WRDA Pilot Project Factsheet

What is the challenge?
Have you been to our lakefront recently? If so, you have seen first-hand how our shoreline has changed. In many communities, our beaches are disappearing. In other communities, our harbors are collecting more sediment or beaches are emerging where they never existed before. To some extent, this is natural. Illinois’ shoreline is dynamic. Storms, ice, and fluctuating lake levels combine to create an ever-changing coastal system. But, as our climate changes, shoreline change is happening rapidly. For many of us, this has come at a high cost. We are losing important public access to the lakefront and coastal habitats as well spending significant financial resources annually on sand replenishment. In short, we are losing the places where we love to live, work, and play.

What can we do?
So, what can we do about this? We are so glad you asked! Oftentimes, when we take steps to protect our shoreline alone, that can have unintended consequences for our neighbors. Because our shoreline is continually changing, the solutions require us to work together. And, we have done just that. Under the leadership of Illinois Department of Natural Resources Coastal Management Program, we participate in the Illinois Sand Management Working Group, a network of elected officials and managers from local, state, and federal organizations. We collaborate on regionally-impactful and tangible approaches to public shoreline management.

What does regional collaboration look like?
We are excited to share some BIG news. The communities of Evanston, Glencoe, Lake Bluff, and North Chicago put forth a project proposal to a very competitive US Army Corps of Engineers assistance program, and we got it! There is a US law – the Water Resources Development Act – that enables US Army Corps of Engineers to provide support for 10 shoreline protection pilot projects around the country. We were 1 of 95 proposals submitted, and our project was the only one selected in the Great Lakes region. Wow!

Our project – Public Beach Protection Pilot in Four Illinois Coastal Communities – leverages our existing collaboration through the Illinois Sand Management Working Group to help us protect about 55,000 yards along our coast from shoreline loss. That’s the length of 458 football fields (yes, that much!). But, wait – here’s the best part. Much of this work is federally-funded. US Army Corps of Engineers will give our communities about $1 million in project work and technical expertise for a very low price tag for us (about $25,000 for each community involved).

As is true of all successes, we would not be here without the hard work of many people. We are deeply grateful for the support of US Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, Illinois Department of Natural Resources Coastal Management Program, our fellow collaborators in the Illinois Sand Management Working Group, and our federal, state, and local elected leaders. In particular, we would like to thank the leaders who developed letters of support for this project: US Senator Dick Durbin, US Senator Tammy Duckworth, US Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, US Congressman Brad Schneider, former Illinois State Senator Daniel Biss, Illinois State Senator Julie Morrison, Illinois Representative Robyn Gabel, Illinois Representative Rita Mayfield, and Mayor Leon Rockingham.