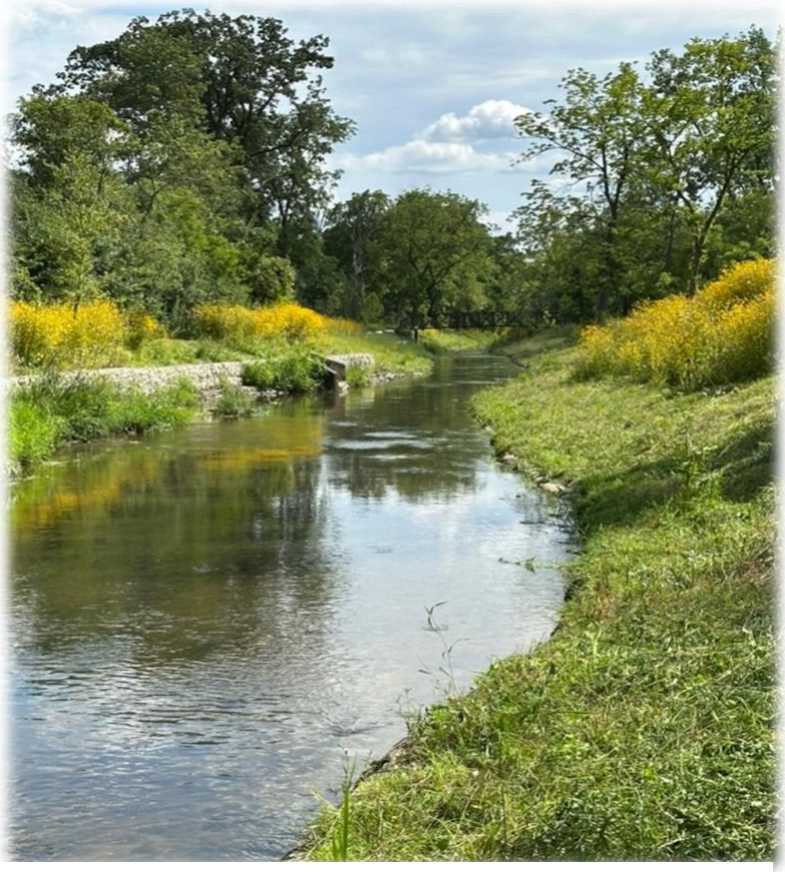
Skokie River Channel Improvements Phase 3
Highland Park

The Skokie River in Lake County is a man-made channel that is not readily visible to residents and people who may enjoy the areas adjacent to the channel. However, the channel is a significant drainage infrastructure for properties located in the sub-watershed, including properties in Highland Park. Stormwater runoff from over 13,000 properties in Lake County is directed to the Skokie River, which flows from its headwaters in Waukegan south to join the North Branch Chicago River. The channel was constructed in the 1920s when a drainage district was formed to improve drainage through what was historically a wetland slough. The Skokie channel, now known as the Skokie River, was constructed so that more of the land in the watershed could be developed for suburban communities.

The Skokie River in Lake County is maintained by the Skokie Consolidated Drainage District (SCDD), which is a governmental entity charged with maintaining the conveyance within the river channel and improving water quality.

The District has successfully completed Phases 1 and 2 Skokie River channel improvement projects located between Westleigh and Old Elm Roads in Lake Forest.



Skokie River Channel Improvements Phase 2, Lake Forest, IL

Skokie River Channel Improvements Phase 3 Project

Starting in October 2025, the District will begin the Skokie River Channel Improvements Phase 3 – Highland Park Project, which will involve stabilizing approximately 4,400 LF of stream bank located at Danny Cunniff Park and Old Elm Golf Club in Highland Park.

Cost-share funding for this project is being provided by a Department of Community and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) grant through the State of Illinois, administered by the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (SMC).

The purpose of the project is to stabilize steep and eroding streambanks to repair and prevent property damage and water pollution caused by severe erosion in this segment of the river channel. The project will improve both conveyance and water quality in the channel. The restoration design will also remove the wall of invasive buckthorn on the channel banks in the project area and protect the safety of park users as a public walking path is located at the top of steeply eroding streambank on the west side of the river.

Stabilization/Restoration Design

The engineering plans for this Project include bank stabilization measures designed to address the specific needs of each segment of the project area based on the velocities of the river, the severity and height of erosion, and proximity to streamside structures. The design uses a mix of bioengineered natural and harder armoring stabilization methods depending on the severity of the erosion, the anticipated erosive forces from the river and the amount of space available for stabilization.

Severely eroding streambank in the project area.

The methods incorporated into the project design were selected because of their effectiveness for stabilizing urban waterways. Installing deep-rooted native plants in combination with gabion baskets provides stabilization redundancy; creating riparian and aquatic habitat while contributing resiliency to the flashier and erosive river flows that are occurring due to changes in rainfall and runoff. The design's bioengineering methods include native vegetation to improve riparian habitat and water quality. Stabilized streambanks will minimize pollution contributed from the bank slumping and eroding sediment in this corridor. In addition, four riffles will be installed in the river bottom in the restored area to improve dissolved oxygen and aquatic habitat in the river.

The channel improvement measures include:

- Toe of slope protection with graded streambanks and native vegetation
- Hybrid bank reshaping with stone and native vegetation
- Gabion baskets
- Riffles
- Replacement of invasive species with native trees and shrubs

Tree Removal/Replacement

The improvements and construction access routes are designed to minimize the amount of tree loss, but selective tree removal will be necessary to properly construct the bank stabilization measures. Tree removal in the heavily eroded areas will provide space for the installation of the stabilization measures and will allow the reshaped bank slopes to establish dense native vegetation adding an extra level of protection against erosion.

SCDD utilizes the expertise of its civil engineering firm working in close concert with Illinois EPA, US Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Highland Park Forestry department requirements regarding best practices for tree removal and replacement. Buckthorn and other invasive species will be included in tree removal. Replacement will be with two-hundred thirty (230) native species of trees and shrubs planned for installation following bank stabilization.

Photo examples of gabion baskets and pulled back bank slopes with deep-rooted native vegetation at the Skokie River Phase 2 Channel Improvements Project two years after construction.

Phase 3 Project Schedule

Construction is scheduled to begin in October of 2025 and be completed by October 31, 2026. Construction will involve several stages including: site preparation, dewatering of the channel, installation of the stabilization practices, restoration of the site including seeding of disturbed areas and tree and shrub installation, and follow-up monitoring and maintenance.

October-December 2025: Site preparation followed by streambank reshaping and installation of bank stabilization measures at the northern extent of the project area as weather allows.

Spring 2026-October 2026: Bank reshaping and installation of streambank stabilization measures and riffles will continue. Permanent site stabilization including seeding and installation of replacement trees and shrubs. Site clean-up.

Path Closure

The walking path along the river at Danny Cunniff Park will be closed at the project area during construction from October of 2025-October 2026.

Work Hours

Work hours will be 7 AM-7 PM weekdays and 9 AM-5 PM on Saturday.

Oversight/Inspections

V3 Construction Group, Ltd., has a Senior Project Manager and a Designated Erosion Control Inspector (DECI) that will provide oversight and inspection services to ensure that construction is proceeding in conformance with the design and engineering plans and that soil erosion/sediment control practices and other permit requirements are being followed. In addition, SCDD has a project coordinator who will be on site regularly to document progress and verify quantities. Several agencies including the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission and the City of Highland Park will also inspect the project as it proceeds.

Contact for more information:

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