

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CHICAGO RIVER SWIM APPROVED FOR HISTORIC RETURN THIS SEPTEMBER
First Organized Swim in the Chicago River in Nearly a Century will Raise Funds for
ALS Research and Youth Swimming Lessons

WHAT: An open water swim through the Chicago River, featuring 500 qualified swimmers
WHERE: Main Stem of the Chicago River | Starts at Dearborn St. Bridge | Ends at Clark St. Bridge
WHEN: September 21, 2025 | 7:00 AM - 10:00 AM | Finish Festival 7:30 AM
WEBSITE: ChicagoRiverSwim.org

CHICAGO, IL – The City of Chicago has officially approved the 2025 Chicago River Swim (CRS), marking the first open water swim in the Chicago River in 98 years. Set for Sunday, September 21, 2025, this landmark event will celebrate the city's environmental progress and generate critical funds for ALS research and youth swim education programs.

"The return of the Chicago River Swim marks a major victory for our city—a testament to decades of hard work revitalizing our river," says Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson. "I commend the organizers for their commitment to safety and dedication to empowering Black and Brown youth through swim education. This event is a celebration of Chicago's progress and a brighter, more inclusive future."

This year's swim will fulfill its original vision: a one- or two-mile swim along the main stem of the Chicago River. Five hundred qualified swimmers from around the world will navigate beneath the city's iconic bridges, beginning at the Dearborn Street Bridge, heading east to State Street, then west to Lake Street and concluding near the Clark Street Bridge. Spectators are encouraged to join the family-friendly festivities along the Riverwalk between Lake and Clark Streets. Vendors will serve refreshments along the course. Tickets for an official VIP Viewing Party will soon be available.

The event is produced by A Long Swim, a nonprofit organization founded by world-class open-water swimmer Doug McConnell. "This is more than just a swim—it's a tribute to Chicago's roots and a testament to the power of perseverance," says McConnell. "After 13 years of dedicated collaboration, we are deeply grateful to the City of Chicago for its support and commitment to restoring the river's beauty and vitality. This event is proof of what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared vision."

The 2025 event will benefit two important causes: groundbreaking ALS research at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, and swim safety education for at-risk children in Chicago.

This year, CRS is proud to announce a partnership with USA Swimming Foundation and will feature 2020 Olympic Natalie Hinds. Hinds was a 20-time All-American at the University of Florida and a member of the

US Olympic team in Tokyo, where she earned a bronze medal. Hinds shares the commitment of CRS to provide swimming lessons to underserved communities.

"I'm truly honored to be the featured athlete for the Chicago River Swim," says Hinds. "As an Athlete Ambassador for the USA Swimming Foundation, I care deeply about water safety, broadening access to swimming, and preventing drownings through community outreach and education. Partnering with an event that champions local learn-to-swim programs in Chicago is both inspiring and deeply meaningful to me."

Over the past few decades, the Chicago River has undergone significant improvements, evolving from a heavily polluted waterway to a cleaner, more vibrant urban river. Key advancements include:

- Stronger Environmental Regulations: Federal, state and local laws like the EPA and the Clean Water Act (1972) reduced industrial pollution.
- Pollution Control: Improved sewage treatment processes and the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan reduce combined sewer overflows by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD).
- Enhanced Wastewater Treatment: MWRD's facilities significantly cut harmful pollutant discharge.
- H2NOW Chicago: Real-time water quality monitoring by the nonprofit water innovation hub Current measures and communicates data to the public.
- Advocacy Groups: Friends of the Chicago River and others promote conservation, influence policy, and organize cleanups.
- Wildlife Return: Improved water quality has brought back fish, birds and other aquatic species.
- Riverwalk Development: The city's development of the Chicago Riverwalk has transformed the riverfront into a vibrant public space, offering on-water recreational opportunities, dining and cultural activities.

"Swimming in the Chicago-Calumet River system is more than for recreation," said Margaret Frisbie, executive director of Friends of the Chicago River. "Swimmers in the water demonstrates to the city, the region and the world that Chicago cares about its people, the environment and its water resources, and that Chicago is a leader in recognizing the considerable role our rivers can play in public health and a climate resilient future."

Safety is the highest priority for CRS organizers. A robust water quality and safety program will be in place to meet unprecedented standards, including real-time water quality monitoring in partnership with MWRD, Current and UIC, which will be providing near real-time water quality statistics as it performs for the Chicago Park District beaches. The course will be monitored by more than 100 safety personnel on kayaks, paddle boards and boats. Autonomous buoys, GPS surveillance and in-water timing systems will add additional layers of support. The swim course will be closed to all vessels under authority of the U.S. Coast Guard. Riverwalk access will be limited to specific areas.

"The Chicago River Swim is possible because of the collaborative revitalization efforts of people who understand the value of healthy waterways for recreation and more," said Alaina Harkness, CEO of Chicago's nonprofit water innovation hub Current, and of Great Lakes ReNEW, a National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engine. "Our real-time water quality data collection program, H2NOW Chicago, is like a fitness tracker for our rivers. It makes water quality data accessible and actionable, and helps people make more

informed choices about river recreation, while demonstrating the tangible outcomes of our investments in cleaner waterways.”

CRS organizers are committed to allowing swimmers in the river only if it meets all safety standards for human contact. Data collected in the lead-up to the event will guide the final call, and the team is prepared to postpone or cancel the swim if necessary.

A Long Swim originally hoped to host the Chicago River Swim in 2024, but the event was relocated to Lake Michigan. Despite the venue change, the inaugural event was a major success, raising \$200,000 for ALS research and youth swim safety programs. It attracted 1,160 applicants from 12 countries, 39 states, and 56 of Chicago’s 77 neighborhoods. The five hundred selected swimmers included Olympians, triathletes and open water veterans.

Applications for the 2025 Chicago River Swim are currently open to the public through Monday, August 11 at 10:00 PM CDT. There is no fee to apply, and prior swim experience is required. Selected individuals will be notified of their acceptance and must agree to meet fundraising requirements prior to the event. Full details at chicagoriverswim.org.

Social: <https://www.facebook.com/chicagoriverswim> | <https://www.instagram.com/chicagoriverswim/>

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ABOUT THE CHICAGO RIVER SWIM

The Chicago River Swim (CRS) is a charitable event created by A Long Swim, a nonprofit dedicated to raising funds for ALS research through open water and marathon swimming events. Inspired by successful urban swims in cities like New York, Amsterdam, and Paris, CRS aims to change perceptions of the Chicago River. CRS will also put the city of Chicago at the forefront of environmentally progressive cities globally.

ABOUT A LONG SWIM

A Long Swim is a nonprofit that designs and manages open water swimming events to raise funds for ALS research. Founded by siblings Doug McConnell and Ellen McConnell Blakeman after their father passed away from ALS, and Ellen was later diagnosed with the disease, the organization has raised more than \$2 million for ALS research at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine. Doug, a world-class marathon swimmer, has conquered some of the most challenging waters in the world, including the English Channel, Manhattan Island, the Catalina Channel and the Molokai Channel, using his skills to fundraise for the fight against ALS.