Inspired by the ancestors, hidden art by the lake

culture rooted in nature
Roots = Chicago’s cultural richness and long tradition of caring for the land.
Routes = the migration of people and wildlife that make Chicago their home or stop here on their path.
Roots & Routes is a collective that includes the Chicago Park District, the Field Museum, The Nature Conservancy and community organizations from the south and west sides.

We would like to acknowledge the original caretakers of this land, the Three Fires Confederacy: Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi; and also the Myaamia, Inoka, Ho-Chunk, and Menominee. We are humbled to be guests on this land.

“We’re so busy surviving life and not taking in what life really is… that’s what the wildlife corridor initiative is about, the restoration of the land and ... the restoration of our souls as a people.”
— Raymond A. Thomas, artist for Sankofa for Earth Gathering Space (image on cover)

ancestors, ecology & hidden art: gathering spaces

Using this map of the corridor, you will find hidden art, also referred to as “Gathering Spaces.” These spaces are designed by teams of community artists and organizations and inspired by ancestral knowledge and an affinity for nature. The Gathering Spaces help to ensure the culture and values of neighboring communities are woven into this natural lakefront refuge. In 2015 the Chicago Park District awarded grants to five teams to design and build these spaces within the BWC. The winning designs were selected by a volunteer committee of arts professionals and community leaders called the Burnham Wildlife Corridor Curatorial Committee.

the burnham wildlife corridor

Roots & Routes helps sustain and activate a special place along Chicago’s south lakefront known as the Burnham Wildlife Corridor (BWC). The BWC is 100 acres of native prairie, savanna, and woodland habitat located within the larger Burnham Park between E. 23rd and E. 47th Streets. This stretch of natural areas is ideally situated to provide food and shelter for the millions of birds and insects that follow the western Lake Michigan shoreline during their annual migrations across the Americas. Additionally, the west side of the BWC is associated with human migration – namely, the Great Migration, which was the movement of African Americans from the southern U.S. to the Midwest and Northeast during the first half of the 20th century. The tracks for the trains that brought people north to Chicago ran right through this area, and they are still in use today.
plan your visit

explore

Visit the BWC any day of the year between 5am and 11pm. Before you visit, download nature guides at fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org to help you identify plants, birds, insects, and animals in the corridor. The BWC features wood-chip trails for hikers and ADA accessible paths.

create

We invite organizations or individuals to re-imagine the south lakefront. The Gathering Spaces are open for events, classes and activities. Roots & Routes community partners regularly lead cultural programs at the spaces, such as intergenerational dialogues, early childhood art and nature focused field trips, and the Day of the Dead Celebration. Communities are encouraged to engage with nature through co-developed programs and activities. These events improve the health and resilience of both people and the land.

get involved

To learn more about how you can get involved with monthly volunteer days or to plan an event in the Gathering Spaces, email us at rootsnroutes@fieldmuseum.org.
Please help us maintain this urban nature oasis by following these guidelines:

- Stay on designated trails and within Gathering Spaces, so as not to trample the nature you’ve come to enjoy.
- Fires, grilling, generators, amplified sounds, and pets are not allowed in the Gathering Spaces or the natural areas of the Burnham Wildlife Corridor.
- To keep the wood-chip trails in good condition, bikes and strollers are not allowed.
- Enjoy with all your senses, but please do not “harvest” or remove plants or animals.

Bronzewood

This new space was created by the Chicago Park District and features modern, geometric features for seating and reflection in the shaded woodland near Oakwood Blvd. It was inspired by the woven willow sculptural forms and mission of Sounding Bronzeville, the previous Gathering Space. Bronzewood boasts robust oak sculptures that, like Sounding Bronzeville, commemorate the resilience and strength of the African-Americans that migrated north and now call the Bronzeville community home.
La Ronda Parakata

"La Ronda" refers to the circular structure of the space and "Parakata" means butterfly in Purépecha (an indigenous language from the state of Michoacán). The butterflies in this sculpture are simultaneously headed toward the sky and bound to the earth, symbolic of the migratory pattern of monarch butterflies that parallels the Latino immigrant experience in Chicago.

Lead artists: Héctor Duarte, Alfonso "Piloto" Nieves Ruiz
Community Partner: Casa Michoácan, www.fedecmiusa.com

Sankofa for the Earth

In Africa, a bird looking backwards over its tail represents the Sankofa symbol, which means "go back and fetch it." It is an understanding that our past(s) holds important information to move us forward in life. A mosaic on the exterior of the bird and mural on the interior represent Bronzeville history. QR codes are integrated into the mural to access information about the images.

Lead artists: Arlene Turner Crawford, Dionn Sylves, Raymond A. Thomas
Master Carpenters: BK Ellison, Kendal Glover
Community Partner: South Side Community Art Center, www.sscartcenter.org

Set in Stone

This project, which is an interpretation of a traditional Chinese "scholar's rock," includes a sculpture that represents the ravages and beauty of nature. A scholar’s rock invites visitors to acquire wisdom through meditation, perhaps while sitting on one of the site’s two benches made from ash trees damaged by the emerald ash borer.

Lead artists: Andy Bellomo, Ann Murphy

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Caracol

Drawing on rich connections from the natural world and cultural symbolism, Caracol ("snail" and "shell" in Spanish) represents the immigrant’s desire to belong while maintaining the core of memory and identity. Snails perform a critical role in the food chain; likewise, the immigrant’s economic and cultural contributions enrich and revitalize the host society.

Lead Artists: Georgina Valverde, Diana Solís, José Terrazas
Community Partner: Contratiempo, www.contratiempo.net

For more information about your Chicago Park District visit chicagoparkdistrict.com or call 312.742.PLAY (7529) or 312.747.2001 (TTY)

The Field Museum and the Chicago Park District gratefully acknowledge the following partners for their support of programs in the Burnham Wildlife Corridor:

Chicago Park District  | Michael P. Kelly, General Superintendent and CEO

City of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot, Mayor  | Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners

Burnham Wildlife Corridor Gathering Spaces

- Divvy Bike Station
- ADA Accessible Path
- Parking
- Wood Chip Trail
- Playground
- Bike Path
- Skate Park
- CTA Bus Route
- Basketball Court
- Burnham Park
- Restroom (seasonal)
- Outdoor Gym
- Natural Area
- Information Kiosk

How to Access:
- Divvy Stations at S Lake Park Ave., E 47th St., 31st St. bridge
- Public transportation: CTA bus routes: 35, 39, 47
- Metra Stations: 27th St. and 47th St.
- Car: Metered parking is available in the lots at 31st St., 39th St., and E 47th St. and Cornell Dr.