operation:** Nature Boardwalk is free, and open to the public from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. Educational programming takes place daily during regular zoo hours.

**Fun Facts:** The boardwalk is made entirely of Earth-smart recycled materials – this is the largest single usage of these environmentally friendly products ever created.

The structure of the Peoples Gas Education Pavilion was inspired by a turtle shell. It was designed by award-winning and notable architectural design firm Studio Gang.

## **Daily**

**Activities:** Educators will host daily tours and talks called “Feathered Friends,” “Fishy Fun” and “Exploring an Ecosystem,” among other themes that serve as fun and engaging educational experiences. There will be ample hands-on opportunities to learn and interact. Additionally, new adult and family-oriented special programs launch at Nature Boardwalk this summer including yoga and a family overnight camping program.

**Featured Fish:** Fathead Minnows, Pumpkinseed, Bluegill and Largemouth Bass.

**Horticultural Highlights:** Nature Boardwalk features more than 100 newly planted trees in addition to dozens of mature trees including Downy and Cockspur Hawthorns; River Birch; Pin and Swamp White Oaks; American Sycamores; Pignut and Shagbark Hickory; Serviceberry as well as Silky, Redosier and Flowering Dogwood; Eastern and Western Redbuds and American Elder among many other tree varieties.

Prairie and wetland grasses and vegetation stretch across the habitat including, Switch Grass; Swamp and Prairie Milkweed; Little Bluestem; Sawtooth, Ashy, Downy and Stiff Sunflowers; Compass Plant; Rough Golden Rod; Ohio Spiderwort; Purple Corn Flower, Allegheny Monkey Flower; Yellow Pond Lily and American White Waterlily; Common Witch Hazel and American Water Willow in addition to numerous other prairie and wetland vegetation indigenous to this region.

**Feathered Friends:** Keep an eye to the sky (and trees) to catch a glimpse of numerous native wild and migratory birds that will stop by Nature Boardwalk, or permanently call it home. Some species commonly seen include: Endangered Black-Crowned Night Herons; Barn Swallows; Northern Cardinals; Red-winged Blackbirds; Black-capped chickadee; Mallard and Wood Ducks; Red-Breasted Merganser; Downy Woodpecker; Red-Tailed Hawk; Great Horned Owl; Ring-billed Gull; House Sparrow; American Crow and Canada Geese.

## **Conservation Science at Nature Boardwalk:**

- **Painted Turtle Reintroduction**

Approximately 20 painted turtles will be carefully introduced to Nature Boardwalk during 2010. Transponders will be implanted in the turtles so that biologists can identify individuals and monitor their health. The turtles will also

be fitted with small radio transmitters so that scientists can follow their status from afar. Turtle-friendly landscaping is part of the design of Nature Boardwalk, provides ample basking surfaces, including boulders, where the turtles can thermoregulate. Biologists will observe usage of these landscape features.

- **Black Crowned Night Heron Surveillance**

Black crowned night herons are endangered in Illinois, so the presence of a nesting colony on the island in the center of the pond at Nature Boardwalk is an extraordinary treat for both the public and for scientists. Biologists will count the birds daily until they migrate in the fall. With the help of binoculars, researchers will observe and record bird behaviors as part of a long term study to better understand this rare, little-studied species. Wildlife biologists at the zoo are particularly interested in observing how these birds are affected by human activity in such an urban area.

- **Fish Surveys**

The pond at Nature Boardwalk will be stocked with fish in spring 2010. Fish species include bluegills (the state fish of Illinois), largemouth bass, fathead minnows, and pumpkinseeds. To monitor how the fish population changes over time, zoo biologists will conduct regular seine surveys. Seines are specialized nets used to collect fish. Fish will be identified by species and released. The fish will not be harmed. Seining will also provide an educational opportunity, as fish caught in seining nets can be shown to visitors. Visitors who attend education programs at the pond can learn about the biology of the fish, their food web, and their ecosystem roles. Biologists are interested to learn how the fish use the habitat at Nature Boardwalk to determine if the habitat contains adequate cover, spawning areas, and food resources. Observations about fish habitat usage may help the zoo make future management decisions.

- **Wildlife Surveillance**

One of the exciting aspects of creating a new urban ecosystem is to see what wildlife will arrive. One way biologists will monitor life at the pond is by motion triggered cameras to observe wildlife without disturbing the animals. Some cameras will feature infrared capacity, so nocturnal animals can be observed at night. Wildlife surveillance will also occur through direct visual observation. A biologist will regularly conduct perimeter surveys, taking detailed notes of all the birds, insects, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians observed.

- **Avian Surveys**

Everyone, from children to expert ornithologists, will be able to enjoy bird watching at the Nature Boardwalk. Zoo biologists are fortunate in that this activity will be part of their daily duties at the pond!

Nature Boardwalk landscape structures have been designed to take into account the specific needs of birds. For example, support structures under the Lester E. Fisher Bridge will provide nesting habitat for swallows. Biologists will be interested to see how the birds use these sites.

- **Water Quality Monitoring**

Water quality is important for all life at Nature Boardwalk. Native prairie and wetland vegetation will filter runoff entering the pond. The plants protect against erosion as well. An air diffuser system will provide oxygen that is important for fish and other aquatic life. The pond has been deepened to provide sustainable habitat for fish and turtles that overwinter under water. Biologists are interested to see how these improvements to the pond will impact water quality. Water quality sampling will be frequent at the beginning of the pond's development and will decrease in frequency once water quality parameters have stabilized. A field test kit will be used to determine parameters of interest. Samples will also be tested in a laboratory for quality control. Tests will include dissolved oxygen, pH, and many other parameters indicative of overall water quality.