



Southeast Environmental Task Force

Working with Chicago's Southeast Side and south suburban communities to improve the Calumet region

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STEEL TOWN TO GREEN TOWN

The Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF) adopted its Calumet Area Vision plan showing a remarkable future for the Southeast Side and south suburbs. Board members unanimously approved the plan, a year in the making, at their meeting Monday night. The plan shows the area's natural lands weaving through neighborhoods and industrial districts. It unifies the Calumet area through a regional system of greenways and trails.

"It shows the transition from 'Steel Town' to 'Green Town'," said SETF Executive Director Alan Mammoser. "The open spaces become a 'green infrastructure' that supports community revitalization."

The Calumet area's natural lands were long recognized to be special, harboring unique ecosystems. Yet they suffered from a century of industrial pollution and waste dumping. SETF's new map shows their rebirth. It shows natural lands coexisting with neighborhoods and industrial areas, indicating a new balance of nature, community and industry.

The Calumet Area Vision's most remarkable feature may be the great variety of open spaces. They range from Big Marsh, covering hundreds of acres, to half-acre market gardens on South Chicago lots. These all fit together into a single system, serving the needs of people throughout the Southeast Side and the south suburbs. They give all people access to open space while supporting the birds, animals, fish and native plant species that thrive in the Calumet region.

The vision will require time to implement. The new SETF map shows important steps along the way by highlighting 18 specific points called Places and Connections. These bring attention to critical areas that require special attention, restoration, advocacy and care. To begin, SETF will bring attention to three of them:

1) Burnham Greenway – the "gap"

The Burnham Greenway comes through the heart of south suburban communities and Southeast Side neighborhoods. It links people to Chicago's Lakefront Trail.

Unfortunately, a 5-mile gap interrupts its course through Hegewisch and Burnham.

Closing the gap requires two bridges and new paths along right-of-ways.

2) The Western Shore of Lake Calumet

Lake Calumet is a natural lake that was once considered a natural paradise by indigenous peoples, pioneers and early residents of Chicago. People from the village of Pullman once enjoyed its waters. Today the lake provides harbor facilities for the Illinois International Port District along its southern end. Yet much of the lake remains open, unused and surrounded by a razor wire fence. SETF and its partners in the Lake Calumet Vision Committee call for the transfer of the lake's western shore to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

3) Calumet-Sag Trail

This long east-west trail will unite the Calumet area with the Illinois & Michigan National Heritage Corridor. It will follow the Grand Calumet and Little Calumet rivers through the communities of Burnham, Calumet City, Riverdale and Dolton, then continue along the Cal-Sag Channel to the National Heritage Corridor. The multiuse trail will spur community and economic development through recreation and tourism.

SETF will work closely with governmental and non-governmental partners throughout 2007 to achieve objectives for Burnham Greenway, Lake Calumet and the Calumet-Sag Trail. To provide an overall regional framework for planning, SETF will seek the extension of the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, bringing this east to include the Calumet region.

SETF hopes that the Calumet Area Vision plan will unify and strengthen many current plans for the area. The plan draws from many sources, including maps from the city of Chicago, the south suburbs and northwest Indiana. It draws upon regional plans for water trails, bicycle paths, greenways and forest preserves.

The Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF) serves as a community voice for environmental concerns of the Southeast Side and near south suburbs of Chicago. SETF is a 501(c)(3) organization.

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