

Chicago's History: A Time Line of Environmental Changes Interpreted from a Frog's Point of View

This material was originally developed for Choices and Changes, a project of the DePaul Center for Economic Education funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Frogs have lived in the Chicago area for hundreds of years. In fact, frogs lived here before people did, long before people named this place Chicago. And for all those years, frogs have lived in much the same way. They started out as eggs. They turn into tadpoles, living in water. Then they grow into frogs.

People have lived in the Chicago area for hundreds of years, too. But these people have not lived in the same way for all that time. They have changed the land and the water. They have built a great city.

What might a frog have thought about those changes and all that building? Of course, frogs probably do not think about changes. Still, it is interesting to look at history from a different point of view. So think and write about Chicago's history from a frog's viewpoint.

First, here are some frog facts you may need to know to understand how changes and problems in this area would have affected a frog:

- Frogs need water to live. The Chicago area is fairly wet. We get 30-40 inches of rainfall a year.
- Frogs eat flies and mosquitoes.
- Some frogs live in trees. Some live near water. Some live in prairies.
- During the cold winter, many frogs in Chicago area dig under the ground and stay there until spring.

WHEN **WHAT HAPPENED**

12,000 years ago People first come to this area.
What might a frog have thought of this change?

3,000 to 1,000 years ago The Woodland tribes live in this area. They use animals to make food, tools, clothes. They plant some crops and gather wild foods.
What might a frog have thought of this situation?

- 1,100-200 years ago The Mississippian tribes live here. They get most of their food by growing crops.
What might a frog have thought of this situation?
(Hint: Some frogs might get more insects to eat if there are more plants for the insects to eat.)
- 1795 The U.S. government takes land where Chicago's loop is today. Soldiers build Fort Dearborn. They cut a channel through the sand bar at the mouth of the river to let ships go from the lake into the river.
What might a frog have thought of this change?
- 1831 The population of Chicago is 60.
1835 The population of Chicago is 3,265.
What might a frog have thought of this change?
- 1836 People build new streets. The newspaper reports that people complain of frogs attacking them from ponds on LaSalle Street.
What might a frog have thought of this situation?
- 1844 Farmers begin to dig ditches and drain wet prairies and marshes to grow crops.
What might a frog have thought of this change?
- 1848 There is a cholera epidemic until 1855, partly due to poor sanitary conditions. Parts of Chicago are swampy.
What might a frog have thought of this situation?
- 1849 There is a big flood. The Clark Street bridge is washed away by the rushing water and ice.
What might a frog have thought of this problem?
- 1850 The population is 29,963. Most people get drinking water from the lake, which is polluted.
What might a frog have thought of this problem?
- 1855 The city begins to raise the street level to improve drainage.
What might a frog have thought of this change?

1894-1899 People build a sanitary canal. It changes the flow of the Chicago River. The river used to flow into the Lake. In 1900, it flows out of the Lake. It carries the polluted water away from the city.

What might a frog have thought of this change?

1929 A farmer near Chicago reports plowing up several frogs as he got his field ready for planting this spring.

What might a frog have thought of this news?

1932 The Welland Canal opens. It links the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. Alewives (tiny fish) swim into the lake. They die off by the millions. This problem continues today.

What might a frog have thought of this situation?

1972 Government sets up pollution control on Chicago area waterways.

What might a frog have thought of this change?

1992 On April 13th, the tunnel system under Chicago is flooded when the Chicago river flows into the system because a barge runs into a pole and causes a leak.

What might a frog have thought of this problem?

What's next for Chicago's environment?

What choices would a frog recommend?